



Nemzetközi konferencia-kiadványban megjelent idegen nyelvű előadás

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New Regional Institutions for the Development of Vocational Education and Lifelong Learning in Hungary (CD formátum, PENR3L/PASCAL Conference Proceedings)

Summary

There is an urgent need to reorganise the regional system of institutions in order to ensure a more efficient level of education and training. The purpose of the government is to promote the development of an efficient, multi-purpose and multi-functional modern educational and training system that provides initial, additional and further vocational training for young people and adults; a system that can be adapted to changes in the labour market. According to the recent modernisation of the VET system in Hungary, a network of integrated regional vocational training centres (RIVTCs) is under development, financed by the Human Resources Development Operative Program. Since innovation, which is the key element within the modernisation of VET, cannot be separated from regional innovation in which the development of partnership with local employers and other local stakeholders have crucial roles to play, the presentation explains how and in what ways these new centres can support and utilise the process of local community- and partnership-building with different stakeholders in order to promote the regional integration of vocational training and its adaptation to regional labour demands.

The current structure of the public education system of Hungary:

- *primary school*: is the institution primary and lower secondary education, it works with 8 grades, which pupils typically attend from age of 6 to the age of 14.
- *grammar school*: prepares for the higher education, substantiates the general literacy in 4, 5, 6 or 8 years. The 12th grades end with secondary school-leaving examination. It is schooling students that finished primary school into the 9th grade, but in the 1990's it schooled also 10, 12 years old students into six-grade and eight-grade programmes.
- *vocational secondary school*: prepares for the secondary school-leaving examination, provides general education, and work with 4 grades from grade 9 to grade 12. The vocational schools provide theoretical and practical education (pre-vocational) in the 11th grade. The vocational secondary schools also prepare the students for the vocational graduations after secondary school-leaving examination.



- *vocational training schools*: prepare for the entrance to the labour market, working with 4 grades. The education starts in grade 9, and ends with vocational exam in the 12th grade.

The administration of public education is highly decentralised, and the responsibilities are shared between several actors. Horizontally, the responsibility at the national level is shared by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which assumes the direct responsibility for educational matters, and certain other Ministries – vertically, the responsibility is shared between the central (national), regional, local and institutional levels, i.e. there are four levels of control. At local and regional level, the administration of education is integrated into the general system of public administration that, at this level, are organized on the basis of local governments. The influence of the regional level is rather weak, but the scope of local and institutional responsibilities is very broad. (*Improving School Leadership in Hungary, OECD Country Background Report, January 2007*)

Because of the structural changes and the general crisis and restructuring of the vocational education sector, the number of students enrolled in vocational schools reduced considerably in the last 15 years. The changes and the growing number of institutions with a mixed profile make the boundary between general and vocational education blurred.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Following the political and economic changes in 1989, the Hungarian labour market underwent a major transformation, creating serious challenges for the system of vocational education and training (VET). The structure and content of VET was in many respects transformed in the 1990s, but its comprehensive reform and modernisation reflecting fast changing demands have long been demanded by business representatives and the social partners. Employer organisations and economic and professional chambers have increasingly complained about the mismatch between VET output and labour market needs in both quantitative and qualitative terms. While in some training fields a surplus of VET graduates has emerged, in other sectors and vocations employers may find it extremely difficult to recruit workers. The regional development and training committees are required to prepare regional lists of vocational qualifications in short supply in the labour market every three years, beginning from September 2006. Training leading to such qualifications is being encouraged by financial incentives since September 2007, which can be offered both to students and to enterprises providing practical training based on an apprenticeship contract. (*Eszter Bükki_ Refernet report on the Reform of the vocational education and training system, 2007*)

Lifelong Learning (LLL)

The programme for the development of lifelong learning and the construction of its system can only be successful if the programme is fully integrated into the overall Work Programme on Education and Training which is to further the improvement of Hungarian society and

economy. To this end, in terms of its nature, the strategy does not build on the content and structural model of sector-oriented strategies in the traditional sense; rather, it is grounded in a new approach. The strategy aims at constituting a consensus-based ground for the action programmes and action plans of a variety of sectors, which serve a system-like manner of development.

The priorities formulated in the *Hungarian Lifelong Learning (LLL) Strategy* for the period of 2007-2013 are the following: 1. The fortification of the equal chance-providing role of education and training, 2. The fortification of the relationship between education, training and economics, 3. The application of new governmental methods and public policy procedures, 4. The improvement of performance, the increase of the collective expenditure of education and training, as well as 5. The improvement of quality of education and training. The significant interventional areas that help to achieve the formulated goals are the followings: the development of basic abilities and competencies in public education, in other words, the realization of competence-based education, wide and abundant supply in professional training, in adult training and in learning at adult age; continuously increasing learning opportunities, career orientation, guidance, career observation, the acknowledgement of informal and non-formal learning, the assistance of the underprivileged groups and the groupings insecure in terms of labour market; and the domestication of a new kind of teaching/learning culture. (*The Hungarian Lifelong Learning (LLL) Strategy*)

The emerge of a new research project

In Hungary, within the school system alone there are more than a thousand locations providing vocational training, which is unfavourable from the point of view of both efficiency and quality. Serious criticism has been directed towards VET institutions in the country as a whole, focusing on the fact that VET does not respond adequately to market needs. We have studied the relationship between the economy and vocational training at regional level. Our experience is that regional institutions, for example labour offices and regional labour development centres, have limited opportunity to influence the behaviour of the main players, ie. companies, vocational schools, parents and such like. The interests of teachers and students in VET are more easily asserted than those of the employers. They complain that it is in the schools' interests to keep students in the institutions as long as possible. There is a competition among schools for normative support, whilst parallel training facilities exist within the regions. School-based VET is decided at local government level. Short-term company interests reduce the opportunity to establish a long-term strategy for VET. There is no co-ordination relating to VET at regional level. The institutional system currently in force is both ineffective and inadequate. (*Report of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Hungary to the 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the EU Work Programme on Education and Training, May 2005*)

There is an urgent need to reorganise the regional system of institutions in order to ensure a more efficient level of education and training (*Benke, M. 2002; Benke, M. 2005*). The purpose of the government is to promote the development of an efficient, multi-purpose and multi-functional modern educational and training system that provides initial, additional and

further vocational training for young people and adults; a system that can be adapted to changes in the labour market (*Report of the Ministry of Education .., 2005*). According to the recent modernisation of the VET system in Hungary, a network of integrated regional vocational training centres (RIVTCs) is under development, financed by the Human Resources Development Operative Program. During the first phase leading up to the end of 2006 - in order to operate the system of vocational training more cost efficiently - 16 *regional integrated vocational training centres* (RIVTCs) were set up (with the integration of 120 vocational education schools and 6 higher education institutions), to be followed, according to plans, by 30-35 more centres in the 2007-2013 programming period (*The New Hungary Development Plan, 2007*). To ensure better alignment with the needs of the labour market a new, module-based *National Qualification Register* (NQR) has been worked out and documents related to the individual training types have also been completed. These documents provide the basis for training to begin at the RIVTCs. The program modules in the new system will also serve as a basis for extra curricular training programs and distance learning .

As regards the official plans and members of the network, eight schools on average in each Centre will co-operate closely to harmonise or integrate their management systems and allocate tasks. In this way the integrated organisation will be able to introduce modular training and will function as a practice-oriented basis for vocational training, and will strengthen practical training in every region. The advisory bodies of the Regional Integrated Vocational Training Centres established with the support of the European Social Fund are made up of the representatives of employers nominated by their respective regions. The development of the system of the RIVTCs envisages the total reform of the institutional structure, the concentration of resources and capacities, the strengthening of regional scope and stronger ties with the labour market.

The building of a new network, the development of *Regional Integrated Vocational Training Centres (RIVTCs)* all around the country, according to the plans, increases the opportunity for developing both quality and range, in addition to the influence of guidance and counselling. The main tasks of the newly established Regional Integrated Vocational Training Centres include:

- focusing on labour market needs
- providing teacher training
- ensuring equal opportunities
- offering career guidance and career orientation
- co-operating with partners
- providing information
- increasing the regional dimension of vocational education and training

My paper is based on research started at the end of 2006, aiming to discover the level of partnership existing between these new centres and the economy, and the extent to which these centres fulfil the preconditions, within their respective scopes, to contribute to the modernisation of VET. Since innovation, which is the key element within the modernisation of



VET, cannot be separated from regional innovation (*Benke, M. 2007*), in which the development of partnership with local employers and other local stakeholders have crucial roles to play, the presentation explains how and in what ways these new centres can support and utilise the process of local community- and partnership-building with different stakeholders in order to promote the regional integration of vocational training and its adaptation to regional labour demands, (*Gustavsen, B.; Ennals, R.; Nyhan, B. (eds), 2007*). Another purpose of the research is to find out how these new centres are able to increase competences and provide students with the opportunity to become more responsible for their learning process, how to support them on their individual pathway to knowledge and how to develop their abilities to become more active in preparing themselves for the world of work and finally become more successful during their transition from school to work. The presentation provides a summary of the experience learned from the 16 cases and sets out recommendations for further development.

Research of the RIVTCs is based on a review of the available literature, document analyses and interviews with the experts of the centres researched and with relevant stakeholders. In the first step the research focused on four centres, from different regions of the country, which represent different stages of the development process. Research is still in progress.

The regional approach

Hungary consists of 19 counties in the second governmental level after central government, however they do not have any decision-making power on education or RDTI policies, which policies are centrally governed. For development reasons these counties have been merged to seven so-called statistical-planning regions which receive the development funds but still have no government or elected body on their own, they do not have any own income. The law about regional development adopted in 1996 created the basis of the institutions of regional development in Hungary, thus also the establishment of the independent regions.

There are some traditions for regional co-operation and regional thinking in the Hungarian regions. In 1971 the government established 7 planning-economic districts comprising a certain number of counties. In practice, no strong connections were formed and there were no common regional development plans in these regions, since resources were allocated and development policy remained managed on the basis of county interests. The first step was to elaborate a development concept which still determines regional planning. Later PHARE Pilot Region Programme was set up in some regions, following the partnership model of the European Union. Amongst its members there were the presidents of the participating general county assemblies, mayors delegated by the micro-regional associations, representatives of the chambers, delegates from the county councils of labour and representatives of the central ministries. Some regions can be characterised by micro-village settlement structure, which requires intense cooperation amongst local authorities.

Plans for realignment of disadvantaged regions

There are plans for the realignment of the four disadvantaged regions of the country. In addition, it is important that the *micro regions* (NUTS 4) and *peripheries difficult to access* also have the chance to join in the economic and social flow of the country. In these areas the interventions focus on keeping the population and especially qualified groups, extension of employment, improvement of infrastructural conditions for an appropriate way of life and on better accessibility of public services. In addition the spatial organising effect of small and medium-sized towns needs strengthening to dynamise disadvantaged regions. The development of disadvantaged regions requires the central coordination of complex interventions spanning over region and sector. Therefore the government is planning comprehensive interventions harmonised in space and time, which will enable an increase of chances of people living in disadvantaged regions by their synergetic impact. The aim of these programmes is to decrease the differences between living chances, quality of life and expectancies of people in the better regions and the people in disadvantaged, heavily depressed territories. By realising development projects, it is expected that the pressure will decrease on the social protection system and the efficacy of the economy will increase. It is of importance to initiate developments and supporting processes which will prove sustainable for a longer run (15-20 years). (*The New Hungary Development Plan, May 2007*)

The potentialities of regional partnership

Micro-regional partnerships do not have a real tradition in Hungary. The establishment of a successful partnership requires from the leaders (mainly school leader and local mayor) cooperative skills, real cooperation instead of “experience-exchange”, during which the stress has to be put on the division of power resources. Local communities do not have confidence in the partnership; leaders (because of their role played in the community) have an important part in propagating cooperation. In small settlements the question of partnership is bound up with the question of what kind of role does the school play in the life of the local community. Topics on education, training and lifelong learning do not appear necessarily in the area of local community development and partnership development. (*Improving School Leadership in Hungary, OECD Country Background Report, January 2007*)

In Hungary, in the function and spread of professional innovation there is less influence at policy level governance, and bottom-up processes have defining role. There are situations, where cooperation initiated from the top and from the bottom are complementary and in the long term they strengthen each other. (Bottom-up organized school associations for example where the main point of view of the development was the improvement of the quality of education through cooperation, do not follow the official boundaries of micro regions; at the same time they received state support in certain periods. Becoming an association makes possible to widen their jurisdiction: in their professional activity as an innovation channel of the education branch, since representatives of the civil sector can be the actors of regional development and cooperation.)

While micro regions (NUTS level IV) have been improving in general public administration and in regional education control since 2004, in the future, micro-regional level planning shall have a greater role. At present, it is questionable what the role of the EU's "preferred" regions (NUTS II) - which are only partly active in the institutional system in Hungary - will be in public administration and development. What is already visible is that the change of governance and planning at institutional level will require a different type of development policy.

Some characteristics of the present situation which has a considerable impact on the searched topic:

- Low participation in the labour market (61,4%) continues to be the most typical characteristic of the Hungarian labour market resulting from the low rate of employment (56,9%) and a moderate yet increasing level of unemployment (7,2%). Certain groups, especially poorly-skilled people, Romany people, people living in disadvantaged areas, people with reduced working capabilities and certain demographic groups mainly associated with certain life cycles (among them mothers with small children, young people and elderly employees) are even more exposed in Hungary to the risks of exclusion from the labour market
- In vocational education, the most urgent problem is how labour market demands can be met by the current system of schools and institutions, which is so difficult to finance and operate, and furthermore which is excessively fragmented and articulated, and only appropriate for the training provided by large companies earlier on. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the creation of those practical training centres (RIVTCs) that are capable of ensuring the coordinated work of business organisations and educational institutions
- The major aim of these centres is to develop and run a network of institutions that would facilitate a more rational organisation of assignment provisions within these territories, the improvement of performance and the development of the new techniques of governance. The development of a network could help the spread of modern education methods and to wisely reduce parallel capacities. Within the scope of the realisation of these aims, participants obtain new knowledge and the network functioning offers the possibility of learning from each other
- In order to ensure that the training on offer is aligned with the needs of economy, the government is planning to organise the various training systems maintained or financed by the state, but operated currently as separate systems (vocational training schools, RIVTCs, institutions of adult education) into *regional training networks*. They intend also to improve the information system serving career guidance and career orientation, and elaborate a career monitoring system for vocational school leavers
 - In order to better meet the demands of VET users also at local level, an amendment in 2006 to Act LXXVI of 1993 on Vocational Education and Training ordered the setting up of professional consultative bodies in larger vocational training schools and the regional integrated vocational training centres. These bodies, with the participation of the social partners, aim to advise training providers and school management on the range of training



programmes offered and the content of the curricula for these courses, or on the use of development subsidies provided by an enterprise

- The professional consultative bodies will have the capacity to report skills needs at local level to ensure that these match the actual VET output. Furthermore, the regional development and training committees are required to prepare regional lists of vocational qualifications in short supply in the labour market every three years, beginning from September 2006. Training leading to such qualifications has been encouraged by financial incentives since September 2007, which can be offered both to students and to enterprises providing practical training based on an apprenticeship contract

The following constitute some of the main lessons derived from the research:

- A number of serious differences may be evidenced between the regions in so far as how they are able to harmonise sector specific- (ie. educational) and regional aspects in the planning and development processes

- The new dimension, 'regionalism' related to education and training, poses a real challenge for society as a whole: the socialisation process, social debates, social partnership can increase the effectiveness of this learning process

- We found elements of national development plans for improving adaptiveness of the workforce with such operating tools as the following: transforming the institutional structure of vocational training and establishing the regional system of vocational training and accredited adult training; developing the capacities of social partners; reducing the impacts of restructuring processes on the labour market, and promoting regional partnerships for those within disadvantaged situations

- In different routes, directly or indirectly, all of the above mentioned, main tasks of the new centres can help the students to become more self-aware in the learning process. We have researched two of them, namely 'competence-based training units' which conforms to the requirement of focusing on labour market needs and the 'communal functions' of the centres, namely 'Career advisory services', 'career guidance' and 'career building'. As a new element of the system a special service has been introduced for disadvantaged students (and also for their parents). My hypothesis was that both 'competence-based training units' and 'communal functions' can have a positive effect on the relationship between the students and their responsible learner attitudes while at the same time developing cohesion both among the students and in the students-teachers' partnership. Indirectly, this change may be positively received by the broader environment of the centres which will in turn generate further positive development.

Main findings of the research

Up to this phase of the research, the following main findings - *sometimes criticisms* - have been evidenced related to the development of the Regional Integrated Vocational Training Centres (RIVTCs):

- We have found in the course of our research that region-consciousness is as yet immature and unsettled in our society. We were confronted with similar situations both at lower levels and at sub-regional levels as well, since former central-planning and central decision-making processes did not favour the development of independent local ideas and initiatives, local knowledge and responsibility
- Certain areas – such as social partnership - characteristically call for the improvement of co-operation
- The participation of key actors in the activity of the RIVTCs is formally ensured; still the substantial influence of partnerships is disproportionate compared to that of public administration
- The delegates arriving from the world of work do not always entirely know the demands of the economy, thereby reducing their representational efficiency (*The evaluation of the activity of RIVTC-s, OMAI, Bp, February 2007*)
- It is not clear how to harmonise the activity of the RIVTCs and the Regional Labour Development Centres in the future.
- Despite the fact that the teachers were not all satisfied with the content and development of the ‘competence-based training units’, students were pleased with certain aspects of the new structure of vocational training (namely, with regard to the new training units and the new attitudes demonstrated by the teachers towards the students). However, it does seem that no development took place in the field of group work among students. We found that communal functions, which were very much anticipated by the institutions and which we may consider as ‘filling a gap’, were prosperous.
- In conclusion, the success of the new centres and also the development of the active learner attitudes of students can be measured more precisely upon their leaving school and entering the labour market. Further research is necessary in order to express how other tasks of the centres can contribute to the development of the active learner attitude of students.

Some further concrete information on the recent stage of the development process of the RIVTCs considered as **positive signs** for the future (*Benke, M. 2007; Benke, M. 2008*):

- *at the individual level*: RIVTCs create an opportunity to participate in more balanced and harmonised training providing
- *at the organisational level*: creation of the centres means a learning process how to operate, how to function in networks (since the centres are planning to harmonise their training supply); RIVTCs ensure a higher level of commitment.

Some **negative signs** for the future (*Benke, M. 2007; Benke, M. 2008*):

- *at the individual level*: it is not clear, how the training centres will reduce regional inequalities in access to training

- it is a question how the five big pole centres of the country are able to contribute to reducing regional inequalities
- *at the organisational level*: the connection with the representatives of the economy is considered very weak.

We drafted the following **requirements/recommendations** for the future:

- To strengthen co-operation between sector policies and regional policies
- To develop partnership at both regional and local levels.

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