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HUMAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPA 2020 STRATEGY

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Abstract

Human development is a constant concern at European level. Thus, various programs have been proposed with the main objective of developing skills of citizens and informing them about training courses as part of lifelong learning and of employment in the labour market. The article highlights the evolution of European Union through the investments in human capital. The objective of this paper is represented by the analysis of the impact of sustainable human development through trans-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary education in the context of the European Union strategy proposed for the following period up to 2020. Europe 2020 represents a strategic plan for European Union development until 2020, having as main objective raising the standard of living and the quality of life for European citizens. Europe 2020 strategy promotes a new vision for the economy of European Union. For the following period until 2020 there is a major concern for creating favourable conditions for development of a sustainable intelligent economy that promotes inclusion. Some of the main activities with a major impact on creating such conditions are investments in education, research and innovation. The article analyses the current and recent past years' situation in terms of sustainable development from educational and economic perspectives at European Union level. The analysis was done based on Eurostat data, using specific statistical methods.

Keywords: Human Development, Sustainable Development, Lifelong Learning, Information and Communication Technology, Europe 2020

1. Introduction

Information and communication technology represents the core component that supported the evolution of society and therefore sustainable human development. Investments everything related to information technology - research, computerization, automation of activities - support the development of all sectors of activity: education, medicine, government, etc.

The analysis undertaken aims to research the impact of information and communication technology on society in terms of data series and graphical representation resulted from the analysis of education, a representative area of application of information technology.

During the research the focus was on highlighting the importance of applying information and communication technology in education as one of the most important domains

in society, being responsible for staff training in all areas of activity and hence for quality of services trained staff provides.

2. Sustainable Human Development

Educational domain is a domain maintained through the information and communication technology. In turn, developments in technology were possible because of massive investments realized.

Figure 1 depicts a comparative analysis of the countries in the European Union in terms of percentage of GDP allocated to investments in research and development of information and communication technology. The graphical representation is based on the latest published values (Eurostat, 2014).

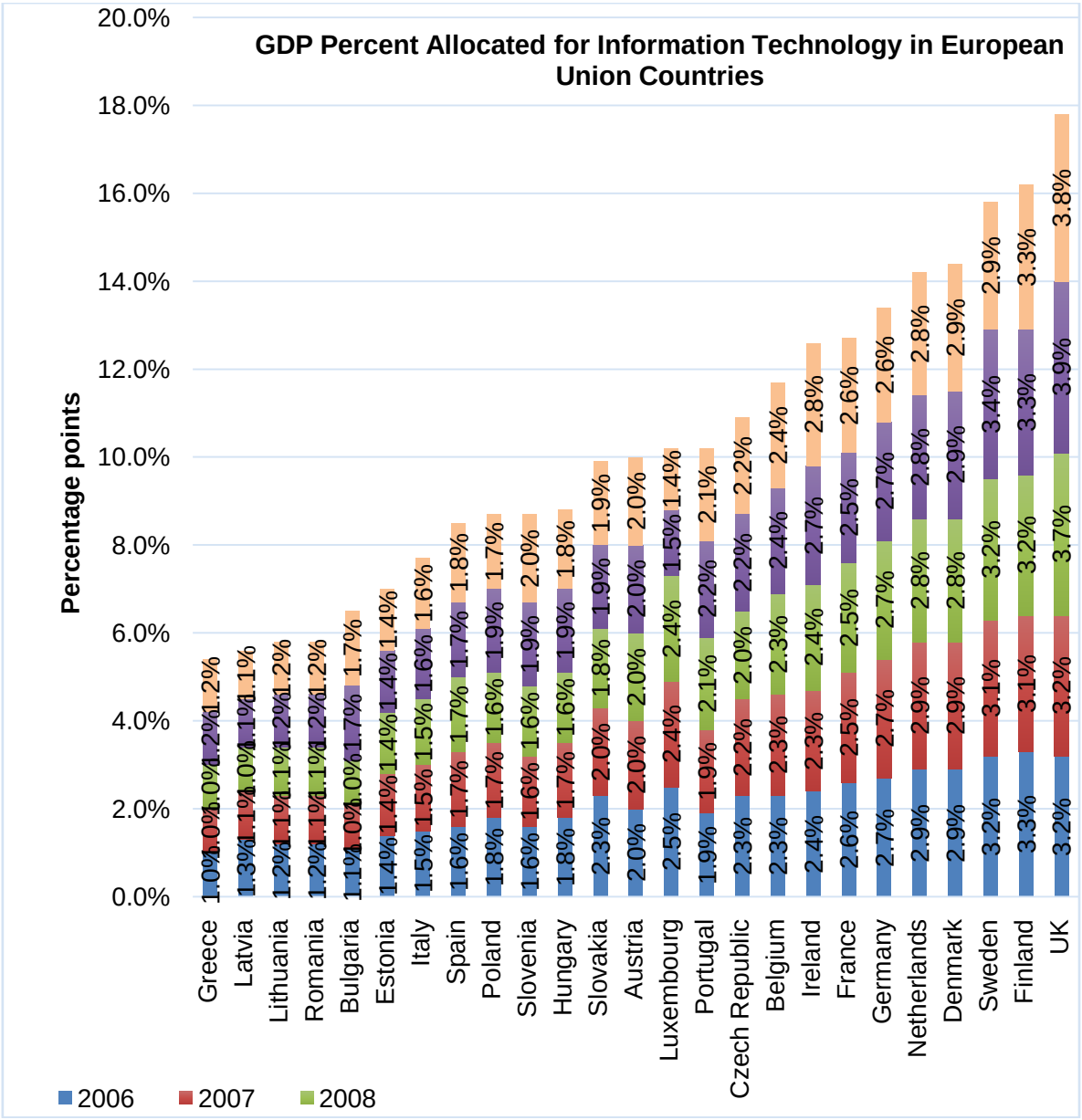

Figure 1. Percent of GDP allocated for ICT in EU countries
Source: The statistical date were taken from Eurostat (2014).

The GDP percentages allocated underline the importance given by each country to research, innovation and development in information technology domain considered to be the one that ensures sustainable development in society.

The representation in Figure 1 states that UK and Nordic countries give the highest percentage of GDP for investment in information and communication technology. Romania reached the lowest rankings, together with Bulgaria and Latvia.

If we refer to the nominal per capita, the graphical representation does not suffer major changes. According to Eurostat (2014), Romania maintains its position at the bottom of the ranking, along with the same Bulgaria and Latvia, and the Nordic countries share the top positions. The difference is the country that occupies the first position. If UK is the first when GDP percentage is considered, in terms of per capita nominal value, the first position is occupied by Luxembourg.

By default the big funds provided per capita, in terms of investment in information and communication technology, support sustainable human development, and consequently a sustainable development of the whole society.

3. Investments in Education in order to Support Sustainable Human

To identify the importance given to education in the European Union countries, a comparative analysis was made between the situation in Romania and the European average in terms of GDP percentage allocated to the education sector. For an overview of investment in education, another two countries representative for research and innovation were chosen, the US and Japan. The analysis was conducted for the period 2006-2011, the last period for which Eurostat published the information (Figure 2).

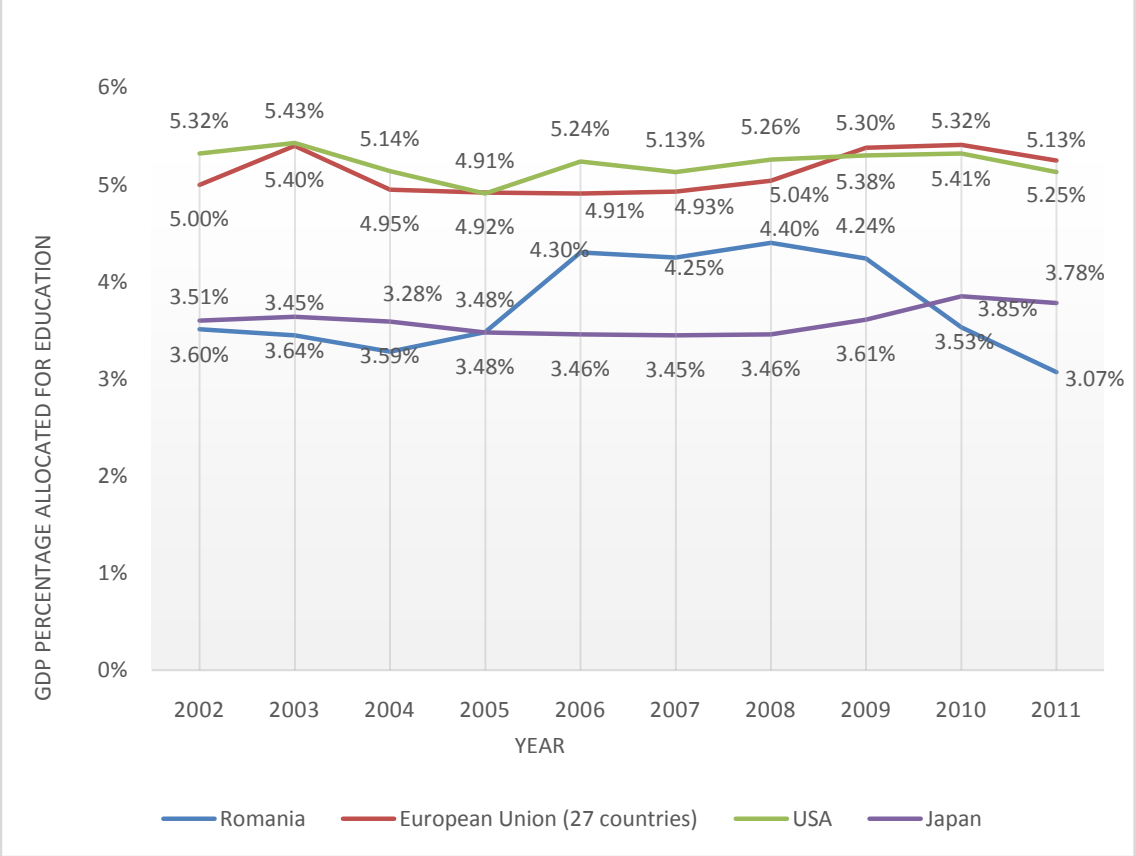

Figure 2. GDP percent allocated for education
Source: The statistical date were taken from Eurostat (2014).

The average percentage allocated by Romania in the period under review for the education sector was approximately 3.75% of GDP. Similar rates were allocated by Slovakia and Croatia. Leading countries in terms of investment in education are Denmark with 8.72% of GDP, Cyprus with 7.98% of GDP and Iceland with 7.82% of GDP in 2009. These countries are followed in rankings by the Nordic countries that allocate an average rate of approximately 7% of GDP (7.32% Norway, Sweden 7.26% Finland 6.81%). Most percentages of GDP allocated by the governments of the European Union for education are in the range 5.01- 5.94.

From 2002 until 2011, at the European level, the average percentage allocated for education increased from about 5% of GDP, ranging between 4.91% - 5.40% of GDP. Outside the European Union education, percentage averages 5.21 of GDP in the US and 3.5 in Japan.

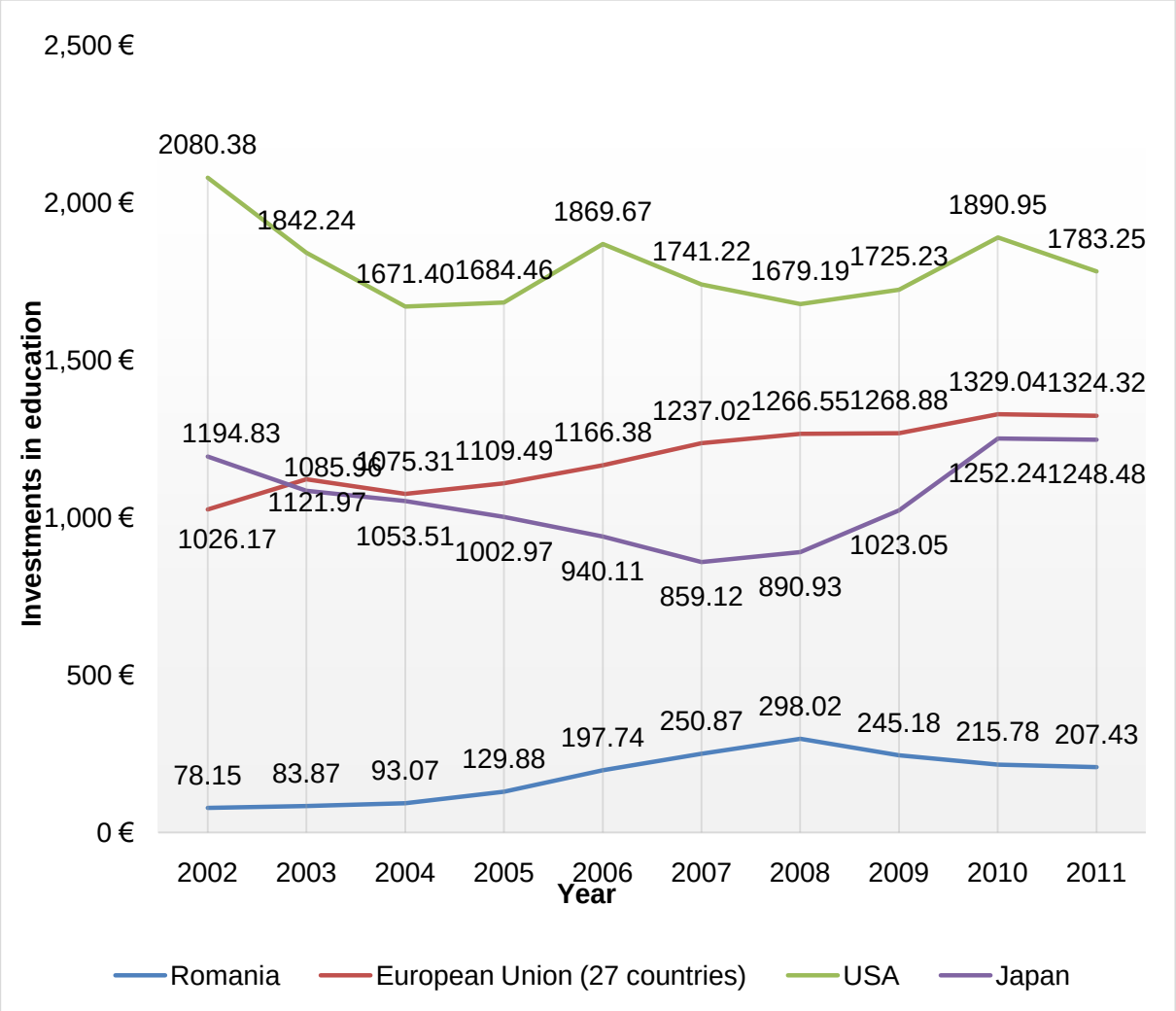

Figure 3. Money of GDP allocated for education and training
Source: The statistical data were taken from Eurostat (2014).

In terms of percentages allocated for education there are not significant differences between countries compared. Still, when the analysis is done at nominal level as the amount of funds allocated by the government for the education and instruction of every citizen a significant can be noticed for the countries focusing on the intellectual development of citizens (Figure 3).

4. Lifelong Learning and the Europe 2020 Strategy

At European Union level a sustainable economic and social development is desired. In pursuit of this objective a series of measures in all sectors of activity are applied. Thus, the purpose is to avoid an artificial development, which is not sustainable.

Over time, European countries started to enter into mutual partnerships initially from the economic perspectives. These partnerships have diversified, and begun to address also other sectors in order to increase the quality of life and the standard of living for citizens in partner countries.

If partnerships in '50s were established between a small numbers of European countries, nowadays all countries are involved in such agreements.

Such a partnership was concluded in 2010 with the purpose of supporting the educational field, for the particular case of higher education in European countries. This is represented by the European Higher Education Area - EHEA, which currently comprises 47 partner countries.

By signing this partnership, participating countries have demonstrated that they were aware of the importance of investments in human capital in order to increase the quality of life for their citizens (Sabau *et al.* 2010) considers that the establishment of partnerships between universities, research institutes and production units is beneficial and sustains the improvement of superior education quality, favouring the emergence of the education-research-production triad.

In the European Higher Education Area, representatives of partner countries have taken a number of measures aiming both graduate and undergraduate learning and also lifelong learning. All measures proposed both by the EHEA and by previous partnerships have been presented over time in conventions, declarations and communiqués: Lisbon Convention 1997, Sorbonne Declaration 1998, Bologna Declaration 1999, Prague Communique 2001, Copenhagen Declaration 2002, Berlin Communique 2003, Bergen Communique 2005, London Communique, 2007, the Leuven - Louvain-la-Neuve Communique 2009, Budapest-Vienna Communique 2010, Bucharest Communique 2012.

The first convention of partner countries as part of the process to support the educational field was that of Portugal, Lisbon in 1997 (Lisbon Convention, 1997). Under the Convention, subjects as key concepts specific to higher education, defining the competencies of the institutions involved in higher education as were discussed, recognition of qualifications issued by an institution of higher education, were approached.

In the following meetings in 1997 and 2012, representatives of the EHEA adopted a series of measures, the most important being: structuring studies periods on semesters; adopting the system of evaluation and scoring based on credits; structuring the superior learning system in two cycles, bachelor and master, admission to the latter being condition by the completion of the first cycle; implementing the concept of lifelong learning.

According to Ion (2014) lifelong learning is the learning any form assumed by a person after the completion of the initial training. This type of education is meant to increase the level of knowledge, skills and competences previously acquired by a person.

At the last EHEA meeting held in Bucharest, Romania, April 26th and 27th, 2012, one of the main objectives was to ensure a higher financing as possible for higher education.

Bucharest Communique (2012) focused on promoting student-cantered learning by involving him actively in the learning process, aiming also at the development of a system in which students voluntarily learn from each other. Students can actively participate in communication processes or observe communications between other students. Ion and Vespan (2011) state that this type of learning through observation, namely vicarious learning, increases the level of knowledge of a student even by the simple observation of the communication and collaboration between other colleagues. According to Ion (2012), such collaborative activities allow identifying intra-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary relations.

In order to increase the employability of the workforce, EHEA encourages cooperation between employers, students and institutions. Thus, according to InfoStart (2014) the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies runs presently several projects financed through European

funds. One of these projects, InfoStart - Start your career in IT, coordinated by the Department of Economic Informatics and Cybernetics aims to facilitate the process of entering the labour market of 400 students enrolled in bachelor and master programs at the Faculty of Economic Cybernetics, Statistics and Informatics, Economic Informatics and Cybernetics specialization, organizing innovative internship programs of practical training, as part of the initiatives to diversify institutional partnerships.

Dorobat (2014) states that there are also several Framework Programme running at European level, FP6 and FP7 aiming at providing support in 2010-2030 to move from the information society to a knowledge based society. The formation and consolidation of a knowledge-based society requires prioritization, higher priority being given to investment in education, increasing the level of human capital, streamlining the use and dissemination of knowledge, creating new technologies and developing the society by using information and communication technology.

The next EHEA representatives meeting will be held in 2015 in Yerevan, Armenia and aims at analysing the progress made in achieving the objectives and proposals set out in previous meetings.

For the next period, at European level, various programs have been proposed having as main objective the sustainable development in all European Union activity areas. Such a program is Europe 2020. According to European Commission (2014) this program represents a strategic plan for the development of the European Union until 2020, aiming at increasing the standard of living and quality of life for European citizens. For educational domain, Europe 2020 program aims at allocating a percentage of 3% of the European Union GDP to research and development, reducing school dropout and increasing the share of graduates in the population aged between 30 and 34.

Europe 2020 includes also the Electronic Agenda 2020 program. EU Legislation (2014) states that the main objective of this program is the efficient exploitation of information and communication technologies to encourage innovation and progress in economic terms.

5. Conclusion

All the measures proposed and sustained at European level represent the evidence of the real interest in making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, encouraging sustainable economic growth and therefore a high standard of living of the population.

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