

CULTURE AND EDUCATION IN THE ROMANIAN RURAL SPACE

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Abstract

In the context of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, access to education and culture was predominantly online. Those responsible for cultural activities in the rural environment ensured access to the culture and traditions specific to the rural area. In this sense, we proposed an analysis of cultural support activities for education in the rural environment during the pandemic period. The present work was structured in three parts, namely: One part in which those responsible for cultural activities are identified, the links between them and the state's contribution to the development of culture, a second part in which we analyzed the specific cultural activities of each institution and the correlation with the results obtained in the educational system in the established area. The last part of the research was dedicated to the conclusions obtained from the analysis.

Key words: education, culture, partnerships, rural environment

INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid technological changes, new ways of cultural production, consumption and dissemination, access to cultural content create great opportunities to promote cultural heritage at home and abroad as a prerequisite for sustainable development. (Tomuletiu and Moraru, 2010), presents the results of a research carried out in 61 Romanian villages whose objective is to capture the specific characteristics of rural education forms and institutions [13]. In the presented study, it was shown that the research depends on factors such as: the experience and degree of studies of the local educational staff, the logistics of the local educational institutions, the specific search methods used by each institution, the interferences with the city community (rural-urban interrelationship). Rural education in the research carried out by (Biriescu and Băbăita, 2014)[4] is one of the important factors in regional development. The authors

proposed a software capable of analyzing the performance of the education system in regional development based on major indicators of efficiency and effectiveness. Fanea-Ivanovici (2018) analyzed the main opportunities of the digitalization process of cultural content with an emphasis on Romania and to highlight the main areas in which the country is still lagging behind [7]. The published article discusses the technical endowment of access to broadband Internet services and the use of these resources by households in urban and rural areas to existing digital cultural content. He also emphasized the importance of open access, e-accessibility, digital archives, e-museums, e-libraries, etc., as well as the main national and European strategies and agendas on which Romania based its cultural digitization and preservation priorities heritage.

Preda and Toma believe that the development of rural education is a strategic objective in Romania, especially because of current

challenges such as: the decrease in the number of students, poverty, lack of infrastructure, etc. Thus, the pressure on the sector was even greater during the pandemic, when the rural education infrastructure was not ready to cope with the demands. The research carried out (Preda and Toma, 2021) aimed to analyze the quality of education in the rural environment with a case study in Argeş county, through a survey among 107 teachers from 7 secondary schools and 1 high school, located in five rural villages. The results highlighted the needs of rural teachers to ensure a good education, the needs of students to learn, the measures to be implemented in terms of curricula, teaching methods and learning techniques [10].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis of the activities in the rural environment requires the identification of those responsible and the links between them. The research carried out by us was carried out in three cultural units in the town of Răcari and is based on the analysis of cultural activity during the pandemic period. The research considered the interaction between cultural institutions in Răcari Dâmbovița (Răcari Village, Ghergani Village) and the institutions responsible for education. Thus, data on the cultural activities carried out in the localities were analyzed and correlated with the results obtained in the educational activities.

The data collection for the elaboration of this paper was made from the data archive of the culture units as well as from the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics. For the quantitative indicators, the amount for the period 2020-2021 and the average level was calculated according to the formula:

$$\bar{X}_i = \frac{\sum \bar{X}_i}{n},$$

where:

\bar{X}_i is the indicator analyzed in the period 2020 – 2021,

$-n$ the number of years. In order to identify the differences (positive or negative).

The comparison method between the levels of the indicators from 2021 to 2020 was used. The results were interpreted and presented, and finally the main conclusions were formulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of schools in 20 countries and the closure of preschools in 19 countries in Europe and Central Asia. This affected a total of 49.8 million children, from preschool to high school, who had a very disruptive last semester of school (if there was one at all), culminating in the closing schools [14].

The pandemic has deeply affected education and aggravated the existing social inequities in the region. Children from low-income families, children living in rural areas with poor infrastructure, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, children with disabilities, migrant and refugee children, children in conflict with the law, children and young people who do not attend educational institutions, boys and girls living in difficult conditions or in abusive homes already faced significant barriers to participation in education and learning and had less education and social advantages than their peers [5].

At the village level, cultural activities were also disturbed primarily by the lack of access to education. In this sense, the presented research represents an analysis of the efforts of those responsible for cultural activities at the village level. Stoyanova-Toneva mentioned that cultural heritage, insofar as it is preserved, in symbiosis with the history of each region, has the potential to become a successful tool for the social and economic development of rural communities [12].

The village is essentially identified with the constitution of society and human civilization, it is the place where culture was born, where strong values and traditions are conserved and survive that need to be discovered, brought to light and preserved. It cannot be an analysis of the village as a social system, as a type of civilization, be conceived without taking into account its culture, because through its

culture, the village universe has become a specific environment of existence, differentiating itself from other social universes [6]. Stoyanova-Toneva mentions that cultural heritage, insofar as it is preserved, in symbiosis with the history of each region, has the potential to become a successful tool for the social and economic development of rural communities [12].

The main level of education that can be followed in rural schools is from early childhood education to primary and lower secondary education (very rarely secondary education cycle 2, as high schools are usually in urban areas [10]).

Culture, at the village level, is mainly supported by three institutions: school, library and church. In the locality where I did the research, culture is promoted by the mentioned cultural institutions with the indirect support of the local administration. In the cultural structure analyzed, the cultural center is represented by the Theoretical High School as the main responsible for culture and tradition in the region. As an organization, the high school has in its composition schools and kindergartens, where they start the road to culture according to Table 1, annually over 600 children.

Table 1. Structure of students enrolled in educational institutions

	Răcari School		Ghergani School		Colacu School	
	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
No. of scholars	311	319	169	160	140	137
%	50.16	51.78	27.26	25.97	22.58	22.24
Total	2020		2021			
	620		616			

Source: Processed from the 2021 high school archives [1].

Education and culture are directly supported by institutions of worship and culture, such as the church and the library. They interact permanently with the educational program of the High School under the direct coordination of the Local Administration. As shown in Figure 1 the flow of cultural activities, the Local Administration as a territorial administrative unit has as its objective, in addition to maintaining the cultural center, awarding,

sponsoring and supporting participation in cultural activities.

Behind these important actors that support the cultural system and cultural activities at the rural level, there are coordinating institutions organized according to the urban type. Thus, the library is coordinated and financed in cultural activities by the Târgoviște Library, and the cultural activities promoted by the church are financed and coordinated by the Archdiocese of Târgoviște.

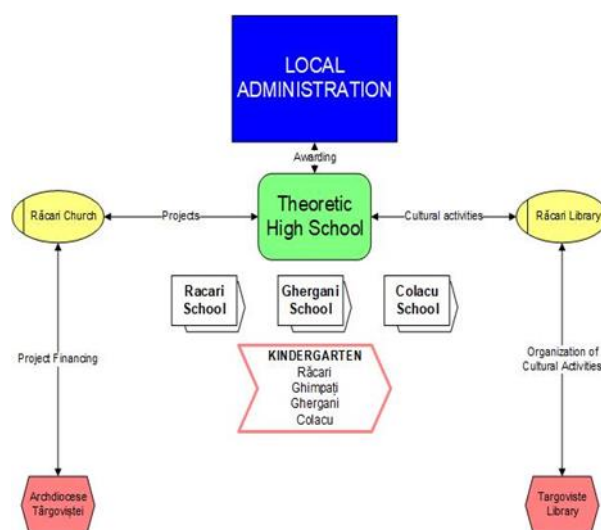


Fig. 1. Flow of cultural activities
 Source: Own determinations.

According to Figure 2, public expenditure for education, the state as the general administrator of cultural activities has realized the importance of these cultural activities, registering a slight increase in the budget allocated for education by a percentage of approximately 1% in 2020 compared to 2017.

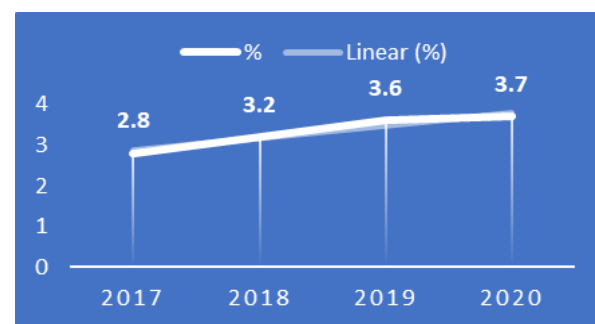


Fig. 2. Share of public costs for education in the total budget

Source: Processed based on NIS, 2022 [8].

The pandemic period (March 2020 – December 2021) had a negative impact on

cultural activities in the countryside. However, the institutions responsible for culture have started a series of activities to counteract the effects of the imposed restrictions. Of these, we mention the implementation of two projects by the educational institution in partnership with the library and a number of 2 partnerships of religious institutions with the objective of supporting the access of the rural population to culture and tradition.

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Educational units

As shown in Table 2, the target group targeted by the projects supported more than 100 students in dropout reduction, counseling and educational guidance. Statistically, POCU covered 48.86% of the target group in high school educational subunits (4th and 8th grade students), while ROSE covered over 90% of 12th grade students. The projects enabled an introduction to e-learning as a worldwide requirement and were accompanied by evaluation activities offering prizes, diplomas and certification of participation.

Table 2. Cultural activity of the High School institution

Project/Activity	Part	Total Schools Răcari, Ghergani Cls. IV, VIII	Total High School Cls. XII	%
Bucuriei School POCU	43	88	-	48.86
ROSE	58	-	63	92.06

Source: Processed from the 2021 high school archives [1].

The Școala Bucuriei (Bucuriei School) project had as its general objective the prevention of early school leaving for 480 children and

students belonging to vulnerable groups from disadvantaged communities in Dâmbovița county through integrated programs of counseling, remedial education and non-formal activities, oriented to their specific needs, programs oriented to 108 parents/guardians, as well as improving the skills of 75 pre-university teachers working in vulnerable communities [11]. The main activities carried out within the project during the 3 years of implementation are: counseling and educational orientation, remedial education, thematic workshops of non-formal education (health, hygiene, sports; independent living skills; local history, traditions, crafts; human rights and democracy; chemistry and green energy; entrepreneurship and initiative; forum theater), professional training programs, educational actions in the community.

ROSE is a cultural initiative to reduce dropout in secondary and tertiary education and aims to increase the pass rate of the baccalaureate examination. The project is supported by a project financed with more than 200 million euros by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) [9]. In the book Education by E-Learning Ben-Oni Ardelean presents the fact that the beneficiaries of education are no longer the same as those of the 20th century, and the institutions providing education are fighting a huge struggle to bring a generation that no longer exists, trying to preserve methods and practices which were effective in the past but which prove to be ineffective in the present [2]. In this sense, the cultural activity carried out in rural educational units, supported by the ROSE project, implemented on a group of over 90% of 12th grade students, brought, according to the data from the archives of the High School, presented in Table 3, a baccalaureate pass rate of over 70%. Considering the difficulty and support of the courses and training, both the professionalism of the teachers and the support programs offered by the cultural institutions completed the pass rate with almost 70% of the students who failed in previous years.

Religious holidays at the rural level are key calendar points where traditional cultural elements of customs are intertwined with the traditional Christian gastronomic art. The pandemic period significantly slowed down these processes in the physical environment. The promotion of religious holidays was the subject of the analysis of the project presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Baccalaureate exam enrollment and passing statistics

Year	Current enrolled	%	Past year enrolled	%	Total enrolled
2017/2018	63	56.76	48	43.24	111
2018/2019	81	77.88	23	22.12	104
2019/2020	64	64.00	36	36.00	100
2020/2021	77	59.69	52	40.31	129

Source: Processed from the 2021 high school archives [1].

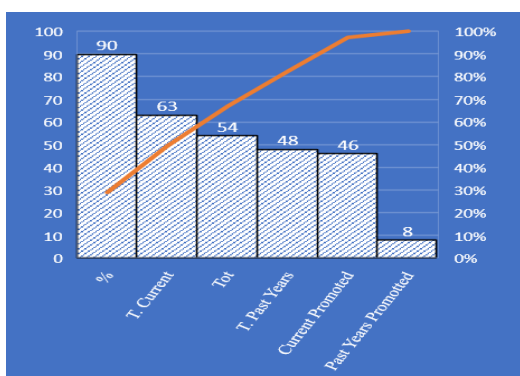


Fig. 3. Baccalaureate Promotion Rate
 Source: Processed from the 2021 high school archives [1].

Cultural units

Currently, the Church carries out social assistance activities through its own system, with the organizational support of the laws issued by the state, promoting the social policies and social protection measures that we find throughout society, making available the human and logistical resources at its disposal. We can mention that within the church social service, projects are carried out that have as a source of achievement and financial resources that are currently modest. That is why the Church invites the state and at the same time proposes that the national social assistance system be put at the service of the Church. The Church offers, through its clerical staff, the mobilization and training of

people as a community in direct involvement in solving problems that may arise.

In this case, a number of partnerships were identified that positively influenced culture and tradition. Among these partnerships we mention those with the schools coordinated by Răcari High School, also presented in Table 4. The partnerships had as a target group the participation of almost 200 students from the educational units. The participation was about 55% of the children enrolled at Ghergani, and about 35% at the Răcari School. The cultural contribution during the pandemic was aimed at knowing the specific moral values of the church, and was achieved by fulfilling the following specific objectives:

- Knowledge of important Christian holidays;
- Preservation of religious and cultural traditions, by highlighting students' talents in church painting;
- The cultivation of moral-religious components.

In order to carry out the proposed activities, visits were made to places of worship, conversations, readings by trainers and teachers, artistic and plastic activities as well as charitable activities. The evaluation of the participants was based on an exhibition of the completed works. Also, multimedia materials (videos, photos) were made, which were posted on the websites of the participating institutions.

It should be noted that these cultural activities of the cult institution motivated some of the participants to participate in the Olympics organized by the Ministry of Education. Participation in the Olympiad brought a surplus of cultural value by obtaining the second prize at the county session of the Religion Olympiad.

Table 4. Cultural activity of the Church institution during 2020 - 2021

Project/Activity	Participant	%	Awards
Partnership School Ghergani	90	55	Diplomas
Partnership School Răcari	100	37	Diploma
Religion Olympiad	1	-	Place II/ County

Source: Processed from the 2021 high school archives [1].

CONCLUSIONS

Compared to the data presented in the present research we can conclude: The digitization of education actually brings a challenge to the entire education system, not just distance education [3]. At the level of the analyzed locality, three institutions responsible for cultural activity were identified. With the emergence of restrictions imposed by the pandemic, all cultural institutions suffered, but according to the analysis, solutions were identified to support the educational process through access to culture. The activities undertaken at the local level by those responsible for cultural activities were integrated into projects and partnerships with the educational unit. Although with a slight increase in investment in culture, the state reacted positively, increasing the budget allocated to education. Under these conditions, from budgetary and European sources, two projects were financed that had a positive impact on education and culture. The two projects allowed access to new forms of education, prevented the increase in school dropouts, and increased the passing rate of the baccalaureate exam. At the same time, religious institutions facilitated access to traditions and spiritual values manifested through partnerships with educational institutions. Thus, knowledge was encouraged and rewarded with second place at the county religion Olympiad.

As a general conclusion, by encouraging access to culture while preserving traditions, it is possible to reduce school dropout, avoid illiteracy, successfully pass exams and create Olympians. They will totally bring a rural development based on culture with the preservation of traditions and with an emphasis on the acceptance of new elements in the educational process.

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