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The Structure of Active Population by Educational Levels before and after the Economic Crisis. Was it Influenced by the Crisis?

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Abstract

The continuous increase in the level of education in the EU countries is one of the fundamental objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy. Taking into consideration the fact that the economical efficiency is significantly influenced by the quality of the human resource, the level of education of the active population is an important variable in the process of the economic growth. The current different politics applied in the EU28 countries 20 years ago had a big structural diversity as a direct consequence concerning the level of education of the active population. Based on these findings, the paper analyses the evolution of the characteristics of the active population in the EU28 countries on the level of education in the last 10 years, a period which includes the economical crisis. The analyses based on official databases show the tendency of increasing the share of the active population with tertiary education and the relative stability of those with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education. At the same time the fact that the difference between the countries with high shares of the tertiary education attainment level and those with still low shares is continuously increasing is emphasized, the process still being divergent. The paper also investigates the convergence in terms of the structure of the active population in EU countries.

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1. Introduction

Lisbon and Europe 2020 strategy considers education a priority of the European Union Council's politics in the context of the broader economic and social politics. The principles concerning education have evolved depending on

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the existing concrete conditions in time and space, depending on the political and ideological framework. There is a vast literature about the effect of education on the labour market (Krahn & al., 2000, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005, Enea, 2011, Edgerton, Roberts & Below, 2012) in which authors address subjects as: social benefits, economic prosperity, wages and earnings; employment/ unemployment, productivity, integration, quality of life.

Currently, education is essential for any economy, because, on the one hand, the relationships between man and society become more diverse through education, and, on the other hand, the current society needs a well educated workforce in the context of globalization. In a world like ours, constantly subject to change, to stagnate in terms of education is a damaging behaviour, even a dangerous one (Angelescu, 2003).

Education is important for both the present and the future, offering people knowledge, abilities, and skills to participate in social life, to acquire current knowledge, to enable, to integrate or to reintegrate successfully into the labour market. The level of education can be used as a measure of the human capital, the educational structure being able to be useful information in order to estimate the skills available in a population (Serban, 2012).

The society of knowledge requires, first of all, a quality leap concerning education, ensured through educational processes throughout the entire active life of a person. Education has also become a way of directing the social developments and underlies all of the transformations that take place in society. In today's society, education is the system that creates values and norms it imposes and modifies depending on the stage reached by science, technology and knowledge. Therefore, any society and any being is the fruit of education, generating effects and results that should be above the previous level of knowledge (Dobrescu, 2008).

On the other hand, the GDP is positive influenced by the factors such the number of graduates from tertiary education, the number of immigrants, and negative by the factors such as the employed population level and the number of emigrants. The graduates' contribution shows that there is a capacity of local economies to integrate these graduates with positive effects. The employed civilian population has a significant importance, suggesting structural changes against less-qualified labour force and implicitly with lower wages (Cristescu & al., 2013).

The paper used classification of educational activities based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) with three educational attainment aggregates level: lower secondary education attainment, upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, and tertiary education attainment.

An important aspect that needs to be highlighted is that the active population with a tertiary education, being the object of the analysis, was born in 1950 – 1990 (a period when former communist countries which are now members of the EU had specific politics being applied to them), and the active population with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education includes the population born after 1990, after the fall of communism and the beginning of the transition of the former communist countries to the new economic mechanisms and systems.

This paper brings information on the impact of the economic crisis about how education is considered in the current society development stage, the high level of training being an element which favoring easier crossing of turbulence' periods.

2. Research methodology

The research aimed to emphasize the active population's distribution characteristics in the EU countries by the levels of education according to ISCED 1997 for the period of 2005 – 2013, and to ISCED 2011 for the year 2014.

Three hypotheses were tested:

- There are significant differences between the structures of the active population by the levels of education before and after the economical crisis.
- The distributions of the active population by the levels of education during the analysed period were normally distributed.
- There are converging processes with the EU media concerning the structure of the active population by levels of education.

The testing of the hypotheses concerning the distribution of the analysed variables was done with the Jarque-Bera normality test (Jarque & Bera, 1987).

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