

THE FUTURE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND THE CASE OF REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract: The non-formal education is becoming very important now days in many areas: the educational reform, as a tool for democratization, for sustainable development, youth employability, etc. Therefore it attracts growing attention of many actors in the society in direction of contributing to solutions of important and pressing problems. Bearing in mind this, the main points of the paper are the following: exploring the rising importance of non-formal education, elaborating the differences and advantages of this type of education in comparison to the formal education, what is the future of non-formal education and what are the pathways that it is heading to, the impact of open educational resources and at the end-case study of the situation in R. Macedonia regarding the non-formal education.

Keywords: non-formal education, learning, skills, knowledge, open educational sources

1. Introduction

People are constantly learning everywhere and at all times. Not a single day goes by that does not lead to additional skills, knowledge or competences for all individuals. For people outside the initial education and training system, adults in particular, it is very likely that this learning, taking place at home, at the workplace or elsewhere, is a lot more important, relevant and significant than the kind of learning that occurs in formal settings.

Education is very important for the prosperity of our society and for growth, innovation and progress in Europe. The swift changes and the transformation of today's world represent a big challenge for the education system that needs to adapt constantly to socio-economic changes of society. Today's education system needs to be a match for the demands of the 21st century for global knowledge-based economy.

Often we ask our self the question: How the educational system improves personal development? In the past, this was the only way to find a better job. These days attending a university has become a goal in itself. Young people, who are unsure of what they want to do in life, choose higher education; however, is it the right choice in every situation? What could help to answer our doubts about the future after high school? Perhaps the answer lies in non-formal education? The main advantage of non-formal education is flexibility, ability to adapt to individual people's needs and changes in the society. It can aid personal development, as well as improve professional skills.

Taking into consideration the rising role of non-formal education this paper will elaborate at first the types of education, with specific focus on non-formal education, the future of the non-formal education, challenges and its development, the free online courses and their importance in building new skills accessible for huge number of people and at the end it will explore case study of the situation in R. Macedonia.

2. Types of Education

Education, as a lifelong process which enables the continuous development of a person's capabilities as an individual and as a member of society, can take three different forms:

- formal education-the structured educational system usually provided or supported by the state, chronologically graded and running from primary to tertiary institutions; (Council of Europe, 2014) Formal learning is always organized and structured, and has learning objectives. From the learner's standpoint, it is always intentional: i.e. the learner's explicit objective is to gain knowledge, skills and/or competences. Typical examples are learning that takes place within the initial education and training system or workplace training arranged by the employer. One can also speak about formal education and/or training or, more accurately speaking, education and/or training in a formal setting. (OECD, 2015)
- informal education-learning that goes on in daily life and can be received from daily experience, such as from family, friends, peer groups, the media and other influences in a person's environment (Council of Europe, 2014) Informal learning is never organized, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience or just as experience. The idea is that the simple fact of existing constantly exposes the individual to learning situations, at work, at home or during leisure time for instance. (OECD, 2015)
- non-formal education-educational activity which is not structured and takes place outside the formal system. (Council of Europe, 2014) The advantage of the intermediate concept lies in the fact that such learning may occur at the initiative of the individual but also happens as a by-product of more organized activities, whether or not the activities themselves have learning objectives. In some countries, the entire sector of adult learning falls under non-formal learning; in others, most adult learning is formal. Non-formal learning therefore gives some flexibility between formal and informal learning, which must be strictly defined to be operational, by being mutually exclusive, and avoid overlap. (OECD, 2015) Non-formal education is an integral part of a lifelong learning concept that ensures that young people and adults acquire and maintain the skills, abilities and dispositions needed to adapt to a continuously changing environment. It can be acquired on the personal initiative of each individual through different learning activities taking place outside the formal educational system. An important part of non-formal education is carried out by non-governmental organizations involved in community and youth work. Non-formal education covers two rather different realities: on the one hand education activities taking part outside the formal education system (for example a lecture on social

rights organized by a trade union) and on the other the experience acquired while exerting responsibilities in a voluntary organization (for example being a member of the board of an environment protection NGO). (Council of Europe, 2014)

Formal educational systems alone cannot respond to rapid and constant technological, social and economic change in society, thus they should be reinforced by non-formal educational practices. The main difference between informal and non-formal education is the fact that the first is non-voluntary and mostly passive whereas the latter results from an individual voluntary action and is mostly active.

2.1 Definitions for Non-formal Education of EU and OECD

If we go through definitions for non-formal education, according to Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) "The non-formal sector comprises learning activities taking place outside this formal system, such as those carried out within companies, by professional associations, or independently by self-motivated adult learners". This definition is formally correct, but does not take into account the experience acquired in citizens' groups or voluntary organizations. (Council of Europe, 2014)

According to the definition of the European Union: Formal learning is typically provided by an education or training institution and leads to certification. It is structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and is intentional from the learner's perspective. Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, both structured and intentional. Informal learning is not provided by education and training institutions, does not lead to certification and is not structured. It is the result of daily activities. (AEGEE, 2009)

3. The Future of Non-formal Education

3.1 Non-formal Education, Insights

Non-formal education gives young people the possibility to develop their values, skills and competencies others than the ones developed in the framework of formal education. Those skills (also called 'soft skills') include a wide range of competencies such as interpersonal, team, organizational and conflict management, intercultural awareness, leadership, planning, organizing, co-ordination and practical problem solving skills, teamwork, self-confidence, discipline and responsibility. What is special about non-formal education is that individuals, participants are the actors actively involved in the education/learning process. The methods that are being used aim at giving young people the tools to further develop their skills and attitudes. Learning is the ongoing process, one of its crucial features is learning by doing. "Non-formal" does not imply unstructured, the process of non-formal learning is shared and designed in such a way that it creates an environment in which the learner is the architect of the skills development.

Non formal learning on the other hand is a process that is different to non-formal education and therefore can happen in different settings and environments. Youth

organizations offer non-formal learning through their programs at the same time non-formal learning experiences can be organized within the work place. It is important to acknowledge that individual skills acquired through involvement with youth organizations are not only related to employment prospects, but they contribute to the development of human capabilities and motivations. Such skills contribute more directly to a general motivation for learning rather than to specific tasks and responsibilities related to personal development. There is a thin line between those learning experiences; nevertheless it is important to outline the specificities of learning provided through engagement in the youth organizations and their programs. (Council of Europe, 2014)

3.2 Challenges and Future Development of Non-formal Education

Non-formal education it is a necessary supplement to formal education. Through involvement in non-formal education, citizens may get a chance to experiment and take on responsibilities. It develops personal, social and professional skills through experimenting in a relatively safe environment.

Through different activities of non-formal education people can obtain experience that can be compared with traditional formal work experience and should be recognized as such. These activities involve democratic decision making and negotiating, participation, personal development and help them to obtain such qualities as commitment, involvement, responsibility, solidarity, democratic awareness, motivation, initiative, emancipation and empowerment, creativity, respect, tolerance, intercultural awareness, criticism, intellectual independence and self-confidence.

There are different forms of non-formal education that contribute to democracy teaching, entrepreneurship, labour market skills etc.

Youth organizations have always been considered as the main experts in non-formal education and they have reached a high level of achievement in this field. In youth and community organizations young people have the opportunity to discover analyses and understand values and their implications and to build over time a personal set of values to guide their lives. They run work camps and meetings, recruit volunteers, raise funds, administer bank accounts, recruit and manage personnel, give counselling and psychological peer support, organize sport activities and cultural festivals, intervene in their communities and lobby institutions for social change. All these activities of NGOs enable people to acquire leadership skills and provide them with important practical experience in different areas. (Council of Europe, 2014)

The consequences of the financial and economic crisis in European Union have had a dramatic impact on the situation of young people looking for a job. Unemployment amongst young people hit highs not seen for almost 20 years and the risk of poverty and social exclusion amongst this population group was constantly increasing.

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added value can take the form of providing all groups of our population with new skills, competences, tangible experience and valuable knowledge.

Non-formal education acknowledges the importance of lifelong learning and training outside of the recognized and established educational system. The set of skills acquired and competencies include better communication, team work, decision-making, cultural and language skills, sense of initiative, confidence and entrepreneurial skills. They can be developed and acquired through involvement in non-formal educational activities. For people who participate in non-formal activities abroad, this set of skills can also include a more pronounced development of intercultural and language skills. All these qualifications are especially valued by employers when young people lack formal working experience. In that case a participation in non-formal activities can positively influence the employability of young people and secure them a better access to the labor market.

The methods that are used in non-formal education put the individual in the focus of the learning process and foster the individual's personal and social development. People practice "learning by doing" through voluntary work and other participatory activities. Learning based on real life situations that actively engage an individual in the learning process becomes more efficient and skill-oriented. Through the interaction via people-to-people contact individual learners acquire valuable interpersonal and management skills such as teamwork, leadership, project management, practical problem solving and ICT skills. These skills are valuable for both personal development and for the labor market. They can not only contribute to the employability, but can empower young people to set up their own start-ups and companies.

These capabilities can create a strong basis for intercultural learning and multi-ethnic dialogue that complement the "hard knowledge" skills acquired through formal education. And when these skills are shared with people from different countries develop a sense of community beyond the national boundaries of their home country. They improve and acquire language skills and develop a sense of solidarity, respect and tolerance that encourages young people to reflect upon their cultural identity and common values such as human rights, equality, freedoms. It can be extremely beneficial for the individual learners who not only acquire needed skills and competences for the labour market but also become more informed and broad-minded.

Therefore the non-formal education has a tendency to adapt to the needs of the labour market and that it has an ability to meet social changes and life needs.

One example of non-formal learning and education is the 'Youth in Action' or now the Erasmus program. This program aims to enhance employability of young people, contributes to their active citizenship and social inclusion, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background. So, non-formal education can have a significant impact on achieving a reasonable, sustainable and inclusive development for the Europe 2020 Strategy. It can play a huge role in addressing the issue of skills shortages and in supporting economic recovery of Europe. In addition it can be helpful in the modernization of education and can provide young people with high-valued skills, abilities and knowledge which also can contribute to social inclusion and personal development of young people in general. (The Baltic Times, 2013)

Important challenge of the non-formal education is its recognition in comparison with formal, academic education. As a result, the importance of non-formal education is not fully recognized and the opportunities to use it are not fully realized. While formal education can be quantified and described, this is more difficult in the case of non-formal education, which largely escapes structure and is difficult to assess quantitatively and qualitatively. Hence, funding is a problem. National education planners should reconsider their policy and practice in order to promote non-formal education as a means of increasing skills and knowledge.

4. Open Education Resources and the Rising Importance of Non-formal and Informal Learning

In light of the current challenges facing the EU in terms of rising levels of youth unemployment, skill shortages and an aging population it is perhaps unsurprising that policy-makers are progressively seeing non-formal and informal learning approaches as a means of unlocking the significant reserves of under-used human capital. In December 2012 the Council of the European Union issued a Recommendation which recognized the importance of non-formal and informal learning pathways in engaging with disadvantaged target groups including the young, the unemployed, and the low skilled – and called upon all EU Member States to make arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018.

In conjunction with existing trends towards lifelong learning and the promotion of non-formal and informal learning opportunities, the increasing availability of online Open Education resources will continue to have a substantial impact on the information environment. In 2011 UNESCO report on Open Education Resources claimed that there has been an explosion in the availability of online educational material fuelled by collective sharing of knowledge as a consequence of growing numbers of connected people.

E-portfolios, blogs, wikis, podcasting, social networking, web conferencing and online assessment tools are increasingly being employed alongside virtual learning environments to deliver “a richer, personalized curriculum to diverse learners”. In addition to the free educational courses available online, a further modulation in this trend can be observed in the arrival of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). In January 2012 Sebastian Thrun, a computer science professor at Stanford University launched Udacity. By October this online education platform had raised \$15 million from investors and boasted 475,000 users (Economist December 2012). In April 2012 two of Mr. Thrun’s former colleagues launched Coursera with \$16 million of venture capital. As of December 2012 Coursera had signed up over 2 million students in partnership with 33 universities worldwide. In response to these developments, both Harvard and MIT announced their intention to devote \$60 million towards developing their own equivalent online course repository called EdX (Harvard Magazine, July 2012). (Harvard Magazine, 2012)

Finally, a further trend which has steadily built up considerable momentum is the practice of granting Open Access to the outputs of publically funded research, generally within the context of peer-reviewed journal articles and papers. Opening up

this knowledge to free online access allows this research to reach wider audiences and gain greater public visibility. Also in July 2012, the European Commission issued a proposal to support open access to publications and data arising from research funded by Horizon 2020 (the science/research component of the EU 2020 Growth Strategy).

Therefore the growing trend of open educational resources is opening new pathways of the non-formal education which in future will make even more changes of the skills and knowledge that will be accessible to wide group of public. (Trend Report, 2015)

5. Republic of Macedonia and Non-formal Education

Macedonia joined the modern trends of diversification of the educational offer through various types of non-formal education programs. Sometimes the formal education system is unable to offer programs designed in accordance with the competencies and skills and knowledge that are of interest for the Macedonian citizens in order to fill in this vacuum.

- **Public sector and non-formal education**

All the public, the NGO and the private sectors have an important role in many non-formal education programs and trainings. It is indisputable that the public sector institutions offer programs of formal education. As a process which enables young people to gain the opportunity to develop their values, skills and competencies different from those obtained in the framework of formal education, non-formal education can contribute a lot in the unemployment problem.

- **The private sector and non-formal education**

The private sector is interested in non-formal education, through which employees acquire more skills, knowledge and abilities to adapt to the needs of employers. But in the R. Macedonia, the motivation of employers for any type of education and training of their employees is low. In the country there are no incentives for education and training of employees, except for persons with disabilities. Employers consider the investment in education and training of their employees a waste of time and resources.

- **NGOs and non-formal education**

There is no doubt that most of the non-formal education trainings are organized by NGOs working with the youth in the community. Civil society and especially NGOs are predominantly focused on programs of general education and cultural education of the youth. One of the greatest promoters of non-formal education in Macedonia is the non-governmental sector assisted by foreign donations. There are youth NGOs which have the capacity, knowledge and experience to offer these kinds of programs. But the problem of coordination which causes duplication of the efforts in the NGO sector and unbalanced offers is more than evident. Another great problem of these NGOs is the accessibility of these programs to the general public. (Abdulai, Sinani, 2012)

The analysis of the conditions in the EU and in Macedonia makes it evident that the conditions with the non-formal education in R. Macedonia are at the medium stage of their development. There is an obvious loss of linkage between the pre-transition period and the continued transition, which creates a vacuum. The human capital in Macedonia is at a decline which is confirmed by studies of several international organizations (mostly from the UN family).

With regard to the planning and strategies that arise from legislation, there is deficiency of open debate, a discussion or developing plans for holistic approaches regarding lifelong learning. Bearing in mind the high unemployment rate in the country and the stratification of the educational structure of the population, the aforementioned is important. This means developing a National Strategy on Lifelong Learning, which would synergistically tackle demand, labor market, and modern and future trends in technologies and economic functions. It should be accompanied by appropriate reforms in primary, secondary and tertiary education, non-formal and informal education, and institutional capacity on implementing the adopted legislation. There is strategy for adult education, but the lifelong learning is broader term. So holistic approach should be developed as an integral solution for lifelong learning as a newer concept, compatible with the present time and the European integrations. (Youth Cultural Centre Bitola, 2011).

Non-formal education providers should ensure partnership not only with the decision-making structures, but also with authorities, educational institutions, the business sector and social partners, local organizations, research centers, etc. The system institutions, especially those in the field of education and labor and social policies should pay more attention and show readiness for greater support and recognition of the importance of non-formal education in order to reduce the unemployment rate in Macedonia.

The situation in the field of non-formal education in the Republic of Macedonia requires suitable approach from the state through the establishment of cooperation between different governmental sectors, between the Government and other factors in the country, such as trade unions, economic chambers, employers, educational institutions, civic associations, etc. (Abdullai, Sinani, 2012)

6. Conclusion

It is very important to acknowledge non-formal education as an essential part of the educational process and to recognize the contribution that can be made by non-formal educational organizations. Although it is difficult to measure the immediate result of non-formal educational activities it might be possible to combine the process of evaluation with the implementation of such activities that could give a consistent picture of progress made by the participants. Such method should be based on the ability of the participants of non-formal education to self-evaluation, which itself could be a purpose of non-formal education.

This paper shows the importance and fast development of non-formal education, it has big role in addressing the issue of skills shortages and in supporting economic and democratic development. It can be helpful in the modernization of education, and can provide people with high-valued skills, abilities and knowledge. In turn,

these skills, acquired through participation in non-formal education activities, promote social inclusion and contribute to the personal development. Also in the Macedonian society there is need of further efforts to enhance the cooperation between all sectors in order to achieve coherent approaches in development of the skills of the participants in the non-formal education.

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