

LIFELONG LEARNING CENTERS AS FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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SUMMARY

Educational trends and discussions about lifelong learning are not new, but lately there is enormous interest from the expert and scientific audience about this new educational paradigm and its influence in changing the focus of the overall pedagogical discourse. This changing course of the educational policy towards building a lifelong learning societies, cities and institutions is due to several factors that follow globalization and demographic trends, economic and cultural as well as personal and civic challenges that the world is facing.

All of these factors are “pressuring” universities and other educational institutions to redefine their role in the society by achieving some of the goals set by European strategic educational documents. The new role of higher educational institutions is primarily oriented to promotion of knowledge, skills and competencies, developing and nurturing entrepreneurship culture and transfer of knowledge to the economic sector. Hence, to accomplish the symbiosis between universities and the economy sector it is crucial to strengthen their relation and cooperation which will result in greater interaction and mutual benefit. Therefore, lifelong learning is one of the channels that can contribute for accomplishing this by symbiosis between higher education and changing labor market demands.

This paper is aiming to prove that creating sustainable and fruitful partnership between higher education and the wider society communities presupposes developing national system for lifelong learning which will significantly influence towards raising the quality of human

resources and accomplishing strategic national and regional goals set in the today's economies based on knowledge, by respecting the differences and individual needs of every stakeholder. We will present the goal and main activities from the Centre for lifelong learning at the Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje at the University “Ss Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje which are aimed to creating European and world standards in educational system of Republic of Macedonia by securing access to quality educational offer for every category of citizens by respecting the principle of inclusiveness and quality in achieving general and specific competences.

Key words: Lifelong learning, Higher education, Competences, Skills, Cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Educational systems around the world are facing number of challenges caused by rapid societal changes in today's so-called “knowledge-based societies”. This is influencing in some extent to alternate and transform educational goals and educational methods and techniques implemented in educational process in context of implementation and realization of lifelong learning concept.

Modern societies should develop new generations, which will be able to live and develop in the contexts of intellectually-intensive, scientifically-intensive and informationally-satiated technologies; that will develop skills for navigating and acting in a constantly changing reality of production, business, social and political life. In such environments and communities the ultimate meaning belongs not to the computers or machines, but to the knowledge and creative way of thinking.

Therefore, overall economic, technological, social and other changes happening in the societies of the XXI century, are posing the inevitable questions: What kind of student and learners do we need? How to prepare students and people for working and integrating in societal changes of the future?

The answer of this complex dilemma lies in the lifelong learning concept, i.e. in enabling individuals for continuous and ongoing learning that will secure the competences for changing

them-selves and changing the whole society, fast adaptability on the work-places and in other spheres of societal and public life, as well as self-fulfilment and self-realisation.

The first principle of the European pillar of social rights is that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning opportunities in order to acquire and maintain appropriate competencies that will enable full participation in society and a successful transition to the labor market (European Commission, 2018). At the same time, the right of all people to timely and adequate educational assistance to improve employability and/or self-employment, adequate training, retraining, continuing education and job search support is emphasized.

The process of globalization imposes the need for people to have the appropriate skills and competencies to achieve and maintain adequate living standards, to increase employment and advancement opportunities in the workplace, and to foster social cohesion in knowledge-based societies and the world of work. Only through continuous improvement of their skills and competencies personal development can be achieved, as well as increasing employment opportunities, improving social inclusion and keeping pace with the times of rapid and significant change.

Over the past few decades, lifelong learning has emerged as one of the top priorities in knowledge-based societies and economies. At the beginning of the XXI century, in year 2000, the Lisbon Strategy emphasized the importance of human resources and investing in education, training and development in order to achieve economic growth, increase labor market competitiveness and reduce unemployment. Three strategic goals are set that educational institutions should achieve:

1. Increasing the quality and effectiveness of the education and training system in accordance with the new requirements of knowledge-based societies and the change in the way teaching and learning is realized;
2. Availability of education and training in the context of lifelong learning, job training, career development, equal opportunities and social cohesion;

3. Opening education and training to the general population, through the prism of more efficient connection of work and knowledge and responding to the challenges that arise in the process of globalization. (European Council, 2000)

The Incheon Declaration "Education 2030", in the fourth sustainable goal - Ensuring inclusive and equal quality education and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning for all, sets several goals, including:

- by 2030, to ensure equal access for all women and men to accessible and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university;
- by 2030, to secure significantly increasement of the number of young people and adults who will have relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship;
- by 2030 to ensure that all youth and a large part of the adult population will acquire reading, writing and counting skills;
- by 2030, significantly increase the supply of qualified teaching staff, including international cooperation for teacher training in developed countries with less developed and developing countries;
- by 2030 to eliminate gender differences in the field of education and to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable categories of citizens, including people with disabilities, marginalized groups of people and children from vulnerable families. (UNESCO, 2016)

In addition to the set goals to be achieved in the foreseeable future, the data from the international tests of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) such as PISA - Program for International Student Assessment or PIAAC - Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies are alarming. They indicate a constant increase in adolescents and adults with low levels of acquired basic skills. In 2015, one in five students had a serious problem with reading and calculating, while in some countries one third of adults

have a very low level of literacy, and 44% of the total population of European Union countries have little or no digital literacy skills.¹

There are many reasons related primarily to globalization, demographic trends, economic and cultural needs, etc., which indicate the need for urgent and comprehensive activities in the field of lifelong learning that must be incorporated within the institutional framework, but also in the education systems of countries. The European Commission therefore points to the need to redefine the role of the university and its role in achieving the objectives of the European Strategic Education Documents. One of the goals set in the document Education and Training 2020 is to achieve 15% participation of the adult population in any form of lifelong learning. (European Council, 2009)

The new role of higher education institutions is aimed primarily at promoting knowledge, skills and competencies, developing and nurturing an entrepreneurial and innovative culture and transferring knowledge to the economic sector. However, in order to realize that symbiosis, it is necessary to strengthen the connection between the university and the economy, i.e the society as a whole, which would provide greater interaction and mutual benefit. Lifelong learning is the channel through which the desired symbiosis between higher education and the real and changing needs of the labor market can be achieved.

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Creating a sustainable and fruitful partnership between higher education and the narrow and wider social community implies the development of a lifelong learning system that will significantly increase the quality of human resources and achieve strategic national and regional goals in a knowledge-based society and economy by respecting the diversity and individual needs of each stakeholder. This on the other hand would mean establishing a partnership between all relevant stakeholders (state, enterprises, regional and local communities, as well as educational and cultural institutions).

¹ Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/education/pisa-2015-results-volume-i-9789264266490-en.html>

The main goal of creating a Center for Lifelong Learning at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje is the introduction of European and world standards in the education system of the Republic of North Macedonia by providing access to quality education offer for all categories of citizens, emphasizing the principle of inclusion and quality assurance in the acquisition of general and professional competencies.

The establishment of a Center for Lifelong Learning at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje also implies a more flexible and accessible acquisition of modern skills and competencies required in the labor market and promotion of existing competencies in a certain profession/profile for all stakeholders (institutions and companies), employed and unemployed persons, university and administrative staff, students, high school students, etc.), by offering a variety of non-formal educational programs.

The Center for Lifelong Learning through the personal and professional development of individuals will contribute to the achievement of multiple benefits, both for the Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje and for the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje and the wider social community through various tasks:

- Opening a new educational market with significant potential for growth and development;
- Development of an open and flexible system of professional and personal development of all stakeholders (teaching staff, students, employed and unemployed persons, institutions and companies, etc.);
- Establishment of a national information and advisory center for adult education;
- Development of a system for andragological-methodological-didactic training and improvement of teaching staff;
- Creating a solid foundation for additional income of the Faculty and University;
- Offering innovative ways of acquiring knowledge and skills that will be formally verified and evaluated, enabling visitors to further engage in the formal education system.

The activity of the Center for Lifelong Learning will take place in accordance with the activity of the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, i.e the Statute of the Faculty. However, special emphasis will be placed on the following activities:

- Promotion of lifelong learning and creating a culture of lifelong learning;
- Organizing seminars and conferences dedicated to lifelong learning;
- Publishing promotional material, manuals and books for the needs of lifelong learning;
- Establishment and development of a network with local and national institutions in the field of lifelong learning;
- Research and development in the field of lifelong learning;
- Establishment and coordination of international cooperation in the field of lifelong learning;
- Developing, defining and implementing trainings, courses and modules in various areas of interest to stakeholders;
- Preparation and implementation of professional training for all stakeholders;
- Providing consulting assistance to institutions and companies in terms of the necessary knowledge and skills that are conditioned by changes in the technical-technological and socio-economic environment.

CONCLUSION

Implementation of some of these activities is leading towards accomplishing the primary goal of the Center for Lifelong learning at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje – which is to contribute towards improving and upgrading the competences among individuals and groups in the society in order to achieve lifelong learning culture and to become a lifelong learning practitioners able to fulfill their full potential in personal and societal development.

Results from several trainings and conferences show that the principle - working together within the micro and macro community level is the only way that higher education institutions can contribute towards building a lifelong learning society where an open and flexible system of professional and personal development can be developed and implemented;

where new educational market with significant potential for growth and development is developed; where innovative ways of acquiring knowledge and skills are formally verified and evaluated contributing for development of a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning and further engaging of individuals in the formal education system.

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