

WCES 2012

## Non-formal education a tool for reducing the transition obstacles

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### Abstract

The everlasting transition and the challenges the youth is facing in the employment sphere are our main focus in this paper. The non-formal education is shown as a tool for reducing the transition obstacles. The good experience form Sweden is taken as a model of non-formal education and which has to do with new skills for the community such as learning of new languages beside the ones for local usage, IT skills and peaceful solution of disputes. The case of Macedonia is shown in this paper.

*Keywords: transition, non-formal education, formal education, unemployment;*

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### Introduction

Through this paper we will present the issues, developments and challenges in the field of non-formal education in Macedonia and compare it with the practices in the Kingdom of Sweden which is a state that has a long tradition in non-formal education.

We will describe that the poor economic development and the transition period in our country are the main reasons for the increased number of unemployed people. The survey will show that a high percentage of participants have similar viewpoints about the process of transition in our country. Also, the data (results) from the research realized with SEEU students regarding the social changes and political developments in the country and abroad will give us a hint in finding proper solutions.

We will present the role of our University and the role of NGOs in organizing programs, trainings and other workshops in this area. It is more than obvious that the NGO sector that deals with the community in general and the youth in particular is the major driving force of these actions and undertakings.

In conclusion, we will try to relate non-formal education with the employment opportunities. The most important segment of this paper is the impact of this type of education in mitigating the problem of unemployment in Macedonia, i.e. the impact of non-formal education in social policies and social welfare.

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## **The endless transition**

After the independence, the Republic of Macedonia did not mark any GDP growth which shows that the system that relies on the public ownership is not capable of giving positive economic results. Thus from the start of the transition process, Macedonia was challenged by the external political and economic pressures. The inefficient privatization and the economic reconstruction, the massive layoffs, the serious worsening of the living standard, and the rapid expansion of poverty are some of the major reasons that keep Macedonia in a pretty bad status quo position without any hopes for sooner improvement of things and brighter future for the young generations.

The survey with students at SEE University shows the public opinion on the transition process in Macedonia. 80% of the participants in the survey share the opinion that the reason for such a long transition period is the lack of a good political will. In the next question, 96% of interviewed students think that the process of privatization has been abused during the transition period in Macedonia in the past 20 years. The students' opinion in finding the way out of this difficult process relies in securing sustainable direct international investments for economic development. Thus, in the research published in "Students and global political and religious movements", we can see their opinions about these issues.

Of course, in order to attract international investments you also need to have a qualified workforce. The official statistical data in 2011 say that 31.6% of the population capable for work in Republic of Macedonia are unemployed. In numbers, that is 295 427 unemployed people. This is one of the highest rates of unemployment in Europe.

## **Macedonia and Non-formal Education**

Macedonia joined the modern trends of diversification of the educational offer through various types of non-formal education programs. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the role of non-formal education in Macedonia in terms of capacity building at the individual level but also at the level of society and its impact on the problem of unemployment in our society. In this sense it is very important to find a structured model of non-formal education, and see it as a supporter of the formal educational system i.e. as an added value, so that the educational system will be able to exercise its maximum impact on all segments of the society.

The Republic of Macedonia is not immune to the trend of diversification of non-formal education. It is evident that in our country 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**

According to the analysis of research data we can conclude that 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, but they do not correspond to the educational needs of citizens and the needs of the labour market.

The poor socio-economic situation of citizens in the country which has a tendency of deterioration as a result of the global financial crisis adversely affected demand in the labour market. Public sector institutions such as the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia, the Agency for Civil Servants, the Secretariat for European Affairs, the Agency for Youth and Sports, have special significance for the promotion and implementation of programs in the field of non-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 at large in soothing the unemployment problem. Skills such as group work, organizational and conflict management, intercultural awareness, leadership, planning, coordination, discipline and responsibility are the main areas of focus.

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

The private sector is the most important driving force of the economy in a society. The comparative experiences show that the private sector is most interested in these training sessions, through which employees acquire more skills, knowledge and abilities to adapt to the needs of employers. But in the Republic of 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 our partners that offer non-formal education is the NGO “Triagolnik”, Skopje, Macedonia. We jointly did a research on “Non-formal education as an opportunity, mechanism and tool for decreasing the unemployment in the Republic of Macedonia”. In this research we concluded that non-formal education creates good employment opportunities and that the participants seek more by learning local languages other than their native language.

The biggest problem of these NGOs is the lack of recognition of these trainings in the country and insufficient information on these courses, lack of financial sustainability of these organizations, and an imbalance of these trainings throughout the whole territory of the Republic of Macedonia.

### **The experiences of the Swedish model of non-formal education – a good example for the Republic of Macedonia**

We will dwell on this paper on the experiences of the implementation of non-formal education in Sweden as well as on the volume and the role of this kind of education and the support from the state in providing trainings and workshops in this field.

A fundamental point of the Swedish model is the complete governmental support for non-formal education. Fields with the greatest number of participants include: arts, sculpture, media, journalism, leadership, international trainings, drama, ecology, and religion, philosophy of life, sports, languages, creative writing, tourism, and cultural studies.

The flexibility and freedom of determination of programs in accordance with the participants’ needs are the most important characteristics of the learning process in the folk secondary schools. It is considered that these schools offer the possibility to learn flexibly based on the content of trainings and learning methods.

Through this model, Sweden is trying to make it up to those who were not able to acquire formal education. Special attention is paid to values of tolerance, equality and democracy through this model.

The foundation of this model of the non-formal education means a flexible and independent learning process, focused on the methodology of small groups and creative dialog. The participants are considered adults and responsible people who are able to think critically and are responsible for the learning process. It is also important to

point out that during the 1995-1996 school year, a national evaluation of this kind of educational model as carried out. In accordance with this evaluation it was concluded that Swedish folk secondary schools meet the criteria for public financial support.

Sweden is known for its non-formal education approach and is considered as one of the leading countries which promote non-formal education. Non-formal education in Sweden is a developed concept which is happening parallel and in addition to the process of formal education through support programs by the state as well as by formal education institutions in the country.

### **Comparative approach**

The Republic of Macedonia is far away from the approach of the encompassing implementation of non-formal education due to the insufficient support by the state as well as the ignorance of the importance of the skills that can be acquired in this kind of educational setting. The strategy for the youth in the Republic of Macedonia in terms of establishing civic program schools by NGOs is a good foundation, but its implementation in the first place depends on the support that these NGOs will receive from the public sector at a central and local level.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

There is no conceptual framework and a strategy for non-formal education in R. of Macedonia. Non-formal education is situated in a very bad condition due to the lack of a complete legal framework, coordination and cooperation among social partners, as well as inappropriate transparency and accessibility of these kinds of programs.

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. Most of the participants in the focus groups of the unemployed had no idea of the concept of non-formal education.

The motivation of employers to send their employees to non-formal education and trainings is very low. There are no stimulation measures for that purpose (financial benefits, tax releases, etc.) Most of the employers think that investment in education and training of their employees is a useless attempt and expense.

There is a perception that formal education contributes partially to the acquisition of those competences, skills and approaches that are necessary to remain competent and in line with the latest trends in the labor market.

The private sector employers have a need to hire people who not only have a formal education degree but also competences, skills and abilities in the field of non-formal education.

Individual skills acquired through trainings in non-formal education activities are not only related to the perspectives and opportunities for employment, but they also contribute to the development of human capacities and motivation for individual development which is necessary in a modern democratic society.

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 centres, etc.

The system institutions, especially those in the field of education and labour 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 an urgent and 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.

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