



EDUCATION AS A FACTOR IN STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION IN R. MACEDONIA

PhD. Zoran Matevski¹

PhD. Dushka Matevska²

Abstract: *Effective changes and reforms of the education system are necessary in countries like R. Macedonia. These changes will build an education system that betters social cohesion and the involvement of vulnerable groups of citizens in society. In essence, education is a key factor in sustainable economic and societal growth. The universities of today, because of their ability to generate new skills and knowledge, are highlighted as a key factor in strengthening competitiveness of economy at the global level. The key solutions that originate from the modern empirical and theoretical frames of societal growth refer to the important direct and indirect connections between the building of human capacity, the dynamics of technological change, employment, as well as the betterment of life conditions. Considering this, education has the crucial role in personal growth and sustainable societal growth of a country like R. Macedonia, because of its role in securing qualified and competent staff.*

Keywords: *education system, social cohesion, sustainable growth.*

1. Introduction

In R. Macedonia the term social exclusion has been used in political social and scientific speech for the past 15 years. It is thought that this concept causes individuals to decrease and weaken their social links, becoming isolated from all kinds of social, political and cultural events. Most often, social exclusion is closely linked to unemployment. The

¹ Distinguished Professor at Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. CYRIL AND METHODIUS University in Skopje, R. Macedonia
email: zmatevski@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

² Distinguished Professor at Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. CYRIL AND METHODIUS University in Skopje, R. Macedonia
email: zmatevski@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

approach to exclusion is often used when describing the social situation of a group of citizens, like the unemployed, poor and marginalized ethnic groups (Roma). The poorest citizens are unemployed or earn a low wage. Given the strong tradition of family in Macedonia, which supports the unemployed, they do not always immediately fall into poverty and social isolation. The social environment isn't inclined towards blaming the unemployed for the situation they are in. Beside employment, knowledge, expertise and the ability to improve and perfect their skills have a crucial role for improving societal involvement. All of these are under the direct influence of the education system as a whole.

Therefore, society that is based on knowledge, or post-industrial society, puts a focus on the interest of questioning the relations between sustainable societal growth, social cohesion and education. Effective changes and reform in the education system are also necessary in countries such as R. Macedonia in the direction of building an education system which leads to improving social cohesion and increasing involvement of sensitive citizen groups in social events. In fact, education today can be considered as a factor in sustainable economic and societal growth. Universities today, because of their ability to generate new knowledge and skills, are more and more prominent as a key factor in strengthening the competitiveness of the economy on a global level.

2. Main text

2.1 Higher education and social cohesion

Higher education has a large role in promoting the understanding and involvement of societal groups with the framework of building a feeling of transparency and equality in less developed societies, such as R. Macedonia. Higher education is implemented in social circles with the goal of building an intellectual foundation for promoting pluralistic culture, increasing state-societal synergy and supporting national development initiatives in the country itself. Empirical research, independent reasoning, as well as informal debate on the given subject are an integral foundation in the development of rational self-critical society in which the shared part of citizenship can connect all the differences based in race, ethnicity, religion, economical and other factors (Smith, 2011, p. 529-603). Higher education is located in a correlative relationship with variables such as: social connection; respecting diversity; civil participation in societal, political and cultural events in the country; as well as the faith in social and government institutions. This type of education has a huge influence on social cohesion which is recognized as one of the most important contributions to the public good.

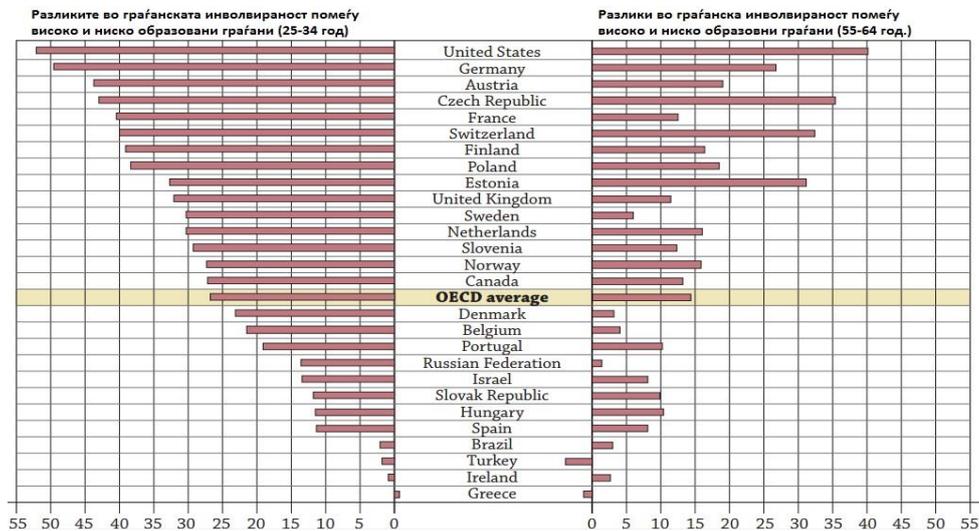
Taking into account the potential of higher education institutions to take a bigger and more direct role in promoting social cohesion in the Republic of Macedonia, unfortunately analyses show many failures related to this trend of action of higher education in the country. The role of universities in social cohesion in the country is at an exceptionally low level. In certain cases, higher education institutions are models for immoral and unprofessional behavior prompted by institutional corruption and the other self-directed factors and selfish goals. Government institutions in the country have the opportunity to present multiple courses designed with the goal of bettering the ideological representation of the given belief of the large and crucial role of education on improving

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social cohesion (Rizvi, 2009). Traditionally, their will and capability to oppose continued problems is shown by the implementation of debates and empirical studies directed at improving internal adaptability and the ability to recognize and emphasize the big social, cultural, economic and religious differences between Macedonian citizens. Today, these and similar activities take a central place in the mission of universities and other higher education institutions in the country. However, most world problems and challenges with which Macedonian society is faced are prompting management and academic circles to decrease social divisions and exclusion in the country.

However the main question that is asked is- how the universities, or higher education institutions in Macedonia, can promote mutual understanding, transparency, tolerance and mutual respect. In fact, would certain higher education institutions succumb to corruption, wrong ideology, stereotyping and prejudices? These debates pretend to direct themselves more towards building a healthy nation, prompting democratic thinking, including the central role of education of increasing tolerance and the desire of younger generations to involve themselves in the political processes of the country. Taking into account the fact that valid data about this type of influence in the Macedonian education system does not exist, we can still use samples from research made within OECD countries through which civil involvement is measured in relation to highly educated citizens. With this, we can additionally show the relation between higher education and increased civil involvement in political, economic and cultural events in the country, whose practice can be realized in Macedonian education.

Table. 1 Overview of the differences in civil involvement



Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators, Indicator A11
www.oecd.org/edu/eag2012

The role of universities in society is no longer linked only to equipping human resources and human capital, in terms of the capabilities, skills, behavior and marginal productivity, but more and more we look at the mechanisms with which higher education in Macedonia affects social cohesion. In fact, we think of directing social capital towards strengthening a healthy and democratic society. It's exactly this understanding of social cohesion that has serious implication on higher education in the country. Higher education institutions offer many opportunities to sensitive groups in society to come in closer contact with the majority. The importance of these activities is based on creating "networks of involvement and interactivity" (Popkewitz. & Rizvi , 2009).

Sensitive groups (ethnic minorities, extremely poor students etc.) socially mobilize themselves throughout universities, faculty camps and dormitories in Macedonia. The next aspect of the role of higher education in Macedonia is based on the promotion of social cohesion and its influence on the development of modern mechanisms which are used in realizing social control. As it could be noticed through the conflicts around the world, conflicts on the national level transform into large movements for human rights. The role of higher education is implemented as a critically inclined system against public policy and administration, directing attention towards the potential sources of conflict before the strongest clashes even begin. The fourth implication of the large role of higher education is based on the model of social capital which affects the development of social cohesion, related to the formation and socialization of shared values between constructed higher education groups and organizations, including the citizens and the whole Macedonian public. Higher education institutions, especially those whose members reflect the social diversity in the country, contribute to a meaningful surrounding for exploring social change Macedonian society must face. These institutions have the ability to also implement channels through which social norms and expectations can be more effectively implemented in the public. Because of this universities in Macedonia have a vital role which they play by supporting the concept of democratic citizenship.

2.2 Challenges in Macedonian higher education

Any country that tries to be competitive in the dynamic job market needs to provide a quality education for every student, which requires changes in the organization of learning, at all levels. Unfortunately, the introduction of ECTS didn't provide the necessary changes. We have the impression that some of the positive sides of the old system are abandoned, while the positive sides of the new system aren't fully developed yet. It seems like the Management of the faculties and universities have accepted that there aren't enough resources for a successful education and they have directed the blame towards the Ministry of Education and Science. The faculties and universities will be forced to face the weight of the situation they have put themselves once the degree of their independence increases. In a situation when they enroll more students that they can handle, no one asked if the quality of the education will suffer. The introduction of the reform didn't change and improve the way things work; the access to studies; the demands of the students; didn't strengthen the perception that it is about serious reforms and undertakings that will improve the old way of learning the reforms did the exact opposite. This makes the reaction of most professors that the Bologna system was a wrong turn for our education system and we should return to the way things were understandable. We can not disregard the fact

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that the Bologna system is a process that needs to be constantly improved. Will the high percentage (1/3 of the people surveyed) of people who believe that the Bologna system was a big mistake be regarded as a high or “acceptable” percentage isn’t as important as the fact that half of the people surveyed didn’t have an opinion on the matter and only a few percent of them disagreed. Keeping the previous answer in mind, we can logically reach the answer to the second question: Did the realization of the Bologna system achieve a higher quality of education? Only 1/5 of the people surveyed agree, 40% did not have an opinion on the matter, while 1/3 disagreed. Without delving deeper into the logic behind the opinions of the students, this forms the point of view for the system, which only a few students have found the positive sides of.

It appears that the students are aware of the importance of the system, but they also realize that its implementation wasn’t successful. However, are the students satisfied with their education? The students of the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje can clearly define their opinion on the quality of the education they receive. On one hand receiving a degree is simple, but on the other hand it mobilizes the mechanisms of the end result such as the point of their studies. The effectiveness of the received degree and the satisfaction that creates a healthy person are not fulfilled at the same time. This situation imprisons and frustrates the student which results in differentiated attitudes, unclear perception, not enough rational thought, which can be easily manipulated. The Higher education is too complex to be explained for reasons that come from one sphere of society, but this does not mean that all subjects in this process have the same level of responsibility. Some are far more responsible, especially those who have long managed the faculties and universities. In this sense the universities and faculties have not developed managery practices that can be compared with the ones used by education institutions from developed countries.

Every student “subjectifies” the objective truth and expects to secure the maximal amount for himself. The one thing that leads as on the correct path is connected to the aims of the education system. How much does the system satisfy the expectations of the student; do they feel, understand and think how it works; and what isn’t in accordance whit their expectations. All of this reinforces the belief that serious and radical steps are necessary to improve the process of learning, and courage is necessary to seek outside evaluation that can objectively asses the quality of the higher education institutions in R. Macedonia.

3. Conclusion

Hence, the primary conclusion is based off the necessity of the development of education, as a crucial factor that improves social cohesion. In fact, sustainable societal growth is crucial for the reforms in the higher education institutions of R. Macedonia, which is a condition for the survival of all Macedonian citizens, no matter their ethnicity, religious and other affiliations. The development of most education institutions in the country so far hasn’t been based on the principles of social cohesion. In fact, the exact opposite is true. This development is followed by “brain drain”, disloyal competition, corruption, inefficient studies, the domination of personal, group, party and other interests above the societal and national interests of the country. The economical, ecological, political, moral, demographic, spiritual and ideological problems that are faced by R. Macedonia affect the crisis of the

education system, which drastically slows down the process of improving the social cohesion in the country. This is why deeper and all-encompassing of the entire society are necessary to improve the education system. These reforms will build effective education programs, whose frame will allow for productive and efficient education institutions; their qualitative organization; implementation of high quality management; qualified and professional administrative staff. According to this, the key institutions that need to change in society to improve social cohesion are the job market and the education system. The job market needs to be dominated by healthy competition as well as partnership, needs to open up space for mobilization of future employees, who after leaving the effective education system can present their skills at the job market. With this, undergraduate and graduate students will be involved in all cultural, economic and social happenings in the society surrounding them and they will be able to continuously educate themselves.

The situation of the higher education system in R. Macedonia is complex. On one hand, almost all students that finish high school enroll in college, which is to be respected, but isn't thought through as a practice. Education, especially higher education is expensive, and it turned out into free will from those who study, as well as an irresponsible attitude of the state and the faculties and their professors and students. It is a fact that: higher education hasn't reformed itself and it has been "left on its own" and doesn't try to change itself hoping that an outside force will change it; the programs of some faculties aren't made in accordance with those who need to absorb the needs of the graduates; many of the professors aren't involved in the scientific field (this is apparent by the lack of published scientific articles); most of the scientific articles published aren't based on original research; the old system of doctoral studies created an army of students with PhDs who have entered the institutions of the system; some of them are unqualified professors of the public and private universities. There are professors who have never been a part of a scientific project, who haven't specialized outside of the country, have never been visiting professors, have never been cited, and have never done the necessary scientific work. This speaks indirectly of the quality of the education and what the students have spent their time studying. There are many people with master's degrees and PhDs who are unemployed, or "inappropriately" employed. These people form a group of at least a hundred subjects in administration and economy, who don't have clearly defined tasks. On one hand the "autonomy" of the universities is realized through the material benefit of the faculties and professors, but on the other hand, the state has secured them with regular paychecks for a job that isn't clearly defined. A system is formed that is difficult to rationally explain and can't be reduced to explanations such as "greed" and "ignorance", because these terms do not explain the phenomenon and only serves to disqualify the subjects of the process who started to act "systemically" and do not ask themselves what they are doing. The discussion of the quality of education in R. Macedonia quickly entered the labyrinth of the political discussions where the party in power would suggest something that will be immediately shut down by the opposition. Now the question remains: what is quality education and how can we achieve such a thing? Of course the answer to the first question is easier and the second answer requires more complex elaboration, although the discussion of what constitutes quality education doesn't lead us closer to the answer to how do we achieve it.

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ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ КАО ФАКТОР У ЈАЧЕЊУ СОЦИЈАЛНЕ КОХЕЗИЈЕ У Р. МАЦЕДОНИЈА

Сажетак: Ефективне промене и реформе образовног система неопходне су у земљама попут Р. Македоније. Ове промене ће изградити образовни систем који ће издржати социјалну кохезију и укључивање рањивих група граѓана у друштво. У суштини, образовање је кључни фактор одрживог економског и друштвеног раста. Данас су универзитети, због своје способности да генеришу нове вештине и знања, наглашени као кључни фактор у јачању конкурентности привреде на глобалном нивоу. Кључна решења која потичу из савремених емпиријских и теоријских оквира друштвеног развоја односе се на важне директне и индиректне везе између изградње људских капацитета, динамике технолошких промена, запошљавања, као и побољшања животних услова. С обзиром на то, образовање има кључну улогу у личном расту и одрживом друштвеном развоју земље попут Р. Македоније, због своје улоге у обезбеђивању квалификованог и компетентног особља.

Кључне речи: образовни систем, социјална кохезија, одрживи раст.