Abstract

The current global financial-economic crisis that has encompassed almost every country in the world has proven to be disastrous for the weak economies throughout the globe. Macedonia, rated lately as one of the world's worst economies regarding its high unemployment, is not an exception and has therefore to undertake steps towards finding a resolution to this problem.

In this respect, lifelong learning can play a significant role. This type of education would help the category of unemployed persons find better solutions in terms of their employment in different spheres and enable current employees improve further their skills so that they can keep in step with the latest advancements in the 21st century societies.

Apart from being one of the best higher education institutions in the region, SEEU has a lot to offer in the field of lifelong learning, since it has been actively involved in offering different certificate programs in partnership with NGOs, local businesses, municipalities, associations, schools, and universities in the country and abroad, including Skill Soft, Kelly School of Business certification program, Leadership and Community Youth Work certification program, etc.

These and other professional development programs offered by SEEU would considerably help in improving the vague picture that has been prevailing in Macedonia for the last couple of years and we hope that it will become the main driving force towards the integration of the country since it is known as the Little Europe at the Heart of the Balkans.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, unemployment, education, NGOs, professional development

1. Introduction

The deep economic crisis can be felt in all spheres of our everyday lives. Macedonia is a relatively new state with a very fragile and unstable economy, as a result of the everlasting transition which is at the same time non-transparent as a process. This region is facing with many problems and obstacles, especially those dealing with unemployment.

According to CNN, Macedonia's economy is among the worst in the world (at the same level with that of Congo, Sudan and Belarus), with a high rate of unemployment (31.2%) which, according to analysts, is even higher taking into account the "gray market".)
The reason is the lack of real offer by employment centers to provide people with certain jobs or professional trainings.

Based on the different surveys carried out by USAID, GIZ, the SEEU Career Center, the NGO Millenium, and others, the results are almost identical in terms of getting a job in a company or state institutions. Almost all respondents share the same worries and concerns regarding their employment opportunities. The main problem that the companies are facing with, on the other hand, is the lack of skilled workers in a certain field, which implies that there are no specialized courses and trainings in order to establish a well-trained and skilled workforce that will meet the labor market requirements. In order to fill in a job vacancy, most people have only some general basic knowledge which they have acquired in their formal educational system.

This gap which is attempted to be filled by us by offering these services for citizens is not sufficient. Having in consideration the level of poverty, unemployment, etc., the opportunities for those who want to improve their knowledge and skills and eventually earn a certificate of acquired skills and expertise are getting weaker and weaker.

2. Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is a radical and all-encompassing change in education, going on under the conditions of the late modern societies. It implies a quantitative increase of the educational opportunities, a constant rethinking of the contents of the educational activities, an unfolding of new educational forms, a significant change in the status of the individuals and institutions involved in the educational process, and a qualitative change in the individual lifestyles.

The increasing need to continue education or to improve knowledge and the demands of the growing number of geographically distributed universities, staff training, teaching quality and academic research, emphasizes the importance, acting as a driving force to ensure the future of a more sophisticated, cost competitive, distance learning approach as a major component of higher education.

In his book, Sociology, among other things, Anthony Giddens, says that in a modern society people should acquire basic skills, such as reading, writing, calculating and understanding their physical, social and economic environment. It is also important for them to know how to learn in order to be able to acquire new forms, sometimes too technical, of information.

3. South East European university

In this context, the South East European University in Tetovo tries to play the leading role in merging the efforts among different players such as NGO’s, local businesses, state institutions and other educational institutions in the region, whether they are private or part of state institutions, regarding the lifelong learning and finding new opportunities for decreasing the high unemployment in the region.

The Bologna Declaration is not only a political declaration, but an obligation to interlink in a single action program which, among other things, is based on clearly defined objectives and contains such requirements as ECTS, which covers the activities in the field of continuous and life-long learning.

Through our departments such as Business Development Centre, Career Center, faculties, etc, we keep continuous contact with our partners and exchange experience and new information related with new academic programs, projects and ideas for increasing our mutual cooperation. In this regard we consider their opinion and experience regarding the lifelong learning and their role in easing the gap between the recruiting companies and skilled workforce. Therefore, we asked for their opinion on lifelong learning and how they see their role in this regard.

4. Triagolnik – NGO

Young people are the future leaders in that state. It is the role of the state in a functioning democracy to engage with and promote the inclusion of civil society in participation and decision-making, making sure that decision-
making is positive for that society. Cooperation between SEEU and Triagolnik Center for non-formal education initiated new wave in community development. Namely with close cooperation on development of Bachelor and MA in Leadership and Developmental Community Youth Work we actually initiated changes for introduction of Life Long Learning Processes and Adult Education in Republic of Macedonia. We created a fundament through development of skills, knowledge and attitudes supporting critical thinking among children, youth and adults. This was also an initiation for accenting the importance of the Lisbon Treaty (2007/C 306/01) and introduction of eight key competences in primary educational system defined by the Council of Europe.

In this respect, the cooperation between the SEEU and Triagolnik is worth mentioning, in terms of the realization of the regional project known as “The youth and key competencies as a cornerstone for the EU integration”, in which Prof. Jonuz Abdullai took part as an expert of public policies in education, as an SEEU representative. Several different issues connected to lifelong learning were analyzed in this project, and several various data sets were combined in order to analyze the current situation and areas of improvement in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia.

5. Deutsch Language School and Translation Center

Deutsch was established in 1997 in Tetovo, Macedonia, as a German Language Center. It began by offering German courses as well translations from German into Macedonian and Albanian and vice-versa.

Since the need for foreign languages, translations, and other professional services, increased in time, we decided to expand our facilities and services and since 2002, we have been providing English courses and professional translations from English into Macedonian and Albanian and vice-versa, too.

The staff at Deutsch consists of highly motivated and professional cadres with more than ten years of teaching and translation experience.

6. Neting School

As a company that has been functioning within the region of Pollog Valley for about five years now, our focus is on non-formal education, which includes different trainings, foreign language courses, IT and Web courses, etc. We are also planning to start with new programs in the sphere of business and entrepreneurship, with a special focus on small and medium enterprises.

The reason for undertaking such steps was the lack of non-formal education and lifelong learning activities in these fields in order to help interested candidates in strengthening their personal and professional capacities.

About 90% of our clients live and work in the region of Pollog Valley, so our coverage is pretty stable and sustainable.

7. Lifelong learning – the case of Gostivar High School

The changes in the educational system were initiated by the current processes in the socio-political and technological aspect and equally relate to both formal and non-formal education. Lifelong learning aims at preparing, realizing and coordinating activities in relation to acquisition of new skills and abilities and improvement and development of current personal and professional competences. SHMK Gostivar has signed a cooperation agreement with our university through which we will help people acquire new skills and abilities to adapt to the current labor market needs and requirements.

Within the framework of cooperation activities with other educational centers in the country, we, as a university hire prospective students, organize merit-based scholarship exams, exchange knowledge and experiences with other subjects and strive for meeting the labor market competition. We also pay special attention to high-school teachers for whom we organize special workshops and professional development sessions and we also include them in joint projects such as e.g. the project on “Establishing Institutionalized Cross-Border Partnership – People for people”
which was a project funded by the EU within the framework of the IPA program for trans-border cooperation between Macedonia and Albania.

8. Recommendations:

Having in mind the above mentioned, we come up with the following recommendations, which we think can severely help our poor economy and future perspective:

- The formal education system has to be fulfilled with different activities peculiar to lifelong learning, which will enable better and greater engagement by the citizens
- Utilization of good practices in the region through staff and student exchange programs
- Utilization of European funds dedicated to such projects
- Leveling up the cooperation between NGOs, universities and other educational institutions
- Better promotion of these programs and projects so that citizens can see the benefits of such an engagement
- Further research and studies in this field by including the Alumni students
- Inclusion of civil society in all of these processes
- The focus of relevant state institutions should be directed in this sphere in order to offer citizens opportunities for their career development and support the centers and agencies that deal with these activities.
- Higher involvement and financial support of the state regarding lifelong learning

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