

INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN THE SYSTEM OF LIFELONG EDUCATION AT THE COMRAT STATE UNIVERSITY: THE EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PROJECT COMPASS

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Abstract

Integration processes as a response to the challenges of modern society manifest themselves in different forms and at different levels of the education system. Leading EU countries successfully integrate life-long learning into the adult education system and strive to ensure the mass participation of the adult population in training programs. Realizing the idea of lifelong learning, the Center for Continuing Education has been successfully functioning at the Comrat State University. The international project COMPASS - TOWARDS EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LIFE LONG LEARNING MODEL IN MOLDOVA is aimed at integration into the university model of lifelong learning. COMPASS is a progressive project that greatly expands the opportunities to organize the process of continuous education for specialists.

Keywords: lifelong learning, professional development, innovative pedagogy

Modern education is characterized, like any other sphere of human interaction in society, by continuous development and transformation. In a world that is rapidly changing, the ideas of continuous improvement of professional competencies of specialists in different fields and the development of so-called soft skills or flexible skills are becoming especially relevant and significant above all. A modern specialist must be not only highly qualified, socially active, professionally mobile and competitive in demand on the labour market, but also ready to accept new things, receptive to innovations, creatively working and capable of continuous education, the purpose of which is "to develop independence, purposefulness and responsibility, strengthening the ability to adapt to the transformations taking place in the economy, the culture of society as a whole, as well as in professional life" [3].

Integration processes are manifested in different forms and at different levels of the education system as a response to the challenges of modern society. Based on the results obtained by V.N. Kostyuk [2], regarding the integration processes taking place in the space of lifelong education, let us designate some fundamental conclusions:

- the integration process is inherently evolutionary in the vocational education system;
- the integration process has the property of irreversibility;
- the future state of the evolving integration process is not similar to its prehistory and current state;
- property of nonlinearity: within the so-called "finite horizon of visibility", the behaviour of the evolving integration process is to a certain extent predictable.

The necessity to achieve educational results of a higher level requires the creation of conditions that ensure the continuity, availability of educational services of different content and levels. Currently, all developed countries of the world are implementing programs for the

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formation of a system of lifelong education (lifelong learning - life-long learning). The leading countries of the European Union are successfully integrating life-long learning into the adult education system and strive to ensure the massive participation of the adult population in education and training programs, as well as sustainable positive dynamics in this area.

According to the regulatory framework of our country, in particular, the Code of the Republic of Moldova "On Education" Article 126, the organization of lifelong education for adults indicates the following characteristics of lifelong education:

(1) Continuing education for adults includes:

- a) cultural, socio-economic, technological, environmental aspects;
- (b) continuing professional training which is understood as any learning process in which an employee who already possesses a certain qualification or profession improves his professional competence by in-depth knowledge in the field of the main specialty or by mastering new methods or techniques applied within the relevant specialty [1].

Realizing the ideas of lifelong learning, Comrat State University successfully operates the Center for Continuing Education which is a structural subdivision of the university and implements a wide range of advanced training programs, additional educational programs, as well as professional retraining programs for specialists in general and higher education. The mission of the Center is to coordinate high-quality educational services in the field of general and continuing education for adults in cooperation with the faculties of Comrat State University and other educational institutions in the country and abroad in order to meet the needs of adults for personal and professional development, renewal or acquisition of new knowledge and skills, necessary for active integration into society and the labour market during the implementation of continuing education programs.

Thus, the activities of the Center for Continuing Education are aimed at providing services in the field of continuing education for adults including the following aspects:

- the adult population of the Republic of Moldova;
- organizations engaged in educational activities and teaching staff;
- employers and their associations;
- socially oriented non-profit organizations;
- regional executive authorities, state authorities and local self-government bodies.

One of the opportunities to improve professionalism and become competitive is the participation of teachers in international projects that provide for the exchange of experience in the field of lifelong education for them. In this regard, Comrat State University has been a participant in a number of European projects related to the promotion of life-long learning of education system specialists over the past few years and is a part of a consortium with other well-known European and Moldovan Universities. The International COMPASS project – TOWARDS EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL IN MOLDOVA, Reference number: 597889-EPP-1-2018-1 -MD-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP is aimed at the integration into the University of the model of lifelong learning (ULLL) - it is an approach that requires immediate national and institutional responses and joint actions in the Republic

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of Moldova, a creation of conditions for the national institutions that manage the process in higher education institutions for the strategic management of lifelong learning at the institutional level, which is seen as the overall objective of the project and the main support for the responsible and complementary role of the Republic of Moldova.

The target groups of the COMPASS project are representatives of the Ministry of Education and Researches of the Republic of Moldova; advocates of the Bologna Process at the national level; heads / managers of higher education institutions; directors of LLL University centers.

The overall goal of the project:

Facilitating the process of integration of the Republic of Moldova into ENEA by integrating in the Republic of Moldova an inclusive and acceptable university model of lifelong learning (ULLL).

Specific objectives of the project:

- promoting and strengthening a culture of lifelong learning in Moldova and achieving national consensus among key stakeholders on development issues;
- developing and promoting the national legislative framework and stimulation of the legislative changes in the field of lifelong education in Moldova;
- building the integration function of the University in Moldova through the development of integrated teaching strategies at the University;
- strengthening the institutional capacity of the University in Moldova for the effective and efficient implementation of the reform of lifelong learning.

It should be emphasized that, within the framework of the COMPASS project, a number of regulatory documents have been developed that regulate the activities of the Center for Continuing Education, as well as the whole structure of advanced training of didactic personnel of the University. One of these documents is the Development Strategy of the Center for Continuing Education of Comrat State University which determines the main directions of the Center's development and represents a system of views on the content, principles and main priorities of the policy of the Center for Continuing Education of CSU that is aimed at ensuring opportunities for the realization of the adult's right to education throughout life. This document is aimed at ensuring the continuous improvement of the quality of the lifelong education process for adults as an integral part of lifelong learning.

Strategic Objective 1: Development of the direction of a provider of high-quality educational services for the educational and economic environment.

Strategic goal 2. Consolidation and capitalization of the educational offer.

Strategic Goal 3: Continuous teacher training at Comrat State University.

Strategic goal 4. Consolidation of strategies for promoting the educational offer.

To achieve the goal of the Strategy, it is assumed that a set of basic tasks will be solved:

- Creation of ample opportunities in acquiring the necessary qualifications throughout the entire working life of the adult population.
- Creation of conditions for the formation of key competencies and increasing the functional literacy of the adult population.

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- Development of infrastructure and technologies in the sphere of lifelong education of adults to ensure personal growth and self-realization of various categories of the adult population.

The participation in the COMPASS project also allowed the Center for Continuing Education of CSU to improve the material and technical base acquiring actual technical equipment and modern computer equipment that fully meets the needs of the University. Thus, it becomes possible to prepare innovative educational proposals for teachers who were involved in advanced training courses for didactic personnel, so as to increase the attractiveness and access to lifelong education by revising and adapting the e-learning methodology.

One of the most valuable advantages of participating in the project is the opportunity for members of the project group to exchange experience in the field of organizing lifelong education in leading European educational centers - Spain, Belgium, Italy. Due to study visits, the project members went to the Institute of Continuing Education (Institut de Formacio Continua) at the University of Barcelona. The program of the study visit provided for an acquaintance with the basic principles and strategies of adult learning in the European education system, as well as the introduction of European standards in the programs of continuing education for adults at the CSU Center for Continuing Education. Such a kind of study visit was also organized to the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, where various aspects of the continuing education process at UCLOUVAIN were discussed:

- cooperation of various departments of the University with the Center / Institute of Continuing Education;
- development of ULLL versus traditional educational activities;
- conceptualization, organization, promotion and marketing of LLL programs;
- use of modern information and communication technologies in the process of lifelong learning: distance learning LLL;
- recognition of LLL programs and their integration into the transferable credit system;
- institutional cooperation in the development of common comprehensive programs, LLL master's degrees, etc.

In addition to the project participants, European partners organized and conducted training courses in a distance format: organized by Italian colleagues from the Universities of Girona, during which attention was paid to design and management, administration and technical aspects in organizing advanced training courses. Online study visits of French colleagues allowed the project participants to familiarize themselves with the best practices of organizing the continuing education process at the University of Brest (UBO), France, the activities of LLL institutional management, assessment and accreditation of LLL curricula, certification, etc.

Thus, the participation in training courses for LLL trainers allowed the preparation of institutional trainers on the creation of educational programs with the support of strategic partners. The sequence of the cycle of events for the development of educational programs, organizational conditions and selection criteria for the participation of university academic staff in the competition for conducting relevant continuing education courses were outlined. After an analysis was carried out regarding the needs of the labour market, the beneficiaries were identified, for whom the continuing education programs might be of interest, in 2021 the

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representatives of the project team proposed a number of relevant topics, which were implemented in the LLL programs through the corresponding courses:

- The use of interactive learning systems (boards) in the creation of educational products;
- The development and implementation of training in the educational environment;
- The audit of the quality management system.

Each of the proposed programs aroused great interest among the beneficiaries who noted not only the relevance and importance of the relevant content but also the technology of organizing and conducting courses in these programs.

Thus, the participation of Comrat State University employees in the COMPASS project – TOWARDS EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL IN MOLDOVA, Reference number: 597889-EPP-1-2018-1 -MD-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP made it possible to get acquainted with progressive approaches to the organization of continuing education of European universities. Study visits of CSU academic staff, familiarization with the work of European LLL Centers, exchange of experience in the field of life-long learning - all these aspects allowed us to bring new ideas to the work of the Continuing Education Center of Comrat State University. These are ideas about the importance of the various proposals of the training center, the provision of variable course programs that correspond to the professional, current needs of labour market, participants in improving specific professional competencies. In the long term, the important tasks of the team participating in the project are to offer new services of the Center for Continuing Education, as well as to develop relevant programs in various areas that are in demand on the labour market.

COMPASS is a progressive project that is greatly expanded within the framework of the possibilities of organizing the process of continuous education of specialists. Currently, it becomes possible to prepare innovative and educational proposals for teachers involved in advanced training and retraining courses, as well as to increase the attractiveness and access to lifelong education by revising and adapting the teaching methodology in the distance and electronic formats.]

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