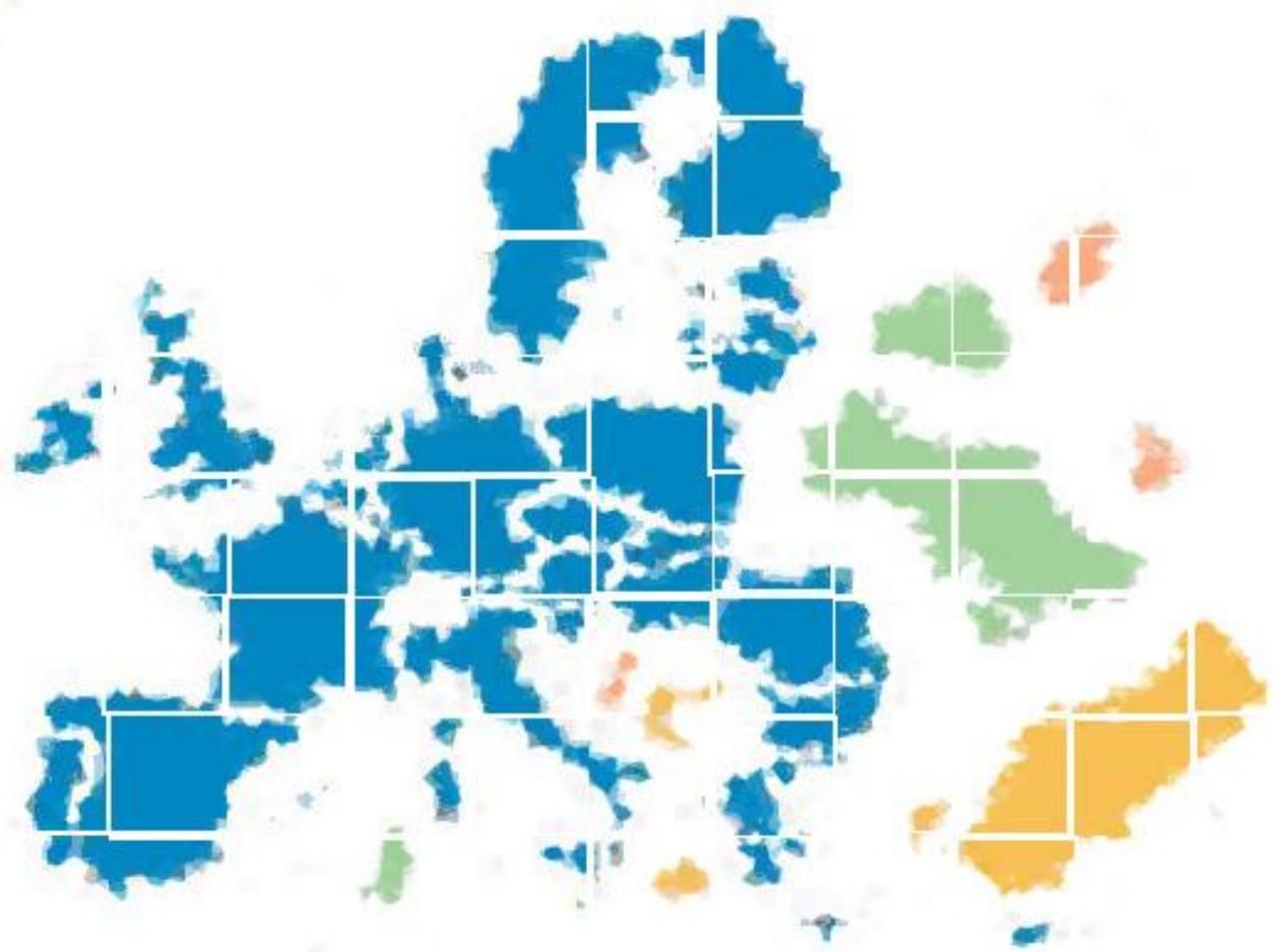


Frontiers of Democracy

Non-Formal Education in Ukraine *Its state, needs, challenges and impact*

Olga Budnyk



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Center for European Neighborhood Studies

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Frontiers of Democracy

Embedding Democratic Values in Moldova and Ukraine

Moldova and Ukraine, countries of the European Union's Eastern Partnership program, are undergoing complex processes of democratic transformation, but with weak embeddedness of democratic values and principles drawbacks can occur. It is embeddedness that helps to overcome the challenges of transformation and pushes countries beyond mere frontiers of democracy towards becoming strongly committed democratic communities. The goal of the [“Frontiers of Democracy: Embedding Democratic Values in Moldova and Ukraine”](#) project of the CEU Center for European Neighborhood Studies is to facilitate embedding democratic values in the societal ethos in Moldova and Ukraine by providing a forum for discussion of the difficulties of such a complex process and by drawing on the transition experience of the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).



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About the author

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Olga Budnyk is executive director of the Center for Political Studies and Analysis “Eidos”. From 2007, she has worked in the third sector (political parties, NGO). She holds a Master degree in economics and is alumni of the European Parliament internship program. She has experience in youth international politics. She is also alumni of the program of professional changes “Open World” in the anticorruption section (USA). She worked as assistance-consultant to a member of the Parliament. She has conducted education programs in analytical centers of Europe and Ukraine. Olga is head of the all-Ukrainian annual education project “High school of politics” and is senior expert, trainer in the National Center “Minor Academy of sciences of Ukraine.” She has experience of conducting strategic sessions, publications, organization and participation in public events, and is professionally engaged in project management, organizational development.

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The main principle of educational system activity in developed countries consists in citizens' involvement in learning lasting continuously throughout life. Developing of continuous learning together with the knowledge society formation became one of the social consequences of globalization and informatization. Education can no longer be limited to a few years or even decades at the beginning of human life as a continuous update of information requires constant self-improvement and learning, in order to achieve success in life.

Problems of continuous education can be roughly divided into two main areas. The first deals with the construction of a continuous education system as a part of social practices (social and educational aspect of continuous education). The second consist of the process of constantly acquiring social and professional experience. That is why, in the second half of the 1990s, the connection was operated between the principle of continuity in education and the principle of lifelong learning, on the one hand, and the formation of a knowledge society, on the other. Thus, an attempt was made to fixate in the mentality of people the understanding of the mutual responsibility of society, state and individual for the development of educational processes.

The postulates of continuous education for the 21th century formulated by UNESCO International Commission are as follows: to learn to perceive; to learn to do; to learn to live together; to learn to live. An institutionalization of different kinds of education, including those which did not exist before, took place. UNESCO introduced special terminology, which reflects the different levels of organization of educational services: formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Dawei, well-known figure of UNESCO, said that continuous education is a process of personal, social and professional development of the individual throughout his life, carried out in order to improve quality of life for both the individual and the society. It is a comprehensive and unifying idea, which covers formal, non-formal and overformal learning which is to be carried out in order to achieve full development of different aspects of life at its various stages.¹

Formal education has forms defined and established by state and society, characterized by the participation of adults in educational programs, after which issued the document (certificate, diploma) that gives the right to engage in remunerative profession etc.

¹ Dave, R. H. *Foundation of Lifelong Education: Studies in Lifelong Education*. (Hamburg, 1976), p. 34

Non-formal education - structured programs that are not formally recognized by the national education system, implemented in educational institutions or non-governmental organizations (learning clubs etc.), during individual lessons with a tutor, coach and generally not confirmed by the document.

Informal education - informal, self-organizing (self-education) individual cognitive activities (life social experience); disorganized capture of information, usually does not have focus. Carried out particularly through self-education, visiting libraries, theaters, museums, while traveling, in the course of communication with friends. As social daily unstructured education can take place in the family, society, during work, which is the most common form of workplace learning.²

The educational system in Ukraine, like many other fields, is in a state of reform. Taking into account all the complexity of the state system, one can safely argue that it is much more difficult to solve actual problems. Non-formal education allows obtaining the most actual skills and knowledge with greater mobility and ease. Over the last 5-7 years the non-formal education sector in Ukraine has greatly developed, and the increasing number of non-formal education projects compensates the weak sides of formal education.

Speaking of learning programs including both formal and non-formal education, there is no such practice in Ukraine nowadays. Non-formal education is not recognized by Ukrainian law, so in this context it is non-formal both in regard to its form and its content. In the postmodern world with an advanced information sphere and broad access to knowledge, these forms can exist simultaneously excluding any conflicts between each other.

In general, such a situation is typical for many countries of the Eastern Partnership, including Moldova and Ukraine. In many respects, the educational system of these countries is similar to the principle of “banking system” as it is described by Paulo Freire in his book “Pedagogy of the oppressed.” Under these conditions, the teacher is the depositor of information and the student is a depository who should receive and reproduce this information as received without critical rethinking. This “banking” model of education implies that the volume of operations allowed for students only covers receiving, making clear and storing information.³ This system contributes to the accumulation of information, specific knowledge, but it does not develop the creativity of the individual.

According to Paulo Freire, only problem-oriented education can put “an end to vertical structures, which are inherent for banking education model, [and] can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom.”⁴ According to this statement, the functions and methods of pedagogical activity changed, particularly, “The role of problem-oriented pedagogue is to create, together

² Luk'yanova L., Anischenko O. - K. *Adult education: a brief glossary of terms*. (Nizhyn: Publisher PE Lysenko M., 2014). Access: <http://bit.ly/2c9TmUs>

Federighi, P. *Non-formal Education. Glossary of Adult Learning in Europe*. (Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education, 1999). Access: <http://bit.ly/2ckvCij>

³ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), p.54

⁴ *ibid.*, p.61

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with students, conditions under which knowledge at the level of doctrine is replaced by true knowledge at the level of logos.”⁵

Thus, non-formal education partially covers this need, focusing on the development of practical abilities, skills, and orienting people to reassess the facts obtained, subjecting them to doubt and providing rise to the search for additional arguments.

In general, non-formal education can be considered from several sides. In the context of life-long learning, it is very important as it helps to acquire new skills and knowledge quickly in order to adapt to changes. In such a format it is more relevant for middle-aged and elderly people. As for adolescents and youth, the process of learning and acquiring new useful skills and knowledge is a matter of the speed of their own growth and progress in the professional sphere.

However, let us consider the role of non-formal education in the context of the democratization of society. As practice and experience show, democratization involves two main factors: institutional and human. I am convinced that the human factor is critical. Let us examine this idea on the example of reforms that are currently taking place in Ukraine, in the context of European integration.

The non-governmental organization “Center for Political Studies and Analysis Eidos” specializes in the fight against corruption by way of increasing the accountability and transparency of government authorities, as it is stipulated by the Law of Ukraine “On the transparency use of public funds.” According to this law initiated by Eidos, the Ministry of finance created a single web portal, where you can observe all the transactions of spending public funds made by all managers, who regulate spending public funds, including state enterprises, the National Bank of Ukraine and others. This process is required in order to minimize the abuse of spending public funds and to encourage citizens to observe spending their own funds, i.e. those which are to be paid as taxes.

During the process of implementation of this law it became evident that, at the local level, especially in small towns, officials do not understand why they should present publicly information about the use of public funds for the general public access. Since Soviet times, they are used to treat public funds as their own. Only after a series of seminars were held (by Eidos, other organizations, the web portal team and representatives of the Ministry of Finance), officials gradually began to understand the concepts of transparency and accountability.

Institutional changes by themselves have only a formal character. It is human willingness and the will to act in a defined institutional framework that can render changes meaningful.

Alternatively, there are citizens who do not realize that they can control government authorities, since the latter has always decided how to spend

⁵ *ibid.*, p.62

money and what to spend money on. Eidos also organizes training activities for public activists. They usually start by introducing the democratic values and the philosophy of building relationships between government representatives and citizens, rather than with the presentation of the instruments of control. The training program discusses the series of instruments that allow one to keep the government authorities under the close supervision of the public only later

This is an example of what the democratization process involves: the perception of core values such as responsibility, transparency and accountability, the principles of good governance, freedom of speech and peaceful assemblies, being pro-active and much more.

Teaching people how to deal with and internalize these values is very difficult, because they have to integrate them in their own value system. Therefore, Eidos has developed and is conducting a series of training programs that are based not only on practical skills, but also on implementing a value-centered approach in their work which includes both living activity in general and professional activity in particular.

One of the most successful educational projects of the Center of Political Studies and Analysis Eidos, the “Higher Political School,” which has been implemented for seven years in a row, is a very good example of non-formal education in Ukraine. Since the school program is built on the value approach of study and consideration of the political processes in Ukraine, we have the opportunity, through the real examples, to see how the graduates of the project, becoming members of local councils, deputy governors, mayors, or civil servants try to implement the acquired values in their daily work. Of course, such values are not commonsensical within the state apparatus, and so there is negative reaction against the mentioned approach. However, inviting new members in the team, they are able to apply new approaches in their work, and, hopefully, change the system from within. In this sense, non-formal education is a key factor of democratization, which directly affects the preparation of professionals with a certain type of ideology.

Projects which are implemented with the youngest category of population do indicate the impact of non-formal education on the general rates of social development.

School children represent one of the target audiences, which is currently only to be involved in the process of non-formal education. Ukraine has some private projects that offer to train children by using alternative methods of education. This falls under the category of formal education because children attend school for a full academic year, but the educational process is based on more democratic approaches. Such schools have many advantages, such as, learning to work in teams and to create projects that would allow children to build productive relationships in their today’s activity as well as in their adult life. They rest upon the concept that children should be taught that making mistakes is normal and could be used as a source of personal development, throughout all their lives.

The main disadvantage of such schools is the cost of education, and not every parent has the ability to pay such sums, even if their child is a really talented person.

In its turn, the Eidos cooperated with one of the state institutions, namely the Minor Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, when organizing and running the educational project “Agents of Changes,” for pupils of 8-10th grades. The main objective of the project is to create conditions for teaching teenagers how to form an active life position, to work towards self-realization and to gain successful social experience, leadership skills and be aware of belonging to the local community through informal interactive learning.

In recent years, in Ukraine, given the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the problem of patriotic education and education of public consciousness of youth has increased in value. Today in Ukraine, there is a need to construct an effective system of public education, which would unite the various state and non-state institutions. There is no innovative and complex solution for solving this problem. Understanding one’s own role in the community, participating and developing the ability to influence one’s own development is low and there is no complex vision of personal development of Ukraine. Children and youth are unable to form a vision on the long term perspective because they do not have such life experiences that create the ability to think globally, to dream and do not worry about tactical issues that can interfere with this process. Public education enables young people to enter the space of civil society, to take more active positions among their peers, to gain the skills and competences necessary to live in a democratic society.

Carrying out such a project jointly with the Minor Academy of Sciences of Ukraine provided an opportunity to re-create the learning process, based on interactive learning methods and designed to provide participants with the necessary skills to implement the value approach for solving a number of current problems, but also getting soft skills for self-realization. During the learning process, project participants learn to set goals, to transform their own dreams and desires into projects and then move to their implementation. The first results were impressive in its scale, because pupils were not afraid to take on big projects and started, for example, with the implementation of inclusive classrooms, which are intended to teach disabled children and children with special needs together with healthy children. The participants also advocated the reconstruction of parks in cities, which had been occupied up until recently, the organization of cultural events in small towns where young talented people and local intellectuals had an opportunity to meet and spend time with each other, and where their peers and also adults could spend their leisure meaningfully.

In such projects, the most important thing is to teach participants to use their critical thinking, to learn how to achieve and exercise personal leadership, to be pro-active, to apply project management skills and to change the space around you, as in former Soviet countries a sense of paternalism still exists.

The global trend today consists of a movement towards closing the gap between formal and non-formal education, and eliminating the element of competition between the two. Non-formal education can be a testing ground for methods and tools that can be used in formal education in the future. However, unlike formal education, non-formal education is optional and voluntary in Ukraine, which means that it cannot replace or displace the existing educational infrastructure. There is a need for systematic scientific research on the interaction mechanisms between three branches of education - formal, non-formal and informal, a legally protected framework for lifelong education in Ukraine, European and international cooperation in the field of education, exchange of experiences, cooperation between governmental, non-governmental and public organizations involved in the education sphere.

In fact, the need for non-formal education arises not only in the case of youth and schoolchildren, but adults also in the case of adults searching for ways of achieving professional realization. There is a quite an acute problem of internally displaced persons nowadays in Ukraine due to the military conflict in the east of the country. These people need skills not only to change their career path, but also to protect and manifest their rights and freedoms, as well as, their interests. Those who lose their jobs very often cannot find any opportunities to participate in various projects of public education, because a large number of projects have a special age limit.

If you single out the main target groups of non-formal education in Ukraine, they are the following:

- civically and politically active youth;
- representatives of public organizations;
- government officials;
- adults, who are looking for professional realization (such as internally displaced persons, the unemployed, etc.);
- newly elected deputies;
- journalists.

Each of these categories have their own needs and priorities, not always addressed by providers of non-formal education. One of the problems of non-formal education in Ukraine is the absence of a formalized system of service quality management. Unlike formal education, non-formal education has no certification and accreditation system, and the participants have no guarantee that after the completion of appropriate training, the level of their knowledge and skills would efficiently increase. Among the trainers it is very common to meet so-called experts-generalists, who are only capable of imparting broad-ranging knowledge.

At the same time, audiences interested in educational events can find information thanks to informational campaigns, digitalization of media and social networks.

The main providers of non-formal education in Ukraine are public organizations, individual experts of various fields, religious organizations and others.

It should be noted that Collardin identifies two essentially different forms of recognition of learning outcomes:

- certification as an element of formal training, which is an official recognition of institutional education acquiring: diplomas and certificates on gaining professional education provided and issued by governmental organizations (mainly by the ministries of education and training);
- Validation is by nature of recognition of the entire palette of competencies and knowledge regardless of time and place of their obtaining. The validation, as opposed to the certification, recognizes all forms of education, including non-formal one. Its content is “to make learning visible”,⁶ as well as emphasize and recognize the value of a set of competencies acquired apart from educational institutions. If certification in the institutional respect is an already well-established process, the validation is a relatively new process. It applies to professional competences relating to certain professional experience and skills necessary for life in the community (for example, public and intercultural competencies). The main objective of validation of non-formal education is to enable all citizens to confirm their knowledge, skills and abilities that they have acquired during the process of training, work, specific kind of activities and their own efforts. Validation promotes individual self-confidence in the labor market, as well as, professional self-identification; it stimulates interest in learning throughout one’s whole life.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that, despite the fact that non-formal education in Ukraine is not stipulated and duly fixed by the Ukrainian legislation, it plays an important role in social transformations, promotes democratization of society and makes it easier to adapt to new conditions and challenges. The greatest needs in this area include high-quality specialists and funding of quality education projects. At this stage, such needs are covered by international donor organizations and relevant programs of embassies, foreign missions and more. As for the impact of non-formal education, it should be noted that people who have obtained advanced knowledge and useful skills through such education, are beginning to become the very changes that they desire to make, wherever it is, at the mayor’s office, the city council, the university, etc. Non-formal education is an opportunity to be competitive on the global labor market; it is the ability to move and to develop one’s own country, to accelerate change and develop human capital.

⁶ Bentley, T. *Learning beyond the classroom: Education for a Changing World* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), p.12.

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