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PREREQUISITES FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER THE COUNTRY'S ELDERLY EDUCATION NETWORK: THE CASE OF RUSSIA

REQUISITOS PREVIOS PARA CREAR UN SISTEMA NACIONAL DE GESTIÓN DE PROYECTOS EDUCATIVOS PARA LOS ADULTOS MAYORES: EL CASO DE RUSIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper's aim is identification of prerequisites for national government control over the country's elderly education network. The presented Russian case accentuates the importance of development of elderly education programs in view of the recent retirement-age increase. There are arguments for a need in the involvement of the national government in functioning and development of the national network of elderly education projects. The paper includes an overview of patterns used by other national governments in their interaction with national systems of elderly education. The authors describe the pattern that is the best for the social, economic, and cultural conditions that prevail in Russia. The authors ground their conclusions on the overview of academic papers on a status of elderly education in Russia and in the world, as well as results of their own research. The paper contains recommendations on the development of measures to implement the potential of the national system of elderly education projects in Russia as a social management tool.

Keywords:

Elderly education, education sociology, management sociology, demography.

RESUMEN

El artículo tiene como objetivo general definir los requisitos previos necesarios para crear un sistema nacional de gestión de proyectos educativos para los adultos mayores. En el caso de Rusia se destaca la necesidad del desarrollo de programas educativos para las personas de tercera edad en relación con la recién implementada reforma de las pensiones. En el trabajo se subraya el papel del gobierno en el funcionamiento y desarrollo de proyectos educativos para las personas mayores, se examinan los modelos foráneos de gestión de estos proyectos a nivel nacional, al igual que se elabora un modelo óptimo para la sociedad rusa. Las conclusiones se basan en la revisión de las obras científicas que reflejan el nivel de educación de los adultos mayores en Rusia y en todo el mundo, así como en los resultados de las investigaciones propias. El artículo ofrece recomendaciones sobre estrategias eficaces para desarrollar un sistema nacional de gestión de proyectos educativos para las personas mayores en Rusia como una herramienta de la gobernanza social.

Palabras clave:

Educación de personas mayores, sociología de la educación, sociología de la gestión, demografía.

INTRODUCTION

The recent retirement-age increase in Russia in the near future will lead to a much higher number of people aged 55+ in the labor market. At the same time, one should also expect higher unemployment rates in this group of economic actors (Watanabe, et al., 2018). Poor skills and no access to relevant education essentially limit a list of open positions that senior applicants might apply for (Tan, et al., 2016). Their chances in the upcoming competition with young low-skilled migrants are obviously poor.

It turns out that the mentioned issue is in direct relation to the problem of the elderly educational background in Russia. The academic community and country's political leaders are fully aware of this fact (Solovev, 2019). The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation is currently elaborating professional development programs for senior Russians, for implementation of which they are going to allocate RUB 5 billion a year.

Taking into account a scale of the described issue, it seems reasonable to use all the possible means for its solution. In particular, along with the establishment of new institutions, it seems reasonable to use the resources of already existing structures, focused on an educational background of third-age citizens. These structures include institutions of informal elderly education

Elderly education projects have been implemented in Russia since the early 1990-ies. Over 250 projects provided on an ongoing basis enrol about 2,000 students annually. The totality of elderly education projects is today a leading factor for the raise of the educational level of senior citizens (Sorokin & Fokina, 2019). Russian elderly education mainly solves tasks of enlightenment, social adjustment, and social inclusion of the elderly. Based on our long-term research and having looked through papers of other authors, we can state that the national elderly education system can also take a part of the load in terms of vocational skills development among the elderly (Subačienė, et al., 2019).

Therefore, at already functioning elderly education institutions, it might be possible to provide the following groups of training programs:

- short-term vocational programs with governmental certification,
- vocational programs without governmental certification,
- programs aimed at development of the knowledge and skills that make employment chances higher,
- programs that facilitate a job search.

The main objective of this research is to provide a rationale for the involvement of government authorities in functioning and development of the elderly education national system in Russia focused on a search for solutions to pressing issues of the day.

The theoretical basis of this paper includes ideas proposed by Russian and foreign researchers on prerequisites and conditions for development of education programs for senior citizens in the modern society. Taziev (2015); and Eakin & Witten (2018), discuss trends in demographic aging of the Earth's population and associated social transformations. The authors see aging as an irreversible process, for which the society has not been yet ready in general.

Chahrak & Ugryniuk (2016); Driouchi & Gamar (2017); Savinov, et al. (2018); Gel`man (2019), refer to the measures that make it possible to counter negative consequences of the changhed age structure of the population. The authors agree on a need in the higher public attention to elderly education.

They consider the development of purpose-oriented elderly education as one of the most important measures of societal adjustment to new social, economic, and cultural realia. Kazimov (2018); and Solovev (2019), provide analytically forecasted consequencies from the increased retirement age in Russia. According to them, the retirement-age increase in Russia will be only effective if the country provides the senior citizens with career guidance, including purpose-oriented vocational training and retraining programs. Elsakov (2016); and Mosin & Gonezhuk (2019), describe a current state and trends in informal elderly education in Russia. The authors have noticed higher numbers of purpose-oriented training projects in the country and an increase of their participants, as well as a wider range of training tracks. They also point out to a high capacity of elderly education as a tool to solve pressing problems in the Russian society.

Despite the fact that many Russian experts have identified the support to various forms of elderly education as an important direction within the governmental policy, there have been almost no research on possible involvement of the national government in functioning and development of the country's existing system of informal elderly education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The document analysis was a main research method. Based on the review of print and Internet sources, the author made an information corpus describing initiatives of over 250 Russian elderly education projects run

in 1990-2017. The conclusions presented in the research come from a comparison of such project parameters, as a type of a founder, main area of activity, financial and personnel resources, form of project implementation, and throughput capacity.

To assess characteristics of potential management entities for the national elderly education network, we used findings of the online survey of 50 experts coming from 7 Russian cities: Moscow (10 respondents), Saint Petersburg (10), Kazan (10), Omsk (5), Smolensk (5), Novosibirsk (5), and Tyumen (5).

The sample included researchers (theoreticians) and practitioners (teachers) from purpose-oriented elderly education initiatives. In the survey, researchers used the Google Forms. Experts answered to 11 open and closed questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to findings from our research, all ongoing elderly education projects in Russia currently follow the social network principle (Galaso & KovářÍk, 2018). Individual projects (network nodes) develop independently of any managing entity and poorly interact between each other. Project organizers independently set objectives for functioning of their educational programs and choose proper means to achieve them. Projects' activities are not always synchronous with a current social and economic situation and not always aimed at solving the pressing social problems.

In terms of encouraged economic activity of the elderly Russians, the complete fulfilment of the potential of elderly education initiatives is only possible when an integrating and coordinating body is in place that might influence all the educational projects and focus it on specific (pre-set) goals and objectives.

It is clear that a manager in the national system of elderly education must have necessary tangible assets and human resources to cover wider groups of the country's elderly. At the same time, its core activity, area of responsibility or interest to some extent should relate to elderly education.

As such potential actors, we have reviewed the structures that currently provide assistance and facilitate purpose-oriented education projects. Figure 1 presents the ratio of elderly education projects supported by various founders, as well as the ratio of numbers of participants under such projects. In 1991-2017, it is clear that social welfare institutions, colleges, and public authorities were the most effective founders of projects.
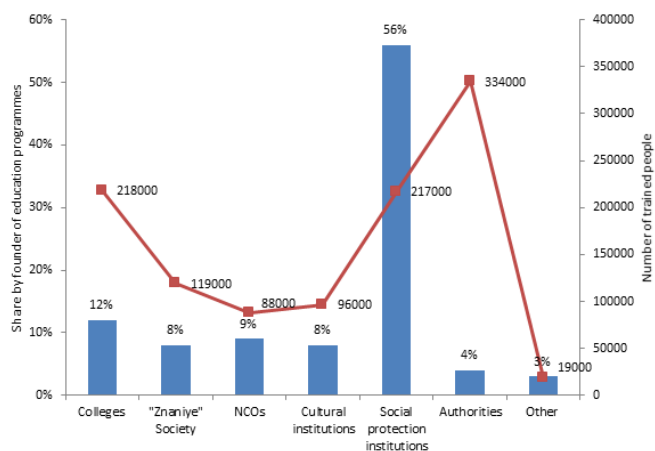

Figure 1. Compared share of institutions that had run elderly education projects in Russia (with indicated numbers of students trained in 1991-2017).

Source: Sorokin & Fokina, 2019.

Looking at the bodies that have achieved the greatest success in the development of practice-oriented elderly education, let us try to evaluate their prospects to become management entities in the national network of elderly education in Russia

Today, Russian social protection institutions run more than a half of all the elderly education projects. Education is mainly a form of social support, communication, and cultural entertainment. Through education, they solve such pressing tasks, as social adjustment of the elderly and their reintegration in the training field. At the same time, it is clear that social protection institutions due to their profile and poor pool of personnel (professors) will not be able to cover an entire range of relevant areas in elderly education. Therefore, they cannot claim to be management entities in the national network of elderly education.

Russian colleges are powerful training pools. Their training and enlightening mission goes far beyond young people (pre-college training, vocational retraining, post-graduate studies, etc.). Many Russian colleges have had sound experience in informal elderly education. Tangible assets and human resources of colleges would definitely allow them to solve successfully the task of large-scale elderly education. At the same time, one needs to understand that the main social function of an institution of higher education is to prepare highly qualified specialists for the society.

There is also an essential gap between this function and relevant training goals of the elderly in Russia. Today, the paramount task in elderly education in Russia is to give a reasonable minimum of knowledge to the senior

generation, making them more socially competent according to requirements of functional literacy and able to hold positions that do not require high qualification. A wide use of the potential of colleges for these purposes would be an irrational use of resources. Besides, given the scale of the training task for the elderly, this step would also initiate various dysfunctions in the higher education system in general. Thus, in general, colleges might accept the role of the management entity in the national network of education facilities for the elderly, but it will cause a number of socially undesirable consequences.

We believe that when the main managerial result in the national elderly education system is its orientation towards solving governmental-level problems, the government turns out to be the most efficient management entity. Only in case of the governmental management, goals and objectives of elderly education development will go beyond the interests of separate social structures, and educational practices for the elderly will become real tools of social management. Today, vectors in functioning of the national elderly education system are moving away from pressing problems of the nation. We think that one of the reasons for this is that authorities underestimate the potential of informal elderly education projects, and, accordingly, governmental structures are not interested in introduction of any governing influence over their activities.

It sounds like a paradox but it is the state that actually but unconsciously provides the largest support to elderly education in Russia. The projects that authorities support cover almost a third of elder students, their throughput capacity is the highest and in a permanent growth (Table 1). The reasons for the government support largely relate to the fact that senior citizens are the largest and most active part among the Russian voters.

Table 1. Throughput capacity of elderly education projects by founder as of 2011 and 2017.

Founders of educational projects for the elderly	Number of students trained in the 1 year	
	1990-2011	2012-2017
Colleges	399	649
The Znaniye Society	196	531
NCOs	188	349
Cultural institutions	255	429
Social protection institutions	112	138
Authorities	1,878	2,982

Unfortunately, the today's effect of the government support to the national elderly education system is much lower than it could be. This is due to the following circumstances.

First, people usually do not regard support to projects as investments, but as social responsibility and humanitarian aid. The managerial task only comes down to the ensured survival of a particular community project. Secondly, the authorities that support elderly education programs do not share a single strategy. Thirdly, the financial support usually goes to particular projects under the patronage and the results of such managerial measures do not affect functioning of the elderly education network in general.

Taking into account that funding of educational projects is the most important factor in their activity, we might state that in Russia, the national government possesses enormous resources for management of the elderly education system. It is also necessary to consider that elderly education projects are mostly run at institutions that report to the government (centres of education, social protection institutions, cultural facilities, etc.). The authorities have a mechanism to manage activities of these facilities in line with the governmental educational policy. A powerful administrative resource will also allow the government to involve other structures under its control that have not yet participated in training of the elderly Russians.

Thus, in today's Russia, the government has not yet had a definite stand regarding interaction with the national system of projects of informal elderly education. To achieve completely its enormous potential for the benefit of the society, it is necessary to develop principles for interaction of the government with all of the elderly education practices available in the country.

In many overseas countries, where elderly education projects have been run for several decades, and the very phenomenon of elderly education does not look like something exotic, such interaction patterns have already been established (Medaiskis, et al., 2018; Sorokin, 2019).

The findings of the research completed by us make it possible to conclude that there are three patterns of the interaction between the government and national elderly education system. We can conditionally associate their titles with the countries for which these patterns are typical. See below their brief description.

The South Korea pattern. In this country, the government takes over the control of all the issues related to elderly education, including project funding. Such stand of the government comes from the legislation. Further education centres are available in almost every settlement. More than 40,000 students participate in them annually. Educational programs mainly aim at filling gaps in the basic education of senior citizens and their enlightenment. Some purpose-oriented institutions even award their students with a master's degree. Within this pattern, the government does

not only support the development of the national elderly education system at the legislation level. It also takes an active and direct part in implementation of educational practices for third-age persons.

The UK pattern. In the United Kingdom, about 300,000 people are annually students at 850 third-age colleges. Usually, educational projects arise as private initiatives in local communities. Third-age colleges are self-sufficient and self-organizing. A steering committee is usually in charge of all the organizational issues (content of classes, involvement of professors, rent of premises, etc.).

This body includes students chosen on an elective basis. Students themselves often teach and classes can take place even in private houses. Colleges only accept funding from their students. In the UK, there is the foster organization called *the Third Age Trust*, which consolidates all the UK projects of elderly education. *The Trust* consists of representatives of colleges from all regions of the country. It provides guidelines and cases that third-age colleges are encouraged to follow. Main objectives of *the Trust* are opening new educational institutions, media coverage of activities of education centres, development of methodical literature and online courses. Thus, the elderly education system in the UK is completely independent of the government and any other external management entity. It is a self-organizing and self-governing.

The Mainland Europe pattern. This type of interaction is typical for the most countries in Western Europe. The government policy of elderly education is ambiguous. On the one hand, legislation contains regulations aimed at support to learning energy of the elderly. On the other hand, there is no practical direct and systematic support to educational projects from the part of the government. In the European countries, the policy of elderly education is a result of interaction between the policy of the elderly and policy of education for the adults.

At the same time, we cannot ignore that today's elderly education programs in Europe do not only face their active development, but also introduce global trends of elderly education. Successes in European countries largely depend on the high community commitment of their citizens. Senior European people often independently deal with all the issues regarding the organization and implementation of educational projects. The government's ability of management in national elderly education systems is significantly limited as educational projects are independent of the government institutions. But government agencies can provide selective financial support to certain groups of projects and, thus, influence various characteristics of national elderly education systems. In the most cases,

they only provide funding to two groups of educational projects: the projects where education is a kind of humanitarian aid and the projects aimed at pressing social tasks. Summer schools called "Retirement and the Future," opened in the Netherlands by people's colleges and supported by the Ministry of Well-being, Health and Culture are an example of projects from the first group.

Training events aimed at improvement of the information culture and computer literacy between the elderly in the late 1990-ies in Germany encouraged by the Federal Ministry for Women, Family, Seniors and Youth, are an example of projects in the second group (Wetzel, 2002). Thus, for the mainland Europe pattern, it is typical that governmental institutions and elderly education systems interact following the let me alone principle. The government develops the regulatory framework that removes all the obstacles in the development of elderly education programs in the country, but the government does not directly intervene in this process (Vunsh, 2002). At the same time, state authorities are able to use the potential of national systems of elderly education to solve social management tasks by encouraging their certain activities.

The differences found in the abovementioned patterns of interaction between the government and national systems of elderly education are not at all grounds for criticism about any of the patterns.

Each of them is the best in specific social, cultural, and economic realia. Taking into account low community commitment among the senior Russians, we can state that in our country, the UK pattern will unlikely have any future. The South Korea pattern is also not fully suitable for Russia as it involves development of a national system of elderly education from the scratch. Taking into account achievements and status of the national system of elderly education, we cannot consider this approach reasonable.

We believe that the Mainland Europe Pattern is the closest to the Russian realia. By its organization, the Russian elderly education system is similar to that of the Western Europe. It functions as a network structure independent of the government or any other management entity. In this regard, while developing the governmental policy of managerial influence on the Russian elderly education system, it makes sense to consider the experience of European countries in the first place. There is a significant difference: in the mainland Europe, although indirectly, national governments have a managerial effect on national elderly education networks. We can actually talk about the existing network of elderly education initiatives as a potential object of social management without a management entity.

CONCLUSIONS

In terms of a higher number of the elderly integrated in production and economic sectors of the Russian society, the problem of higher educational level of the elderly has become more and more important. As for the set of measures undertaken by the national government to solve it, there is the involvement if resources from already functioning projects of informal elderly education. In today's Russia, there is a number of reasons that make it reasonable for the national government to assume functions of management over the elderly education national network Russia has already established its elderly education network. This is an almost ready-made social management tool where there is no need to establish it from the scratch, it will be only enough to learn how to fulfil its potential with suitable managerial impact on the elderly education system (its constituents), it might turn into a tool with which it is possible to solve a wide range of pressing problems in the Russian society.

The most of purpose-oriented education projects in our country are provided by the institutions that are to one or another degree supervised by the national government (colleges, centres of culture, social protection institutions, etc.).

In order to focus the national system of elderly education on pressing tasks of social management, we need to make a clear pattern for the interaction between the national government and all the educational projects available in the country using the example of the triple helix format. The West-European interaction pattern is the closest to Russian realia. The national government's involvement in functioning and development of the national elderly education network will not only have a positive effect on quantitative indicators of special-purpose education initiatives, but also significantly increase their quality, economic, and social efficiency.

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