DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: APPROACHES OF “3 EMI” PROJECT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. Sustainable development has become a reference term for all institutions, companies and organizations who wish to integrate social, economic and environmental aspects in their development policies. Schools can not be indifferent to these evolutions and, therefore, they must develop management procedures according to the principles of sustainable development. This paper aims to present the objectives, approaches and the impact of implementing the "Intercultural and Environmental Management of Schools" (3EMI) international project, addressing teachers and academic community in Romania.

Key words: education for sustainable development, school management.

Introduction

Serious problems of humanity such as climate change, super-exploitation of natural resources, reducing energy supplies, pollution, poverty, globalization require radical changes in society by involving all the responsible factors: citizens, authorities, national and international bodies, institutions. In this context, we need a rapid change to a new form of society [1], it is necessary to change our lifestyle so as to contribute to the perpetuation of life on earth.

The only alternative to the challenges of the contemporary world is the sustainable development, i.e. the type of development that meets the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs [3]. The aim of sustainable development is to ensure economic development compatible with social equity and environmental responsibility [3]. Therefore, sustainable development is supported by three pillars: society, economy and environment.

Recent evolutions in the conceptual area indicate that sustainable development should take into account the interculturality to achieve targets. The term of interculture is defined as a dynamic eco-socio-cultural process that aims to promote interethnic harmony, so that people should become aware of cultural and biological differences that are deeply rooted in social, economic and environmental practices. Interculture involves the development of links between different cultures, and identities’ recognition leads to the creation of a collective identity.

The dialogue needed to implement sustainable development at local/global level involves cultural and intercultural competences, which are based on: intercultural equality, intercultural solidarity, intercultural responsibility [2], intercultural autonomy and intercultural interdependence. Without these principles and values, it is impossible to develop bi- or multi-directional dialogue channels. These values and principles are

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necessary to enhance any process of intercultural communication based on a very dynamic development perspective.

From the perspective of implementing sustainable development, education systems are basic factors able to facilitate the awareness of mankind’s need to adopt more sustainable models and lifestyles. Educational institutions should implement management systems focused on environmental issues, and they should become the space where students implement appropriate procedures to save energy, reduce water consumption, selective separation of waste, to promote ethnic tolerance etc. In schools, pupils should learn eco-conscious behaviors to become responsible citizens.

Therefore, procedures are needed to (1) achieve a new model of eco-efficient school in order to make intercultural sustainable development a key concept of the educational process; (2) implementation of "customized" environmental management systems to fit environmental aspects of the school main activities into a coherent and efficient way from the economical point of view; (3) offer support to schools in carrying out initiatives to promote sustainable development.

Implementation of environmental management in schools shapes not only the employees’ behavior, but also the students’ and parents’ behavior. Learning in a context where energy and water are saved, and separate collection of waste and green procurement are a reality will make students think they can have consumer behaviors in compliance with sustainable development targets.

In school management, the human factor plays an important role. It is necessary to have managers who are also leaders, who can decide and negotiate change, the change which aims to implement sustainable development. A new form of school management would be required to bring innovations in school space. This is the reasoning at the basis of the "Intercultural and Environmental Management of Schools" 3EMI international project, which, by a professional master, aims to train managers for pre-university educational institutions who would be able to handle innovative ecomanagerial procedures.

Results and discussions

3EMI is the acronym for Expérimentation du Management Interculturel et Environnemental dans les Etablissement scolaires, an European project promoted by Cà Foscarì University of Venice, co-financed by the European Commission as part of the Lifelong Learning Programme LLP. This project aims to create an online learning model on educational leadership, which is able to promote intercultural management and eco-management in schools.

The partners of 3EMI project have been: Youth Center of Haskovo (BG), University of Malta (MT), KCDKO - Administrative and Management Centre in Krakow (PL), Centro de Formação Dr. Rui Grácio (PT), Filocalia Foundation (RO) and Çankiri National Education Directorate (TK). The course is specifically for school managers and teachers.

3EMI consists of 789 Master lessons - Level I - on intercultural management and eco-management, involving 166 school managers and teachers in Italy (64 participants), Portugal (27 participants), Malta (30 participants), Romania (17 participants) and Bulgaria (28 participants).

The themes of training are structured in four learning units, each with multiple modules. Modules consist of lectures with theoretical character and seminars/laboratory
activities, with practical-applicative character. Each learning unit, module and theme is associated with the intended objectives and skills that trainees wish to be formed.

The contents of training intend to gradually introduce and study themes more profoundly, both form the theoretical and applicative point of view.

The process starts from the analysis of sustainable development concept, presenting the evolution of this concept, of international programmatic documents that have delimited this development, as well as the strong and weak points of the concept; there are presented the pillars of sustainable development and the focus is on its inter-cultural dimension. Subsequently, there are detailed the issues related to citizens’ participation in sustainable development policies and practices and there is also analyzed the manner sustainable development is reflected in national, local and school policies, i.e. how to act through Agenda 21 (at national, local and school level).

There are analyzed the environmental management and the ways in which corporate social responsibility can be integrated into school management. It stresses the concept of eco-responsibility and its tools of implementation, i.e. balance of sustainability, participatory budgeting and environmental management systems.

Particularly interesting is the analysis of the environmental quality standards applicability in the school context, with reference to sustainable use of energy in schools and sustainable school mobility (movement of vehicles which pollute less the environment). Behavioral and best practices codes and development of action plans for energy saving in the school context represent applicative aspects which are relevant for the detailed theoretical aspects of this issue.

A special attention is paid to the description of intercultural management and to the exploration of possibilities for its application in the school context. The necessary operational terms such as intercultural communication, intercultural mediation, intercultural management techniques, change management, teamwork, etc. are detailed.

It is particularly relevant, to the end, the applicative part, which invites to the elaboration of a local Agenda 21 at school level, and especially to the development and experiment of some innovative methods and models for environmental and intercultural management in schools, the latter being the theme for the Master graduation project.

Throughout the course of training it could be noticed the importance and value of laboratory practical applications. According to their design, trainees are constantly challenged to use the concepts they have learnt in theory, to put them into context, to apply them creatively, to try their functionality. Everything is subject to profound study, exercise, to application to concrete situations. For example, learning about sustainable development is studied through comparative analysis, upon the texts of Stockholm, Rio and Johannesburg Declarations; at the discussion about the cultural pillar of sustainable development, trainees were asked to make an inventory of the most relevant pieces of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, namely to discuss what should be done to its better conservation; when learning about participatory democracy, trainees were asked to develop a plan to involve the responsible factors into a school project. To analyze the manner sustainable development is reflected in national policies, and local ones, respectively, an Agenda 21 has been actually worked about the trainees’ locality of origin and, moreover, the trainees were asked to develop an Agenda 21 of the school where they work. To the same approach, there is the elaboration of a balance of sustainability at school, of a
participatory budgeting, the introduction of a suitable environmental management system focused on saving energy and reducing pollution.

Trainees’ assessment during the courses and the final one and the formative and summative assessment which is rigorously designed on the basis of performance indicators, include both solving tests online – for the theoretical part, and solving specific tasks related to each laboratory.

Online training was a challenge both for trainees and the tutors who were less familiar with this way of training. In order to assure the quality of the master’s ongoing, online tutors have attended a training module by which they were trained about online learning particularities, tutoring and evaluation techniques.

**Conclusion**

The 3EMI project has great innovative and applicative value and it represents a significant step towards improving education practices for sustainable development.

**REFERENCES**