

Introducing Holistic Approach in Higher Education: Latvian Case of Reorienting Education towards Sustainability

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Abstract

Joining European Union in May 2004 the former Soviet Union country – Latvia – is witnessing processes of globalization and inclusiveness, increased technological development and reevaluation of human potential. The current perspective of higher education in Latvia is based on numerous issues to be re-discovered, re-considered, re-imagined, and re-constructed. This is a trend, among others that challenge traditional theoretical conceptions and approaches towards higher education, confront educators with an unfamiliar reality that goes beyond individualism, dogmatism, indoctrination, and hierarchical structure of organization, and fosters the development of whole field of higher education.

This article introduces experience of the Institute of Sustainable Education, Daugavpils University, Latvia, that is committed to holistic approach and sustainable development of education. This article discusses that higher education that welcomes a holistic understanding of a human person and sustainable development of society is a transformed meaning of education. It also seeks to highlight that the aim of higher education is not simply to hand on the experience and achievements of humanity, but to rise beyond the traditional norm-oriented approach and modernist world-view, and create a democratic community both inside and outside the higher education establishment, taking into consideration the global and ecological perspective and recognizing the spiritual dimension of human existence.

Key words: Higher education, education philosophy, holistic approach, spiritual dimension of education, meaningful educational environment, transformative educational experience, education for sustainable development.

Current Perspective of Education in Latvia

Re-establishment of Latvia as an independent country in 1991 has generated a considerable transformation in Latvia's system of education. This transformation or reform of education that has been initiated not only includes reevaluation of the development of education, establishment "a system ... that corresponds to fundamental principles of a democratic state and the new economic situation" (Melnis et al. 2003, 12), and its adjustment to European educational legislation (Haugh and Tauch 2001; Rauhvargers 2003), but also to the revival of national pedagogical wisdom that was fostered during the period of the first independence 1918-1940 (Anspaks 2003; Kopeloviča and Žukovs 1999, 2004; Žukovs and Kopeloviča 1997) and that still "comprises significant part of nation's spiritual culture" (Anspaks 2003, 6).

Initially there was much hope in this reform (Catlaks, 2001), yet its impact on the educational process in general still is rather poor (Birzkops 2003, Eglītis 2004). Educational research that is currently conducted on intellectual and technological grounds lacks the efficiency to provide the expected outcomes (Anspaks 2003, 447-448). Scholars discern the imbalance within the field of education between education laws, conceptions, and strategies and reality in schools and classrooms (Catlaks 2001; Dedze 2002; Eglītis 2004; Vītiņš 2004), between the development of knowledge in specific subjects and the development of spiritual, moral, social, emotional, psychological sphere, life skills, and values (Anspaks 2003; Birzkops 2003). This situation "prevents the possibility in education theory and practice to approach fundamental issues of the epoch: balance between activity and values, unity of education and nurture, revelation of genuine purpose of education" (Anspaks 2003, 433). It indicates that there is a need for holistic knowledge,

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skills, and experience that exceeds the importance of traditional production factors. However, the reform of the teaching content has been cancelled (PROVIDUS, 2004, 9).

The transition process in education has several concerns. Experience shows that some of these processes in higher education are introduced more successfully than others. Public discussion has turned to reforming the criteria underlying teachers' pay scales, response to new labor market demands, economic environment, knowledge capital, adaptability of education institutions, etc. As the main reason, "the challenges of social cohesion and economic competition including the skills necessary for innovation and adaptation of technologies have been shifting at a speed faster than the improvements can be made in education to meet those challenges" (PROVIDUS, 2003, 6) are emphasized. However, the philosophical consideration of these current challenges in higher education in Latvia echoes Palmer's (1998a) proposition that "reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts. ... None of that will transform education if we fail to cherish – and challenge – the human heart that is the source of good teaching" (3). Palmer highlights a dimension that incorporates issues that are fundamental to education. This dimension is based on educational philosophy that introduces awareness of issues of sustainability and sustainable development of education.

Current Education System: Theory and Challenges

Legal Foundations

Fundamentals of state, culture, science and education of Latvia were shaped at the beginning of the last century. However, during the period of the Soviet occupation much was destroyed. Therefore, the renewal of the independence of the republic of Latvia in 1991 brought about the need to reevaluate the development of education and to apply it in conjunction with the thinking and characteristics of the present time. The reestablishment of the state system of education was necessary. It started with an attempt to amend the legislation that governs education. In 1991, the first version of the *Education Law* (Saeima 1991) was adopted which set the first principles for an independent educational system in Latvia. In 1996, the *Conception of Education in Latvia* was issued (Ministry of Education and Science 1996), which provided the main philosophical principles for designing and implementing the strategy of education.

The years 1998 and 1999 witnessed further significant changes in the education system. In 1998 the new version of *Education Law* (Saeima 1999a) was adopted. It is currently the major legal document of public education, whose purpose is as follows:

To ensure that every resident of Latvia has the opportunity to develop his or her spiritual/mental and physical potential, in order to become an independent and fully developed individual, a member of the democratic State and society of Latvia. Corresponding to the age and the needs of an educatee, he or she shall be ensured an opportunity:

- 1) to acquire knowledge and skills in the field of humanities, social, natural and technical sciences;
- 2) to acquire knowledge, skills and experience in relationships, in order to participate in the life of the State and society; and
- 3) for moral, aesthetic, intellectual and physical development, by promoting the development of a knowledgeable, skillful and socialized individual. (Saeima 1999a)

In 1999 *The Law on General Education* (Saeima 1999b) and *The Law of Professional Education* (Saeima 1999c) were accepted. These laws currently guide the application of general education and vocational education programs in educational institutions.

In 2000, the *Law on Higher Education Institutions* ratified in 1995 (Saeima 1995) was amended. It concerns higher education institutions, programs, credentials, status of higher education institutions, and the relation between state and higher education. This amended law asserts that a higher educational institution is autonomous in regard to organizational procedure, implementation

of the educational process, internal rules and regulations, hiring and discharge of educational and technical personnel and distribution of allocated funding (Saeima 1995). Recognition of higher education institutions and programs is based upon a quality assessment, which implies a self-assessment of the institution and is followed by an evaluation visit with the participation of foreign experts in the particular field. According to the statistics of the Latvian Academic Information center¹ in the academic year 2004/2005 there were eight higher education institutions that provided 140 undergraduate and graduate pedagogy and teacher education programs in Latvia. The laws of 1998-2000 link the Latvian education system with European higher education systems, and provide the link that was missing during the Soviet period.

The educational system in Latvia is administered at three levels – national, municipal, and institutional. The Parliament (*Saeima*), the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Ministry of Education and Science are the main decision-making bodies at the national level. The Ministry of Education and Science is the education policy-making institution that also issues licenses for opening comprehensive education institutions, and which sets educational standards and teacher training content and procedures. A significant factor is the growing desire of society to participate in the decision-making process in education (Dedze 2002).

The process of rapid changes and conservatism in reform politics (Catlaks 2002) has created a conflict in the educational system (Catlaks 2001). Although there is significant progress in overcoming new challenges, the major weakness is the practical implementation of national concepts and guidelines for further development of education (Catlaks 2001, 2002; Dedze 2002). There is a need to achieve political homogeneity and consensus with economic realities and cultural peculiarities in Latvia. Priority should be given to facilitating the cultural conditions which promote diversity and equality. This highlights the necessity for strategies that promote harmony (Catlaks 2001) within a society, within an educational institution, within a teaching process, and within each person. Such expressed needs point to the necessity of addressing issues of sustainable development of education.

Reforms in Higher Education

After the adoption of the *Education Law* (Saeima 1998) and the *Law on Higher Education Institutions* (Saeima 1995, amended in 2000) many changes have been implemented in higher education. Melnis et al. (2003) point out that “Latvia has managed to create a system of higher education that corresponds to fundamental principles of a democratic state and the new economic situation” (12). This general statement affirms that the essential transformation of the structure of higher education has been completed. The reorientation has been accomplished from “Soviet-time inherited features, principles and positions ... towards the Western-type higher education system, which is based on wide autonomy of higher education establishments and nevertheless is linked with high responsibility of these institutions to the same state and the society” (Melnis et al. 2003, 17).

The commitment of the state to join the European Union reflects the tendency that was emphasized in educational legislature since 1991. Melnis et al. (2003) highlight that this commitment initiated “radical changes that have taken place in state politics, economy and culture [which] have created a completely different environment and preconditions for the development of higher education” (17). After entering the European Union in May 1, 2004, higher education in Latvia is still in the process of reconstruction. The ongoing reforms are connected with the reorientation of higher education towards the principles of the Bologna declaration² and activities for creation of “coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area” (*Realising the European*

¹ The Academic Information center is the Latvian member to the Network of National Academic Recognition Information centers (NARIC) and European Network of Information centers (ENIC). One of its functions is to provide the current information and statistics about Latvia’s higher education. For more information see <http://www.aic.lv>

² Bologna declaration “Towards a European Higher Education Area” was signed initially by 29 European Ministers responsible for higher education. The *Bologna process* started in June 19, 1999 and should be completed by 2010.

Higher Education Area 2003). The activities entitled as *Bologna process* in Latvia are not the beginning of new higher education reforms but rather a continuation that “shapes the ongoing ones, turning them into the overall stream of higher education reforms in Europe, and often filling them with a new or changed content” (Rauhvargers 2003, 19).

The action lines included in the Bologna declaration introduce joint objectives and constitutive areas that are crucial for the continuing advancement of higher education³. The declaration and main reports on trends, and the process of creating European higher education area acknowledge that “higher education is a public good and a public responsibility” (*Realising the European Higher Education Area* 2003, 1) - a constitutive area of shaping “the basis of the Europe of Knowledge” (2), “promotion of the European dimension in higher education” (6), and enhancing “the possibilities of lifelong learning” (6). So, the aim, together with the creation of European higher education area, is “to preserve Europe’s cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions, and to foster its potential of innovation and social and economic development through enhanced co-operation among European Higher Education Institutions” (2).

The *National Conception on the Development of Latvian Higher Education and Higher Educational Institutions for the Period until 2010* (Higher Education Council 2001) is mandated to monitor the purposeful implementation of the action lines of the Bologna declaration. The strategic objective of this conception is

to develop Latvian higher education system with a view of, on the one hand, preserving its national development spirit, on the other hand, readability and recognition of Latvian degrees and diplomas both for employment on the European labour market and further studies in Europe. (quoted in Rauhvarger 2003, 24-25)

This objective gives a legitimate hope that the stakeholders who coordinate the Bologna process in Latvia: Ministry of Education and Science with its dependent organizations/institutions -)Rector’s Council, Higher Education Council, Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (HEQEC), Academic Information Centre (AIC), Academic Program Agency, and higher education institutions) will foster the dimension of education that facilitated the survival of the Latvian nation during the long period of occupations so that its uniqueness can enrich the European higher education area.

Changes in Teachers’ Education

According to the *Instruction of Acquiring Teacher Education* (Higher Education Council 1996) the general structure of teacher education is composed of four sections: (1) courses on pedagogy and psychology; (2) courses that provide content of the particular subjects/classes that will be taught at school; (3) general education courses like languages, computer technologies, arts, physical education/sport; and (4) pedagogical practice and qualification thesis. The most challenging and difficult areas in teachers’ training are the courses of pedagogy and psychology. The content has to be reevaluated and infused with the current accomplishments in the fields of psychology of education, environmental studies, holistic approaches to education, child-centered learning, and interactive learning strategies.

Although the process of reevaluating curricula, teaching methods and resources already has begun, much work is still needed. Discussion about the structure of teacher education is a key aspect of teacher education reform. Geske et al. (2003) point out that the structure is a constitutive agent of teacher education. According to them, two main models of teacher education – the integrated and the consecutive⁴ – generate certain advantages and disadvantages. The consecutive model “basically has very limited relation to the profession of a teacher ... [and] no longer

³ Introduction to *Bologna process*, the main documents and detailed information about Latvia in *Bologna process* can be found in http://www.aic.lv/rec/Eng/new_d_en/bologna.htm

⁴ Geske et al. (2003) suggest the following understanding of the models: “The *integrated model* means that within its framework the academic (subject-related), pedagogic, psychological, professional internship and other components of the learning process are combined. The consecutive model at first comprises the obtaining of the bachelor’s degree in a certain field ... and only after that – during the next step of the learning process (it could also be studies for a master’s degree) – the choice to become a teacher is made and the knowledge and skills necessary for a teacher (pedagogy, teaching methods, internship at school, etc.) are acquired” (77-78).

corresponds to the tasks of the teacher in the present and future society” (78). Thus, the challenge of restructuring teacher education according to the integrated model could imply the possibility of holistic teaching and learning performance.

The renovations of the structure of teacher education have necessitated the reforming of education content. Recently, it has been suggested that there is a fragmentation of acquired knowledge and skills, overlapping of material, and lack of systemic interaction between the acquired knowledge and skills (Eglitis 2004). Thus, according to Grīnuma (2005), the reform of education content in schools will begin September 1, 2005. This reform acknowledges skills of practical application of information, ability to express and to understand the use of the acquired information for further development. What is crucial in teacher education is that this reform should be implemented in the process of teachers’ training.

Geske et al. (2003) assert that “the nature of teacher training in Latvia ... is [still] based on outdated traditions of overspecialization stemming from the Soviet era” (74). They suggest that one-country or one-nation perspective can no longer be a comprehensive framework for education. Education is “expected to be based on global values, which enable analyzing and assessing any field of human activities in a global context” (75). This is a strong suggestion to explore the historical and the current situation in education and to acknowledge its global dimension.

The complicated shift from the Soviet system to the current system has largely been accomplished through the work of teachers (Catlaks 2001), not education politicians or theorists. Yet teachers are still not economically supported or professionally recognized. Also, teachers are not directly involved in education development (Catlaks 2001). Their voice is still weak. Presumably these factors result in the lack of popularity of the teaching profession (Avotiņš 2004). There is a high level of dissatisfaction with schools, teaching and teachers in society. Teachers, on the contrary, are not satisfied with their work and profession (Geske et al. 2003, 82). Ideals that are in people’s hearts and minds differ from the reality of education. To recover its position in society, education has to reclaim a global aim of education (Whitehead 1929) and address issues that are meaningful to people, such as: questions of the meaning of existence, the nature of the human being, and spirituality, to mention but a few.

Education through the Context of Different Paradigms

This is a complicated period. Reforms in education are still ongoing and can be described as going through a process of paradigm shift. Although promising, this process not only causes feelings of insecurity, but it also challenges teachers to reevaluate their professional activity and to reconstruct a model of their own educational practice within the light of a different way of thinking. To be successful, it implies critical reflection on teachers’ educational philosophy. There is a risk of getting lost in the immense set of new information. The most crucial issues are to determine what kind of information, activities, approaches and theories to choose and how to teach in a situation where there is no one truth, one right answer, or one approved way of performance.

The current period can be characterized as the time of paradigm shift in education from the traditional teaching paradigm to the humanistic learning paradigm. The key element of this paradigm change is a transition from a passive, inductive, norm-oriented educational process established in the Soviet times to active, constructive, learner-centered education (Beļickis 1995) that agrees with current achievements in related fields, contemporary structures of society, and modes of present-day thinking.

In the traditional *paradigm of teaching* (Barr and Tagg 1995) dominant in Latvia in the Soviet times, there was over-concentration on knowledge acquisition without connection to everyday life. It caused a dominance of conceptual knowledge, depersonalization of students, and feelings of low self-esteem/inferiority, exhaustion of creativity, and lack of interest and self-actualization. The goal of the traditional paradigm in education was to provide instruction. The learning environment was identified as teacher-centered and controlled. Teaching material was presented in an objectified way emphasizing the value of the intellect. It stressed knowledge being found “out there”. Tacey (2004) explains that the old “paradigm of knowledge ... derives from the Enlightenment [and introduces] a rationalist conspiracy against spirituality and sacred meaning”

(62). It is based on authoritarianism, “in which the soul and spirit are imprisoned and never allowed to take flight” (73).

Two needs for 21st century education can be especially highlighted: transference of the knowledge and skills to the next generation, and guidance in fruitfully using them. In other words, education should be both, a map of a complicated and dynamic world, and a compass helping students to find their way. Accomplishment of these objectives requires a philosophy based on new ways of thinking. The traditional (individualistic, objective, rational, norm-oriented) philosophy should be transformed to a new one that interprets education in terms of four pillars – learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. These concepts are introduced by the report to UNESCO from the International Commission on Education for the 21st century (Delors 1996). These four ways of learning act as an integrated unity, facing, covering, and interacting with one other, and for the first time, initiating the notion of education for a sustainable future. Such a notion is consistent with a transformed meaning of education which emphasizes the assumption that the aim of education is not simply to hand on the experience and achievements of humanity but to generate a new understanding of education. Thus, the goal of the emerging paradigm in educational thinking is to create a democratic community both inside and outside the school taking into consideration the global and ecological perspective of social and economic problems recognizing the spiritual dimensions of human existence. As Geske et al. (2003) contend,

The task of teaching has changed. Today the task of the teacher no longer lies in providing students with certain knowledge in a given subject-area and testing how accurately they have mastered it. Today the aim of the teacher is to develop the students’ ability to learn, “to teach learning” at school and later on during the rest of life, to acquire the competences required for their professional activities. (78)

Thus in a paradigm of learning (Barr and Tagg 1995) the means of knowledge acquisition change from instruction where everything is controlled and the acquired results are compared, to the organizing and providing of a student-centered learning environment aimed at personally involving the learners so that they can be discoverers and creators of knowledge. Students in a learning paradigm are understood as personalities with their inborn striving towards growth, achievements, and success. If this tendency is not satiated, the learning endangers growth. The role of a teacher is to guide students to the center of their lives and their relationships with other human beings and the world. As Slattery (1995) suggests, “teachers are guides and mentors who orchestrate self-reflective learning experiences ... but not dominating and manipulating the process” (179).

Tacey (2004) proposes that the new paradigm of knowledge leads humans “out of the iron-cage of rationality into broader categories of thought in which poetry, mystery and symbolic thinking are reaffirmed and experienced anew” (95). In this new paradigm spirituality “bursts free from its former confinement, and becomes a much larger field of human activity” (38). Tacey claims that the new kind of consciousness introduced by this new paradigm “opens the door to the sacred and expands to a new communion with the world” (123). This educational paradigm certainly does not suggest how to solve educational problems. Rather, its main contributions are reevaluation of education and acknowledgement of new questions and possibilities, such as widening the understanding of human nature. Discussion about paradigm change in education in Latvia (Beļickis 1995) has initiated awareness of several meta-curricular issues, e.g., spirituality as a dimension of education (Belousa 2002) that was intentionally driven out of educators’ thinking and practice in the Soviet system.

Experience Of The Institute Of Sustainable Education

Since its establishment the majority of activities performed by Faculty of Education and Management (FEM), Daugavpils University, Latvia has been oriented to the development of teacher education and training. Development of FEM’s conceptual background can be discussed according to the following stages. The first stage, since its establishment in 1993, is highlighted as a transition from norm-oriented to holistic approach in education, and is characteristic with participation in European educational discourse, mainly in the context of TEMPUS projects. This discourse has introduced a social, cooperative dimension and awareness of environmental issues in education.

Educational and research activities of the second stage that has existed since 1995 imply investigation of an aspect of integration in the context of holistic approach. It is represented by staff's participation in applied research activities supported by Soros Foundation-Latvia, Ministry of Education and Science, Center for Curriculum Development and Examinations, etc. The third stage, in place since 1998, is devoted to investigation of meta-curricular dimension of education where an issue of spirituality in cultural context and in context of holistic approach is the most characteristic concern. The fourth stage, introduced in 1999, was interdisciplinary investigation activities of complementarity between ecological, integrated, and spiritual aspects of holistic approach and awareness of sustainable development of education. In general, FEM's development has been proceeding through challenges and inquiry. It included changes or broadening of goals, content and needs of development from which new structural unit - the Institute of Sustainable Education – has been established.

The Institute of Sustainable Education (ISE) (www.ise.du.lv), founded in 2003, is a structural unit of FEM for scientific research activities in pedagogy, pedagogical and developmental psychology, as well as integrative research in the field of education and management. ISE consists of three departments: department of scientific research, department of international projects, and department of scientific editions. The strategic aim of ISE is the commitment to meta-curricular content, holistic approach and sustainable development of education. The fundamental principles of achievement of this aim are the complementarity of academic and scientific activities, integration of meta-curricular, cross-curricular and curricular content, implementation of the issue of sustainability within education, research of regional educational issues, integration of collective and individual frames of reference, encouragement of creative activities, cooperation, and adaptive management. Scientific activities of the Institute of Sustainable Education (ISE) that imply these principles represent Latvian case of reorienting education towards sustainability.

The most characteristic activities are the following (Salīte, 2006): (1) evaluation of experience acquired by participation in the first stage of UNESCO/UNITWIN project “*Reorientation of Teacher Education towards Sustainable Development*” in 2000-2004; (2) foundation of *Journal of teacher Education and Training* (JTET, ISSN 1407-8724, Volumes 1-6) to facilitate academic discourse on sustainable development of education in 2002 with an editorial board that brings together researchers from about 15 countries; (3) foundation of annual international JTET conference “*Sustainable Development. Culture. Education*” in 2003 and international conference “*Person. Color. Nature. Music*” in 1999; (4) implementation of projects granted by Latvian Ministry of Education and Science and Latvian Science; (5) participation and implementation of several international projects that contribute to issues of meta-curricular content (e.g., spirituality, tolerance, gender equality), holistic approach and sustainable development within education; (6) contribution in creation of guidelines and recommendations for reorienting teacher education to address sustainability (UNESCO, 2005); (7) foundation of the first international network on addressing issues of sustainable development within teacher education. In 2005 this network expanded its conceptual foundation and was named as *Baltic and Black Sea Circle Consortium in Educational Research* (BBCC); (8) participation on several international research projects (e.g., comparative research project “*Teacher Education for Future*” initiated by *Pacific Circle Consortium in Educational Research*), research associations (e.g., *All India Association for Educational Research*, *International Association for Children's Spirituality*, *International School Psychology Association*, *International Seminar on Religious Education and Values*, etc), and research networks (e.g., *Environmental Management of Sustainable Universities*, *European Council for High Ability*, etc); (9) participation in development of strategy of educational research for sustainable development in 2005; (10) engagement in UNESCO/UNITWIN project's “*Reorientation of Teacher Education towards Sustainable Development*” second stage in 2006; (11) contribution to initiation of qualitative changes and transformation of professional, bachelor, master, and doctoral study programs in education offered by FEM.

As an example of how qualitative changes are ensured in the study process is an academic master's study program “Pedagogy” that has been transformed according to several aspects that are

critical in contemporary education. The transformations have been implemented at three levels: (1) study program structure, (2) study course content, (3) study forms. Several study courses are integrated in units (e.g., unit *Holistic Pedagogy* consists of three courses: *Environmental Education*, *Spirituality of Pedagogy*, and *Integrated Approach in Education*; unit *Educational Philosophy* consists of three courses: *Theoretical Foundations and Contemporary Issues of Educational Philosophy*, *Education for Sustainable Development* and *Innovative and Future Education*). Each unit is taught with common perspective and the last requirement to evaluate students' academic performance is an integrated paper. The challenge of these new study courses has been and still is to create learning environment that is problem-based, ecocentric and based on social changes, encouraging learners' understanding and attitude development about global changes, cultural and biological diversity in the world.

The Holistic approach as a perspective of reorienting education towards sustainable development reflects the assumption that the universe is a unified whole, and that everything is connected in constant interaction within several aspects – personal, communal, national, and global simultaneously. Different branches and sub-branches of science, according to the holistic approach are observed as diverse perspectives in which to study the phenomenon of life. The context of this approach implies learners' experience or experience-based learning as a constitutive component of a study process. The challenge of implementing experience-based learning is to recognize individual learning preferences and contextualized content of what is being taught. It is important to consider that the educational process is a dynamic process of changes that welcomes person's self-reflection and is both inward and interaction oriented.

The educational process, according to the holistic perspective, is based on choice and responsibility of each learner. Such an educational process is sustainable, for it encourages each learner to develop their own identity, to learn and to receive support from others while being involved in educational and social processes. Transformation of the master's study program at the Faculty of Education and Management is based on the hope that it will foster qualitative changes, not only in the context of a study program or university, but also in the wider section of a society.

Towards Transformed Higher Education

In 20th century, the model of university as an institution was based on problem solving, rooted in the myth of industrial and social progress created in 19th century, and in the methodologies of the modernist worldview. The role of higher education and university in current non-ecological society generally has not changed much. It strives to maintain habitual development, not to improve it, "because of its commitment to modern ways of thinking and its adoption of a disciplinary structure of knowledge that artificially isolates certain aspects of reality from other aspects of reality" (Ford, 2002, 75). As Sullivan notes, at the moment the university often functions as "a holding company for the set of organized disciplines, empty of philosophy" (2003, 131). Currently, universities have become large corporations that produce and sell knowledge (Inayatullah & Gidley, 2000, 188). Nevertheless, the aim of higher education is not simply to hand on the experience and achievements of humanity but to rise beyond the traditional norm-oriented approach and modernist worldview. Holistic approach assigns not only the role of a business project to university but also highlights the connection of university as a social institution with an individual and society in regional, national, and global level.

University as an institution and study programs in particular have a crucial role in development of society and whole EU community. University as a social institution is not connected with one particular system of values, ideology or reality. Historically university has witnessed radical changes moving from medieval to modernistic worldview. Nowadays university as a social institution is at the threshold of changes again because philosophies that serve as base for the current study programs are limited if they represent mechanical approach of modernism. Assumption that the main and the only role of the university in current society is the development of civic and intellectual development of society has become questionable. Ford suggests that postmodern university should encourage understanding that "the world is of immense value and that human beings have a duty to preserve and enhance this value" (2002, 96). This definition of university as a social institution in society is "morally wrong to destroy the earth, morally wrong for some human beings to live degraded lives while others lead lives of great luxury and waste, and morally wrong to promote any type of social organization that diminishes human freedom or needlessly reduces the diversity of human cultures" (Ford, 2002, 96). Creating study programs that contribute to formation of sustainable university and society educators should structure their content so that a person and her/his interaction with social, cultural,

natural, spiritual, and economical environment are in the center. Higher education that welcomes holistic understanding of a human person and sustainable development of society is a transformed meaning of education.

In general, the role of university in society always has been transformative, in agreement with national social needs and vision of development. The university cannot be created and structured only as a big business project to sell knowledge, but “universities of the future, which will be able to rise to the challenge of being agents of transformation, will also need a more extensive, inclusive cosmology--an underpinning system of knowledge comprehensive enough to take in and give meaning to the complex global problems we have unwittingly, and through our greed, created” (Inayatullah & Gidley, 2000, 237). The aim of education in modernity is to foster industrialization, and tended to “produce unbalanced, underdimensioned people tailored to fit the modern economy. Postmodern education must have a different agenda, one designed to heal, connect, liberate, empower, create and celebrate. Postmodern education must be life-centered” (Orr, 1992, x). Because to live in a postmodern world is to acknowledge that we “are forced to make choices, and to compose a life, without confident reference to inherited templates, established knowledge or undisputed authority”(West, 2004, 141).

The postmodern worldview is based on understanding of the interconnectedness of all things (Ford, 2002, 76). Discussing the role of academic branches of science in postmodernity Malpas emphasizes that “one of its most radical characteristics has been the way in which, during the past few decades, it has often broken down the barriers between areas of academic study, bringing them into new forms of collaboration or conflict.” (2005, 6). The university as an institution is a mirror of existent and future value system in a rather unique way. Changes in the university value system, and its inner structure of branches of science, is both a reflection of the situation of a social thought and as evidence of the necessity for radical changes in its structure and content. Ford assures that “The postmodern university will not be neutral with regard to environmentally destructive activities or economic systems that benefit a few at the expense of many. A truly postmodern university will promote a way of being in the world or, more exactly, many ways of being in the world, that are deeply respectful of the natural world and that enhance the quality of human existence” (Ford, 2002, 97). Introducing postmodern awareness of holistic value system in the concept of university and education in general, and perceiving university as socially transformative institution educators should consider that “strong cognitive, affective and existential responses need to be recognized and acknowledged as part of any journey towards personal and political change” (Hicks, 2002, 98). The university as a social institution has to accept historical responsibility about the western modernist world that is affected by social, cultural conflicts and ecological problems, for it has been the university that has initiated and fostered the development of western industrial science and the corresponding value system.

Describing transformative role of university in a current society, it is crucial to consider that “an overriding goal is the transformation of students understanding of themselves and their world. Successful programs of study engage students in actively developing their conception of themselves and others by providing access to new insights and new ways of acting in the world” (Andrea & Gosling, 2005, 34). Hicks emphasizes that education in contemporary times should imply global issues and dimensions of learning: cognitive, affective, existential, empowerment, action (2002, 101) that are important in obtaining transformative experience. The cognitive dimension is the first step to acquire “new facts, ideas and concepts about the current global situation and its likely future consequences” (100). The affective dimension enables obtaining emotional experience “when knowing shifts from being something intellectual and detached to a personal and connected knowing” (101). In the existential dimension, learners are involved in transformative process of their inner reality that is connected with questioning of their values, life purposes, faith and ways of living. In this learning dimension, students are “faced with a reconstruction of their own sense of self, something which often occurs when embarking on a quest for deeper meaning and purpose in life” (101). Reaching empowerment dimension in the educational process, students “can begin to feel a sense of personal empowerment. This arises from a clearer sense of personal responsibility and a commitment to do something. It centers on individual resolution of the question, can one person make a difference” (101). To enable the empowerment dimension in educational process “students need to be able to envision positive scenarios for the future and to learn about success stories in which individuals and groups have clearly made a difference” (101). The action dimension can occur when learners are involved and obtained transformative experience in first four learning dimensions and “learning about global futures had eventually led to a significant reorientation of their lives, personally and/or professionally” (101). Thus, the action dimension is the most important in transformative educational process, because learners in this stage are not only ware of social, cultural, economical, and spiritual interconnections, but also become ready to take responsibility

about themselves and their own activities both in individual and global context, making a contribution to shape sustainable society.

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