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**SOCIAL CENTERS CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL
PRACTICES AS CIS COUNTRIES COOPERATION
DEVELOPMENT FACTOR**

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Abstract

The analysis of the socio-cultural and educational activities of social centres for rendering assistance to the population dominates in the article. In our opinion, these focus areas of the social centres today are extremely important and significant for all countries because these focus areas meet the challenges of the modern strategy of social development, involving the combined efforts of various social institutions. Their objective is to improve social and educational practices. Social centres work with people who find themselves in a difficult life situation, help them in adaptation and socialisation, forming social competence of the adult population of the Commonwealth countries (the Commonwealth of the Independent States or the CIS), which are necessary for successful interaction of a person with a dynamically changing environment. Thus, social centres that implement their activities in cultural and educational practices serve as instruments for solving acute social problems and are a factor in the development of the educational space of post-Soviet countries.

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1. Introduction

Today, the most important areas of cooperation of the CIS countries in their educational space are the increasing importance of information interaction, network-based educational and training practices, and the educational potential of traditionally non-educational social institutions, organisations and communities, the dissemination of awareness-raising activity in the new educational paradigm of the information age.

In the article we will proceed from the competence definition given by Short: "Competence is a situational awareness in terms of a changing environment, it is an ability to respond effectively to environmental influences or to change it." (Short, 1984, p. 22). It is this definition that most closely corresponds to the tasks of this study and allows us to consider social competence as the social and personal value of the actor of the activity carried out by it.

In this sense, social competence is not limited to knowledge or information but includes the socially useful, life experience of a person, the ability to use the knowledge and information obtained by him or her. It is no mere chance that social competencies represent an object of interdisciplinary researches, the study of which is conducted today by the basic anthropological sciences in the space of the cultural dialogue, because scientists see the features of a particular subculture in the manifestation of any competence (While, Raven). Competence is the basic pedagogical category expressing the complex of psychomotor, intellectual and productive indicators. Its functioning is built on the basis of their complex interaction, which is regulated by that system of values that is peculiar to this individual - that is, the competence category is meaningfully filled with actually personal components, including motivation (While, 1959). J. Raven in his work "Competence in modern society," which appeared in London in 1984, gave a detailed explanation of competence as a phenomenon consisting

"...of a large number of components, many of which are relatively independent of each other, ...some components more likely belong to the cognitive sphere, and others - to the emotional, ... these components can replace each other as components of effective behaviour." (Raven, 2002, p. 253).

Analysing different approaches to studying the nature of competence, we have found that the most important in its consideration are the philosophical and practical ones (Konyukhova, Konyukhova, Nesterov, Belkin, and others.). In the philosophical sense, competences have been considered in the structure of an individual's personality, in the person's acquisition of the life social experience, in certain functions performed by him in various activities, in the ability to build relationships, in ethical systems. Romek (1999), John Raven (2002), within the framework of the practical approach (mechanical, behavioural, activity, etc.) consider competences from the perspective of their evaluation and measurement (Konyukhova, Konyukhova, 2010).

The ability of an individual to take responsibility, the ability to jointly develop solutions and participate in their implementation; be tolerant of different cultures, traditions and religions, demonstrate the desire to combine personal interests and the needs of society is important in the social competence (Skala, 2003). V. Hutmacher cites the definition of the five key competences adopted by the Council of Europe, which "...young Europeans should be equipped with." (Hutmacher, 1997, p. 11).

Russian experts in the field of competence in education (Zimniaya, Mitina, Petrovskaya, and others.) highlight social competencies, which to a greater extent indicate the features of human interaction

with the diversity of socio- personal manifestations and social interaction, the ability of an actor to determine its life positions, direct its activity to acquire knowledge and ways of their implementation (Mitina, 1998; Zimniaya, 1992, p.13).

It seems to us that it is important in the framework of this study to refer the statement of Zimniaya on the grounds of the professional competence of a social worker. This is the humanistic potential of social work: the availability of special knowledge and skills of social workers both in the field of social work and in areas indirectly related to it, the ability of a social worker to establish proper interpersonal and conventional relations in various situations of communication" (Zimniaya, 2003, p . 27).

The overall goal of the work focused on the study of the socio-cultural and educational activity of social centres in the formation of the social competences of adults has been addressed in the context of Western and domestic andragogy and is understood as the comprehensive assistance to self-determination, self-development, self-fulfillment of people of different ages. Studies of Slobodchikov (1995, 2000, 2013), Doel (1995) and Shardlow, Shanin, Zharkov (2002), Kelly (2000), Dridze (2008) substantiate the potential of social centres in the development of the individual and social relations. The mission of organisations in this sphere has been defined as a qualified support for effective interaction, which is also needed by the world, in a broader context - the establishment of a full life of those seeking help. The focus on the humanisation of education, the democratisation of public institutions, that was declared almost thirty years ago, led to an understanding of sociocultural and awareness-raising, educational work as for mixed ages, diverse generations, and accessibility and congruity as the basis for choosing forms and methods of support. The general idea implemented in these spheres is the harmonisation of relationships of the individual, society and the state. At the same time, the emphasis is on the development of a civil or a solidary society (depending on the ideological foundations of the chosen social model). The pedagogical and andrological context allows one to interpret this position as the focus on establishing the connection between different people and communities by uniting common cultural goals ("engineering" of human relations) (Doel, Shardlow, Kelly, Hjelle, Slobodchikov, Shanin, Zharkov, Dridze) (Hjelle, Ziegler, 2003).

2. Research Questions

In the context of our research, the problem in question is to distinguish the types of competence, in particular, the social one, which allows an individual to effectively interact with the environment (Raven, 2002) and express the attitude to the activity of both an individual and a state actor (scientists refer it to key competencies: political and social; intercultural, information and those that implement the ability and desire to learn throughout life (Halasz, Hutmacher, 1997).

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze the focus areas of the centers in assisting adults who belong to the socio-cultural and educational sphere and help clients of social centers in self-improvement through self-education: in mastering their skills in independent building an educational route, developing in them communication culture, initiative, civil responsibility and legal awareness, tolerance, readiness for socialization in a changing society. Presumably, an adult can successfully design its own way of life only

with a social competence, having gained an experience of independent, active, socially significant activity that social centres perform in cultural and educational practices.

4. Research Methods

The authors use the analysis and the comparative method of the study.

5. Findings

A significant role in the formation of social competence in the social centre's work belongs to all kinds of social projects, initiatives, practices, that are a factor in the development of mutually beneficial coordinated cooperation of the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the educational space.

The cultural and educational practices of modern social centres, involving mixed-age educational, family communities, various groups of migrants, socially deprived groups of the population, play one of the key roles in this activity, influencing social processes in the Commonwealth countries and the integrity of the educational space. They contribute to self-development of the person, self-fulfilment of its potential in the family and open society in accordance with the peculiarities of its age. The method of social projects is an effective tool that allows forming the necessary social competencies and values in children and adults. International social project planning contributes not only solving the tasks of socialisation, entering into productive interaction with the surrounding society, but also developing new ways of a sociocultural interaction of representatives of different cultures and worldviews. Such activity implies the creation by the trainees in the course of developing and implementing the project of a real, socially significant product for representatives of different countries, which creates the conditions for solving any particular problem perceived by the participants as personally significant. The social project can be considered as a program of real activity, based on an actual social or sociocultural problem, demanding solutions. The program implementation can contribute to the improvement of the social (sociocultural) situation in a particular region, society, association, after all, in the space of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Social project - an innovation, modelled by the project initiators, whose purpose is the creation (development), modernization, support in a changed socio-cultural environment of national or general cultural value (material, cultural, moral), the impact of which on people is positive in its social value. Social project planning can be seen as the motivation of its participants to the inter-ethnic, interpersonal communication.

An analysis of the scholars' discourse on the issues of the socio-cultural institutions work shows that they are traditional socio-cultural institutions (theaters, museums, libraries, public organizations, youth movements, family, etc.) which are complex, multidimensional structures that form norms and traditions, the grounds of cultural and educational practices, actually performing the functions of social centers (Akulich, Krylova, Nagorsky, Perezva, Semenov) suggesting new already called for practices. For example, the St. Petersburg Museum of Theater and Musical Arts offers for parents and children season tickets "Theater Hands", "Theater on the table", within which during the year at the "Magic Theater World", "Backstage" expositions the practices with the use of "Theater ABC" workbooks, the possibilities of the puppet, glove-puppet, finger-puppet theater, toy theater, the preparation of interactive

exhibitions of creative works with the participation of museum teachers, the children of preschool and primary school age, parents, theater studio representatives, video lecture hall employees take place. The dissemination of the Russian experience of positive participation in such practices of the students from children's homes - single mothers aged between 13-15 with children of preschool age, who are under the wardship of the social centres in the Commonwealth countries is essential. The practices emphasise the role of the parent able to transfer practices from the museum area to the family leisure and communication with children. The International Cultural and Educational Forums of children and adult communities, in which children, parents, teachers, educational organisers, scientists, politicians and cultural figures participate are an effective platform for the implementation of cultural and educational practices in the Commonwealth of Independent States. The community of the forum is an example of the joint operation of its participants, a socially significant community that enables the child and adult to choose and master the most interesting practices for them. The expected result of the cultural and educational practices implementation in the international communities of the Commonwealth countries is the inclusion of children and adults not only in interpersonal relations, where the principle of mutual assistance and cooperation between pupils and teachers becomes main, but also in the system of social relations set by the state and society, mastering of the methods, means of interaction with the surrounding society by the community members.

Within the framework of the social activity development, the traditions of volunteer movement are being revived in the member states of the Commonwealth of the Independent States. For this purpose special structures or new directions of social centres work have been establishing. In addition to moral satisfaction, the volunteer movement in the post-Soviet countries gives a number of advantages for young people: new meetings, new professional competencies, and new jobs.

The preparation for the 2014 Olympics substantially changed the situation with volunteering in Russia. Volunteer movement in Belarus with the support of state bodies contributes to the development of the programs based on volunteer activity of pensioners. In recent years, in the Commonwealth countries, the volunteer movement has significantly intensified to help orphans, inmates of care homes, homeless people. Today, volunteering can be viewed as a form of civic participation in socially useful matters, as an effective mechanism for solving urgent social and pedagogical problems.

Different kinds of volunteering are an effective form of development of the actors of the educational network, formed by social centres: 1. The mutual aid or self-aid that the network actors offer to other representatives of their own social community. 2. Charity is the most important component of the actors' activity of the network under study (volunteer assistance of students to schoolchildren and their families, veterans, etc.). As a rule, the assistance has been provided to the groups of people whose members are not the volunteers. The organisation of volunteer activity of young people allows solving the problems of students involving in socially responsible activities, creating the ground for humanising relations in the educational community, changing the outdated stereotypes hindering the development in intergenerational relations. Such social activity gives the education and upbringing processes a moral focus, develops social responsibility. According to Argynov, Zhumakanova, it is necessary to move from volunteerism to professional management of voluntary and charitable activities, as well as to include preparation for volunteer activity into the educational program of universities. At the present stage of the Commonwealth of Independent States development, volunteerism is gaining increasing recognition,

which is capable of changing the process of social development and education of young people, which is potentially capable of solving the problem of the dissociation of citizens of the Commonwealth countries, as responsible members of society, reducing disunity barriers, developing cooperation between all actors of the educational community of the Commonwealth countries (Argynov, Zhumakanova, 2009).

World standards of education make equal access to educatory resources a requirement for its organisation. A broad program of the UNESCO Institute for Continuing Education - "Education for All" is significant. Special attention is paid to representatives of vulnerable groups of the population. The countries of the Commonwealth is involved in the world educational space, have assumed the obligation to fulfil this requirement. The differentiation of socially vulnerable groups of the population of each region is specific and determines the priority directions of their educational support organisation. However, due to political and economic instability, the government agencies of the Commonwealth countries are not in a fit state to fully assume the implementation of the existing plans. The budgetary state or municipal social centre, as a rule, continues to be focused on the so-called "average consumer", operates within the framework of non-flexible planning, and is forced to act as an initiator of any activities. Social centres of a new format come to the rescue. Their specific feature is in the use of public-private partnership, the focus on the support of personal development and self-fulfillment of adults, especially in difficult life circumstances. Such social centres respond quickly to the emergence of micro-trends in social processes, use the resource of self-organization, volunteerism, and exercise the principle of the aid individualization to the maximum.

An adult is the main figure of human civilisation. The multidimensionality of its activity determines the wide range of directions of modern social centres since in all spheres there are specific people who need help. Educational, awareness-raising support is most in demand in a world that is constantly changing. The demand for it is so great that the network has become the main mechanism for spreading this support. It is a mobile network of actors interested in educational communication that makes it possible to achieve adaptive and personal developmental goals. According to Castells, today "distribution" the "network" logic to a large extent affects the course and outcome of the processes associated with the production, daily life, culture and power (Castells, 1999). Those forms of interaction that survive are those which have adopted the rules of the "network logic" game, enabling diversification, giving a multimodality to communication, due to which it acquires the ability to integrate all manifestations of interests and values, including trends in the growth of social conflicts. Such characteristics of social centres as the horizontality, the diversity of connections within them and self-organization ensure greater efficiency of modern social centres.

6. Discussion

A study of the social centres' work experience has shown that in the practice of the centres of some Commonwealth countries only starting their accelerated development, the networks are formed up voluntarily according to the pattern offered by humanitarian organisations of developed countries from outside. In other countries, the most advanced in social and economic development, the network is a sustainable effective tool for solving acute social problems. In both cases, the potential of self-organization is used. Let us give some examples.

In the countries of Central Asia in the early 2000s, the EU project "Promoting adult education as a contribution to stability and safety in Central Asia" began operating. The involvement of German specialists was due to their historically long experience in the development of adult education, which was announced in this region as the main way to develop the human resource. In the first stage ongoing to this day, the main attention was paid to vulnerable social groups, especially women, youth and disabled people. Due to religious traditions, the female population underwent educational discrimination in the period after the collapse of the USSR, especially in rural remote areas. The national organisation of adult education has become the basis for the dissemination of Western European experience in the countries of Central Asia. The activity of the working groups established in each country was aimed at studying the labour market, the material capacities of potential consumers of educational services, the creation of professional standards, and a full package of educational programs, including tutorial support. According to this plan, the jobs of a salesman and a hairdresser were worked out. In addition, awareness-raising and advising support for pregnant women and young mothers who are in a difficult life situation has been provided. Participants who have been trained are considered to be bearers of important experience for other people in need, and in the future, their role as a consultant is a long-term goal. The spread in the youth environment of the business organising skills, involving in the activity which brings income has become the overarching direction of educational support for this population group of the region. Such programs are implemented in three stages: the first one provides training for young initiative citizens, the second stage - a competitive selection of grantees to start independent entrepreneurship, the third stage is the implementation of an action plan approved by experts.

An important field of modern social centres' activity is legal consultancy, representation and protection of the rights and interests of vulnerable segments of the population. Broad informing of the adult population of the region about educational and awareness-raising services, especially free ones is the same essential activity. In the last ten years, one more area of modern social centres work has been set: preparing of those who wish for labour migration in the Russian Federation. The economy and demography of this region have its own specifics in the form of a surplus of human resources and a shortage of funds for vocational training. Trainees, as a rule, belong to families with low income and level of education. They are assisted in mastering the Russian language, computer literacy, and are given legal advice.

All these projects of educational and awareness-raising support for the development of human resources, supervised by experts from the EU, use a network mechanism. It is implemented in the so-called self-help groups. Their participants are citizens selected by experts (for example, women from poor families) who, after completing a course of study, including for the most part practical classes, become some sort of experts in this kind of activity. The positive experience obtained is independently distributed by them in their family and community. They become consultants and potentially can independently organise communities of non-formal education, a kind of the social centre branch.

7. Conclusion

In the post-Soviet countries, against the backdrop of the active development of civil society, the process of the establishment of a modern social centre as a tool for solving acute social problems has been

observed. Similar institutions, being a product of social self-organization, develop the educational space not only by its enriching with information. In the process of project activity, focused on the solution of a specific task of the participants, the position of the actor of this activity type is formed. The obtained social competence allows the actor to become an organiser in other socially important projects in the future. Prospects for the issue study are related to the development of such socially significant projects, their organisation and methodology of the conduct.

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