

ДОПОВІДІ НА СЕКЦІЙНИХ ЗАСІДАННЯХ КОНФЕРЕНЦІЇ

REAL AND POTENTIAL POSITIVE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE FORCED TRANSITION TO DISTANCE LEARNING FORMAT IN UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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As if it were a self-evident truth and part of the common sense of those who provide higher education services, as well as of researchers on this topic, is the rather unambiguous interpretation of the forced transition to the distance format exclusively in a negative and dysfunctional perspective. Nevertheless, both from the point of view of aspiration to scientific knowledge objectivity, and logical completeness, and a simple sense of contradiction to the mainstream, it will be appropriate to consider the opposite side – positive, progressive and socio-functional effects of the current situation in the Ukrainian field of higher education. Based on the author's comprehensive research (conducted within the framework of the project «Social Effects and Challenges of Distance Learning in the Higher Education of Ukraine: from COVID-19 to the War», which is implemented by one of the authors within the framework of «Cambridge – NRFU 2022. Individual research (developments) grants for researchers in Ukraine (supported by the University of Cambridge, UK)» and including desk research, expert interviews, focus groups with students and graduates, and a quantitative online survey of students), we are going to try to briefly describe the real and potential positive effects of such transition. We propose to deal with it at three main levels:

I. The Level of Everyday Life of the Participants of the Educational Process. The *short-term* benefits of moving to distance learning format are similar for both those who provide educational services and those who receive them, and the benefits are fairly obvious:

1) Saving time resources, which in the usual format were spent on travel to and from the place of study/work; this frees up additional time for other activities (personal life, recreation, hobbies, etc.), simplifies the organization of the day, increases the efficiency of time use. Transportation costs are also reduced.

2) Additional opportunities to combine study and work (or teaching with other work).

3) Reducing student workload, simplifying the learning process, and conserving more energy and efforts. It is also an opportunity to independently set priorities, concentrate attention and efforts on more important classes according to their own assessments and save efforts on less important ones.

4) If we talk about *long-term* positive effects, we emphasize one probable advantage: the distance format of work forces all participants of the educational process to shift to the internal locus of control, to develop self-discipline, personal time-management.

II. The Level of the Institution / Field of Higher Education.

1) Forced emergency and real professional development of educators. Both educators and students had to master new means of communication in the *short-time*, expand their arsenal of social networks. At the same time, the need to develop specific digital skills became relevant.

2) Simplifying access to information, digitalization of materials.

3) Stimulates the development of new progressive work formats that are not in demand in the offline format – collaborative work with documents and files online, active Internet surfing and searching, screen casting, etc.

4) It is easier to achieve inclusivity, because it is simpler to adapt education to the individual needs of students. The online format provides more opportunities to create an inclusive barrier-free digital educational space.

5) Increased chances of getting higher education as an adult / on maternity leave. This means that adults who are aware of their needs will be able to become involved in higher education to a greater extent, and not just «yesterday's schoolchildren».

6) The possibility of creating transnational educational platforms, implementing joint international courses and training programs. Already now, in the *short-term*, there are sufficient opportunities for productive work with international partners, and the digital base of educational content in the *long term* can develop into new international collaborations in the global educational market.

7) Potential for the development of pedagogy of cooperation. Due to forced distancing, the structure of relations between students and educators is currently undergoing a transformation, and outdated approaches built on an educational hierarchy now also have purely procedural limitations.

8) Simplification of the quality control process for education. University administrations have a simpler and more transparent way to check whether a lecture was held, whether the class was conducted well, whether students were present, etc.

9) Additional tools in the fight against corruption, maintaining the objectivity of educators. Continuing with the previous point, this also has positive effects in terms of minimizing the risks of direct corruption in the educational process.

10) Awareness of the shortage of offline education, which increases the interest of participants and the efficiency of work during limited live meetings. Some experts also note a rather unusual effect, that those specialties and education that cannot be obtained entirely online (for example, vocational education) may begin to be valued in society more than before.

III. Societal Level.

1) Corresponding transformation of the labor market. This format, of course, has many disadvantages, but the ability to connect to the work process without being tied to the workplace – from home, from travel, from public places, etc. – is a kind of liberation, and we continue to observe such transformation. Related to this is the fact that in the *long term* it is possible to reduce what David Graeber called bullshit jobs [1].

2) Revision of the concept of a city with a business center towards decentralized cities. In this there is no need to maintain city systems with the business center and living periphery; it can be built based on more egalitarian and decentralized models of urban planning. Also, the intensity of daily pendulum migration of the population and the load on the transport infrastructure decrease.

3) De-hierarchization and development of social networks (in sociological meaning). That is, due to the de-hierarchization of the high education system, a larger-scale effect is quite possible – de-hierarchization of the social structure, the development of egalitarian social networks.

4) Reducing the educational urban-rural cleavage. The distance learning format allows residents of rural areas to obtain an education without having to change their place of residence and everyday life, which somewhat equalizes their life chances with city residents. In addition, this can stop the process of ‘brain drain’ from the village to the city, contribute to the fact that rural residents who have received higher education will continue to live and work there.

5) Support for interregional and international cultural ties.

6) Overcoming the negative features of group dynamics (conflicts, bullying, physical violence, etc.).

7) Reducing epidemic risks.

Conclusions. Even having described in detail the real and potential positive effects of such a transition, we still remain extremely skeptical. However, the fact remains: the distance format has really affected higher education, and it will no longer be the same, and the distance format itself will complement the arsenal of educational services. Our task is to note its advantages and preserve them in the further development of the sphere.

References

1. Graeber, D. Bullshit jobs: A theory. NY: Simon and Schuster. 2018. 368 p.