

Galina Zhukova¹
Department of Psychology and Pedagogy
National University of Physical Education and Sports of Ukraine

Iryna Mordous²
Department of Methodology of Science and International Education
National Pedagogical Dragomanov University

Virtual Platform of Educational Institutionalism in the Context of Social Transformations

[Wirtualna platforma edukacyjnego instytucjonalizmu w kontekście przemian społecznych]

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono teoretyczne aspekty edukacyjnego instytucjonalizmu w kontekście wirtualizacji procesu edukacji, które zostały zaktualizowane na skutek współczesnych wyzwań społecznych związanych z pandemią COVID-19. Sformułowane przez autorów wnioski wskazują na istniejące zagrożenia dla podejść instytucjonalnych w edukacji, zwłaszcza w kontekście ich przemian podążających w kierunku wirtualizacji. Wirtualno-cyfrowa transformacja edukacji to nie tylko wiele zmian w zakresie innowacyjno-technicznych, pedagogicznych, zarządczych, ekonomicznych, finansowych aspektów, ale także w zakresie wartości. Sytuacyjne społeczno-edukacyjne doświadczenie korzystania z wirtualnych platform potwierdziło potrzebę systematycznego badania wirtualizacji środowiska edukacyjnego w ramach teorii instytucjonalizmu i jej konceptualizacji w celu stworzenia alternatywnych podejść do już istniejących technologii sprawnego funkcjonowania systemów edukacji.

Summary: The article deals with theoretical aspects of educational institutionalism in the context of the issues of virtualization of the educational process, which have been updated as a result of modern social challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The conclusions formulated by the authors state the existing threats to institutional approaches in education, regarding their shift towards virtualization. Virtual-digital transformation of education forms not only a number of innovative-technical, pedagogical-

¹ Galina Zhukova, Department of Psychology and Pedagogy, National University of Physical Education and Sports of Ukraine, 1 Fizkul'tury str., Kyiv, Ukraine, 03150, galinazh1299@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1248-4669>.

² Iryna Mordous, Department of Methodology of Science and International Education, National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, 9 Pyrohova str., Kyiv, Ukraine, 010601, i.a.mordous@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1659-001X>.

cal, managerial, economic, and financial but also value changes. The situational socio-educational experience of using virtual platforms has confirmed the need for a systematic study of the virtualization of the educational environment within the framework of the theory of institutionalism and its conceptualization to create alternative approaches to existing technologies for the efficient functioning of the education system.

Słowa kluczowe: filozofia edukacji; instytucjonalizm; edukacja; edukacyjny instytucjonalizm; przemiany społeczne; wirtualna przestrzeń edukacyjna.

Keywords: philosophy of education; institutionalism; education; educational institutionalism; social transformations; virtual educational space.

Introduction

Socio-economic, epidemiological-quarantine, moral and ethical challenges of our time, changes in axiological and ontological vectors, the rapid development of artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, bioengineering, formation of digital society, virtualization, these and other phenomena could not but have a significant impact on changes in education as a social institution. The shift of the traditional educational system from offline to online, where the trends of virtualization, digitalization, diversification, and evolution of the educational space have become real processes for all levels of education: from preschool to higher and informal, requires a philosophical rethinking and updating of scientific research in this context.

As it is well known, a social institution and educational institutionalism is no exception, generates fairly clear norms and rules of human behavior in society. Thus, in terms of social transformations associated with changes in the vector of the educational trajectory towards virtualization, we state as an indisputable fact: firstly, the presence of a regulated influence on the formation of moral and ethical values, culture, public consciousness, rights, duties, communicative norms, behavioral rituals and traditions of society; secondly, social institutionalism both accumulates and represents the corresponding stereotypes that create prerequisites for the formation of hermeneutical meanings and interpretation of phenomena; third, evolutionism is inherent to institutionalism, and is characterized by reflexivity, rationalism, and self-improvement; fourth, a social institution is a subject of social relations and processes of a collective-mass format, determined by the organization, equipment, manageability, etc.

Traditionally, education as a social institution has an integrated, interdisciplinary nature, where classical structuralism of F. de Saussure is combined with neo-institutionalism of J. Meyer, normative institutionalism of J. March, communicative society of J. Habermas, social constructiv-

ism of J. Searle, etc. This suggests that this phenomenon is a synthesis of many stable known and unknown variable elements of the system of equations regulating the functioning of a social institution in the context of innovation and socio-educational issues of our time.

The processes of virtualization of education in the context of globalization and quarantine restrictions associated with the pandemic caused by COVID-19 have led to the emergence of some tasks that arise within the existing theories of educational institutionalism. Virtual educational platforms, which were considered a technical/applied/latest/information and communication tool for ensuring educational activities, functionally developed their potential for organizational and managerial systems on a global scale. That is, educational institutionalism, changing, so to speak, the “appearance” – form, cannot even partially change its essence, and therefore, like any other social phenomenon, this phenomenon needs a socio-philosophical analysis.

“This pandemic has successfully forced a global shutdown of several activities, including educational activities, and this has resulted in tremendous crisis-response migration of universities with online learning serving as the educational platform. The crisis-response migration methods of universities, faculty and students, challenges and opportunities were discussed and it is evident that online learning is different from emergency remote teaching, online learning will be more sustainable while instructional activities will become more hybrid provided the challenges experienced during this pandemic are well explored and transformed to opportunities.” (Babatunde O.A., Soykan E., 2020, p. 1)

Thus, the philosophical analysis of a certain issue of educational institutionalism in the context of both local and global virtualization of the educational process will allow us to formulate several theoretical, interdisciplinary, integrated tasks, outline possible prospects and consequences of their social implementation. The authors of the article, narrowing the scale of this fundamental research, aim to analyze the classical and modern philosophical and educational discourse of institutionalism within the framework of social challenges of our time.

Theories of educational institutionalism

Given the objective absence of an “unambiguous” and “universal” definition of the concept of “social institution”, there are many attempts to interpret the classical definition, which to a certain extent, in our opinion, does not change its essence. Nevertheless, it would be more logical to de-

termine the appropriate direction of institutionalism based on the position of analytical expediency. In our scientific search, we adhere to the definition of the concept of “social institution” in the context of social philosophy. Its definition in encyclopedic publications of record is a peculiar generalizing result, a characteristic and an assessment of the current diverse and contradictory state of socio-philosophical ideas about the “social institution”.

The encyclopedia prepared by the H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine states: “social institutions nowadays are considered a multidimensional social entity, the most important components of which are:

a) social level inherent to the relevant institution, variety or localized forms of public consciousness, which can be characterized by the presence of specific knowledge, concepts, theories, views, beliefs, principles, etc.;

b) set of social forms of activity inherent in this institution;

c) system of characteristic relations, relationships, and connections between people;

d) stable set of formal and informal rules, values, norms, attitudes, and other social regulators inherent in institutions that mutually agree on the forms of activity and relations between people in the appropriate system of social roles and statuses;

e) social network of organizations, institutions, and establishments specific to a particular institution.” (Philosophical encyclopedic dictionary, 2002, p. 242)

The majority of foreign scientific reference literature does not provide a generalizing non-objective definition of the term “social institution,” but it contains an almost identical list of constituent features of the term “social institution” regarding a specific study of a particular author representing the relevant scientific direction. It is noted that this list reflects the identity of positions of representatives of social philosophy and classical philosophy. Thus, the term “social institution” means:

a) self-replicating “complex social forms” – governments, family, language, universities, medical institutions, business corporations, and legal systems;

b) “less complex social forms” – agreements, laws, rules, social norms and rituals;

c) set of positions, roles, norms, and values that are embodied in the corresponding types of social structures and the formation of stable patterns of human activity;

d) “social practice”, which includes meaningful practical goals and consequences. These are schools, shops, post offices, the police, the British monarchy, etc. (Scott, 1995).

Focusing on this approach, we consider the phenomenon of education as a social institution. Thus, it is possible to determine the existing uncertainty of scientific opinions in this area. And this is not surprising since education, in its various institutional and activity forms, is somehow integrated into most social institutions. Under such conditions, it is quite appropriate to focus on the existing definitions that fit into the content of our understanding of the phenomenon of “social institution”. In particular, it is worth noting the definition that education as a social institution is: “a set of organizations and institutions that operate in accordance with their own laws and rules; a system of relations, role functions, norms of rules that arise in learning process between different subjects of the educational process; a relatively stable and long-term type of relationships and behavior of people.” (Voronenko, A., 2010, p. 62)

Considering the interrelated concepts of education and culture, most scientists are inclined to believe that education is rather a socio-cultural phenomenon that develops organically, historically, and evolutionarily within the relevant direction and socio-temporal challenges.

“Within the sociological approach, education is studied as a socio-cultural institution in its development and functioning, as well as given its structure, ways of organization, dynamics of its social structure and its interaction with other social and public institutions.” (Chepak V., 2011, pp. 13–14)

The fundamental study on neo-institutionalism is considered, without exaggeration, the work by J. Meyer and W. Rowan “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as a Myth and a Ceremony”, where special attention among the others was paid to educational issues (Meyer J., Rowan W., 1977).

In the 1990s, the situation concerning the institutional dimension of education research has begun to change. A fairly broad group of researchers representing various areas of the scientific tradition has already joined this issue. But the quantity, according to J. Meyer and B. Rowan, did not develop into quality. As early as 2006, they stated that the application of new institutionalism in the field of educational research remains episodic and heterogeneous. However, new institutional practices and new forms of educational organizations have emerged. Scientists focus on the following aspects: firstly, pluralization in the educational field, taking into account the differentiation in the provision of educational services; secondly, the changes in the organizational structure of educational institutions; thirdly, the features of current trends in institutional support, implementation of education management (Meyer J., Rowan W., 2006).

As a social institution, education includes both the institutions (a system of norms and rules) and organizations (educational establishments,

educational institutions, schools, institutes of higher education, etc.). W. Scott presents three approaches, in particular, in the context of distinguishing the concepts of "organization" and "institution" (Scott W., 1995).

Firstly, it is a tradition founded by D. North, who emphasized that institutions create the game's rules, and organizations are the players. Therefore, under such conditions, organizations can actively assist in the process of creating rules, trying to formulate rules that are comfortable for them. Secondly, according to O. Williamson, one should focus on the regulatory properties of institutions when considering this issue. As an economist, O. Williamson emphasizes that the design of an organization as an institutional form is carried out for the efficient management of economic transactions. Under this approach, organizations as social institutions are created by appropriate organizational "agents" and determined by their choices and needs. Thirdly, sociologists (in particular, J. Meyer & B. Rowan, L. Zucker, Fr. Dobbin, and others), as noted by W. Scott, focus not on the differences between organizations and their institutional environment but the strong links between processes occurring at the social and even transnational levels, and the structures and functioning of specific organizations (Scott W., 1995).

L. Zucker carefully justifies this approach. He claims that organizations are the dominant end-to-end institutional form in modern society, containing internal institutional structural elements that are in close relations with the environment (cultural, economic, political), which is also a kind of "repository" of institutions (Zucker L., 1983). As a result, social institutions and their various forms as such act as institutional capacities that cause changes in other areas of social life.

When studying educational institutionalism, it is impossible not to pay attention to the structural and functionalist concept of T. Parsons. One of the key concepts in T. Parsons' research is the concept of "norm", which refers to the processes of institutionalization of normative culture in social systems, which, in fact, is the university. Normative culture is based on values. T. Parsons and J. Platt noted: "customs and norms of academic freedom and academic position are two structures that are most institutionalized in the American higher education system. [...] This is a guarantee, the basis of the freedom necessary for learning and research." (Parsons T., Platt G., 1968, p. 509).

In our opinion, these institutionalized norms are precisely the institutions that determine the nature of the internal structure and activities of the university as an institution, its relations with the external, in its turn also institutionalized, environment.

The institution of education's considered institutional and organizational interpretations are, as we have mentioned, a continuation of the case started in the late 70's – early 80's by J. Meyer and B. Rowan. In particular, this applies to the categorical apparatus used. As noted by J. Hass, the key to understanding the meaning of the legacy of the mentioned scientists is "myth and ceremony": "Organizational structures are 'mythical' in the sense that they are related to general assumptions about the 'right thing'. They are 'ceremonial' in the sense that they are reproduced through certain traditional actions in the same way as in religion: actions are not questioned and no active calculation of efficiency is carried out. [...] A significant component of everyday organizational life has the nature of the ceremony and adheres to myths." (Hass J., 2007, p. 117)

Analyzing the works of J. Meyer and B. Rowan within the framework of organizational institutionalism, T. Hallet identifies two areas where the place and role of myth in the activities of organizations (including educational ones) are justified. Firstly, myths are "universally recognized cultural ideals that provide a rational basis for how organizations should function." (Hallet T., 2010, p. 54).

At the same time, it is important to note that these principles/ideals in the form of norms, rules, and processes are determined more by historically formed values than by empirical data. But this does not mean that myth as a phenomenon is a falsification. Myth is a socially necessary, historically formed natural reflection of being in human consciousness.

Secondly, according to the tradition established by J. Meyer and B. Rowan, T. Hallet believes that myth ensures the legitimacy of the organization's activities in society at the macro level. Accordingly, there is a contradiction between the formal structures that ensure legitimacy and the organization's operational activities. Overcoming this contradiction involves not only correspondence to myths but also revealing evidence that these myths are valid. Under these conditions, there should be "a ceremonial presentation of the close relationship between formal structures and professional activities of organizations, which masks the gap between them." (Hallet T., 2010, p. 54).

To reach these generalizations, representatives of organizational institutionalism relied on the analysis of a wide range of empirical materials concerning the organizational nature of social reality. Their methodology could not but rely on the existing at that time (late 70's – beginning of 80's) philosophical legacy of C. Lévi-Strauss, R. Barthes, G. Sorel, J. Campbell, M. Eliade, and the other authors of quite numerous theories of social mythology.

As for the field of education, this issue is considered to clarify the mechanism of stability of social norms, taking into account the efficiency of reform efforts in that area, their impact on the evolution of the organizational component of education: “When implementing reforms, it is necessary to take into account that the educational space is stratified, its participants differ in status, power, and ability to influence educational norms. Given this, transformation costs are distributed unevenly among agents in the event of a change in the norm. This condition, as well as cultural inertia and uncertainty in the volume of transformation costs, cause the emergence of pressure groups that prevent changing norms.” (Shchudlo S., 2012, p. 81).

Thus, education as a socio-cultural institution, within the framework of the principles of cognitive rationality, forms theories and practices of praxeological guidelines, regulates and consolidates social expectations, legal norms, moral and ethical values.

Considering the signs of social transformations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, education, namely the process of implementing educational activities, is changing its form towards virtualization of the educational environment, new norms, rules, ceremonies, traditions are emerging. This means that the theory of educational institutionalism requires fundamental scientific research for modernization and efficient accommodation.

Virtualization of the educational space

The practice of implementing the virtual environment, even at the spontaneous and empirical level, in educational institutions of any profile or level is to use the latest virtual reality technologies in the educational process, which contributes to the formation of creative, abstract, non-productive thinking of an individual. The unlimited potential of the virtual environment provides opportunities for innovative development of the individual, impartiality, and prejudice of thought, objectivity in assessing one's own capabilities, simulative variability, etc.

Experience has shown that the virtualization of the educational space has intensified paradigm changes both in pedagogical science and education in general, which has become a strategic task of reforming education in the 21st century. In addition, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduced quarantine measures, traditional pedagogical practices could not solve educational tasks in full at a sufficient level. This means that the experience of using the capabilities of information and communication technologies and the global Internet, electronic and digital media,

software tools for educational purposes within the framework of distance learning (sometimes, virtual academic mobility) has come in handy (Savenkova L., Svyrydenko D., 2018).

Most educational institutions have switched for distance learning and changed the management and administrative content of educational activities. Educational and methodological support and access to it were transferred to the plane of the virtual educational space, which led to the activation of the process of developing and improving various platforms and management systems. For example, the most popular in Ukraine, and not only, is the virtual learning environment Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE), which is a web application that provides opportunities for creating various educational electronic resources to support and implement online learning.

The virtual educational space itself is both a cause and a consequence of the processes of globalization in education. The virtual environment rationally implemented in the educational process solves many educational and methodological tasks, including information content, relevance, efficiency, motivation, objectivity, distance, technology, communication, integration, etc. Thus, the process of virtualization of the education system is being transformed into a progressive alternative to the classical educational system.

“Innovative education now acquires the main tasks in the context of the fact that it is: 1) an integral part of the socialization of the individual since a person acquires knowledge, skills, values, norms in the process of education; 2) the system of informatization included in educational programs of various schools and educational institutions is implemented in the learning process; 3) the institutionally organized activity provided by the system of educational institutions; 4) the characteristics (or feature) of the intellectual development of the population; 5) the level of education of various social groups that determine the economic and cultural potential of society.” (Voronkova V., Kyvliuk O., 2017, p. 94).

Virtualization of education is not a natural process, although it has become more active as a result of social challenges. This process is accompanied by a series of difficulties and resistance, including labor intensity, human resources (lack of desire for self-development, self-improvement, a conservatism of views, physiological features, psychological dependencies), unequal technical and network opportunities, one-time/primary financial costs, language barrier and preventive requirements, etc.

“Implementation of the virtual university idea is an important issue of contemporary education discourse. This process contains a complex of issues of legal, psychological, economic, pedagogical, and social nature. Re-

alization of any idea, even under the unequivocal justification of its importance and expediency, requires harmonization of a huge amount of detail. Searching for the optimal model of the virtual university together with the necessity to fit it into the general context of the social and political structure of a particular region, state, educational space as such is also a complex and ambiguous issue.” (Svyrydenko D., Kyvliuk O., 2020, p. 38).

Universities’ organizational, managerial, educational, and pedagogical activities and almost all educational institutions of various levels and specifics are now in a state of transformation. Implementing virtual systems in this context is a crucial task. In our opinion, virtualization of the educational space shall reduce the gap between the administrative and managerial components and pedagogical and academic activities. In other words, new virtual products contribute to the standardization and universalization of relevant types of educational activities, connecting and integrating processes that were historically considered independent.

In fairness, it should be noted that the virtualization of education is associated with the emergence of a number of issues and changes in the worldview in general. The fetishization of virtual opportunities can cause issues related to self-identity and functional redistribution, that is, the concept and its primary meaning “subject of learning” of the student/pupil will cease to be central, reformatted into the concept of a “user”, and the professor/teacher begins to be associated with an individual, and even more so, not a carrier/translator of knowledge with certain professional competencies, skills, experiences of pedagogical skill and human qualities, but with a “communicator” or an intermediary between the virtual and classical educational and pedagogical environment: “Virtual educational space shall be considered as the interaction of an individual not with nature but with virtual reality, the one that opens up opportunities for active reality [...] in the educational plane using communicative, informational, scientific, educational, etc. functions; virtual educational space shall contain virtual objects of only educational and cognitive content and shall comply with the principles of relevance, significance, scientificity, consistency, probability, informativeness, etc.; virtual educational space shall function only within real conditions within a clearly defined time frame and shall not create psychological discomfort.” (Hubska H., 2019, p. 40)

The issues of education virtualization are often associated with a lack of acceptance or understanding of the mechanisms for achieving practical goals. Modifying classical concepts of didactics within the framework of its virtualization and digitalization made it necessary to intensify scientific research and improve educational technologies in this context.

Indeed, there are no adequate/ideal models that explain whether complex educational systems and their functioning are provided, especially in the face of social instability and global epidemiological challenges. Theoretical grounds in comparison with the first attempts to virtualize education look much more attractive than they turned out in real conditions. The critical question is whether these virtual systems, which rebuild the institutional grounds of educational institutions, will work as well in practice as in theory: "The penetration of virtuality into the educational space is quite natural and is due to economic and socio-cultural factors. However, it is important to pay attention to the fact that virtuality shall not absorb or replace the educational system, remaining as one of the components in it, that ensures the compliance of learning results with the requirements of the time, the viability, and the significance of education as a cultural institution. Virtualization of the educational space mediated by telecommunications technologies shall preserve, first of all, the status of a tool that optimizes educational activities. In the context of accelerating the pace of life, unprecedented increase in the volume of new knowledge, and the need for constant updating of knowledge, full-fledged education would hardly have been implemented without the involvement of modern technologies. The virtualization of the educational space shall be carried out in parallel with improving the information culture of the individual, developing the ability to find, analyze and systematize information, separate true knowledge from false, and use information for self-realization." (Trach Y., 2018, p. 170)

Thus, virtualization of the educational space is a long process that requires careful research in the context of managerial, value, legal, moral, ethical, and economic aspects of virtualization. Taking these and other aspects into account will serve to reduce possible dangers and threats and create new issues that will affect the development of education and society as a whole.

Conceptualization of virtualization of educational institutionalism

Within the framework of modern social challenges and the forced transition from offline to online education, shifting the emphasis towards electronic information and reference resources, virtual educational platforms, information and communication environments have given rise to socio-philosophical issues of rethinking or reformatting the phenomenon of educational institutionalism in the context of its virtualization.

It is appropriate to say that an institution is an organism/phenomenon that does not exist without people and their relationships considering educational institutionalism through the prism of a socio-cultural approach. That is, it is a social mechanism of collective action that functions in any society and can idealize certain processes. On the one hand, denying everything “old”, and on the other hand, not perceiving anything “new”.

The virtual space itself, as such, was primarily considered a space of freedom for the development of individual capabilities of personality. Giving institutionalism signs of virtuality, or vice versa, virtualization of institutionalism modifies both the first and the second phenomena. In our opinion, the rules, norms, management, and organizational systems, values, and culture of behavior are changing, which as a result changes traditions and forms new ceremonies in communication and social connections.

“Firstly, organizations and institutions are a product of society (socially constructed). In this capacity, they are as much a myth (in the anthropological sense), as a reality. Secondly, organizations and institutions are constantly replicated (reenacted); this is consistent with the logic of Hoffmann, Garfinkel, Giddens, and others that structure and rules are reproduced by people in the same way that roles are reproduced in the theater (reproduced dramatically). Rules and structures exist since many of us believe they do exist; thus we do not question them (taken-for-granted) or impose them on other people.” (Hass J., 2007, p. 115–116)

There are many external and internal factors: socio-economic, cultural, political, epidemiological, and quarantine, which historically influenced and still affect the evolution of educational institutionalism and as a result can have both positive and negative impacts. H.-D. Meyer’s research highlights that American society, both in the social and political context, has changed radically in the recent decades. There has been an “erosion” of key grounds regarding American education’s unique characteristics and peculiarities. Firstly, the idea of “socio-economic inclusion” does not fit in with “growing socio-economic segregation”. Secondly, “religious and moral inclusion” no longer works in the context of “moral and religious relativism” and cultivated “personal freedom”. Third, the idea of “cultural assimilation” is being replaced by the idea of “multiculturalism”. Under these conditions, the “American dream” as a mythologized image of the “American idea” becomes “problematic” (Meyer H.D., 2006).

In our opinion, the approach to the study of these processes in American education (substantiated and implemented by H.-D. Meyer) is universal. Its application looks quite correct and productive concerning any national education system. Ukraine is no exception. The processes of reform, modernization, standardization, universalization, informatization, digita-

lization, and virtualization have not spared Ukrainian education. All of the above processes are impossible in the absence of equally important institutional configurations: political stability, economic competitiveness, national identity, information culture, digital literacy, “network equality”, etc.

In his research, M. Hercheui identifies a large gap in the scientific understanding of how institutions influence online interaction processes, where institutionalism is still marginal to most scientific research in the field of virtual communities (Hercheui M., 2011).

The shift to the virtual plane changes both organizational and managerial, and educational and pedagogical functions, which are being revised from their significance for the preservation and development of the socio-cultural and economic environment. To this end, educational institutions shall cooperate with all interested parties, identifying the most efficient ones for themselves and including them in their own practice of the processes of modernization and implementation of educational activities.

A collective study of Australian universities on the experience of online education, which was conducted among undergraduates and postgraduates, regarding their impressions of immersion in a virtual environment, was summarized by S. O’Shea, C. Stone & J. Delahunty as follows: “1. High-quality courses that are specifically designed for online learning; 2. Online learners being treated just as important as face-to-face learners and communicated with regularly and appropriately; 3. Academics being accessible and responsive online and engaging regularly and positively with students; 4. Student forums can be problematic and often not well moderated – there is a need to ensure good design and responsiveness of the moderator; 5. More assistance with the technology.” (O’Shea et al., 2015, p. 56)

In addition, this study confirmed the need for further research on the efficiency of the online education environment.

M. Maiese argues in his research that since scientific practices and educational systems are centered on digital technologies, the online learning environment and are conditioned by a certain set of rules, norms, conditions, and collective expectations, internal cognitive processes depend in part on socio-cultural and economic contexts. According to the author, the “mental institution” shapes what, why, and how students learn and how they understand the values and purpose of learning. In addition, the “mental institution” simultaneously poses a threat to limit students’ communication abilities and allows distorting the idea of the limitations of higher education by forming neoliberal values: “In terms of ideology, neoliberalism emphasizes the values of individualism, consumerism, and personal gain; and these market values shape our shared expectations re-

garding what count as rational and responsible forms of human agency. It becomes routine and “normal”, for example, for agents to focus on increasing their ‘human capital’ and advancing their economic ends, and irrational or peculiar for them to engage in pursuits that are not valued in the marketplace. There is little doubt that these expectations and habitual modes of valuation have infiltrated the mental institution of higher education.” (Maiese M., 2021, p. 286)

The integration of e-learning into educational processes, according to P. Boezerooij, M. van der Wende and J. Huisman, is a strategic task for higher education institutions in the following variability: traditional, face-to-face, campus-based education (back-to-basics), flexible on-campus delivery of education (stretching-the-mould), or anytime, anywhere education (world campus) (Boezerooij et al., 2007). Universities with the “world campus” strategy are different from higher education institutions with the “back-to-basics” strategy, as they focus more on accessibility, flexibility, openness, and the use of information and communication technologies, where the existing educational environment is becoming more focused on the labor market and is competitive.

The implementation of open educational practices within the framework of higher education strategies is still at the stage of formation, where it is necessary to overcome a number of challenges at the institutional level (financing, human resources, technological and digital opportunities, etc.) for more mass use of the institutional policy of openness. The institutional educational environment focused on personal learning is considered by most higher educational institutions as one that needs to be improved by modifying the processes of teaching and learning in the process of using digital technologies and information and communication tools. Open educational practices go beyond the formal framework, integrating academic and non-academic institutions of both collective and personal nature.

“Distance learning can be appropriate and efficient if the following requirements are met: careful planning and design of the educational process based on the use of digital tools that support the main types of pedagogical activity; availability of high-quality educational and methodological developments and tasks in electronic form, available to students at any time from any place of stay; planned sequence of their assimilation and implementation, which provides the use of the latest pedagogical technologies; high level of information and communication competence of all participants in the educational process” (Tepla O., 2020, p. 76).

Online education has traditionally been seen as an alternative way to expand educational opportunities in the context of lifelong learning and the principles of continuing education. However, the conditions of the

COVID-19 pandemic have forced the pedagogical community, from teacher to pupil, of all levels of education, to quickly adapt to the virtual capabilities of the educational environment. It would seem that all the known components of this system, when forming a certain set, create an infinite set of variables, generating an unknown sequence of unpredictable events.

Research on the virtualization of the educational environment requires the consolidation of both short- and long-term solutions. These studies are characterized by the need to develop both educational and managerial institutional models to solve urgent issues of education in the conditions of quarantine measures, including digital transformation of educational institutions, virtualization of educational platforms, modernization of the learning process, variability of modeling of educational environments in the online plane, innovation of educational systems and institutional forms, etc.

Conclusions

Thus, the socio-philosophical analysis of the issues of virtualization of educational institutionalism in the context of modern social challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to formulate a number of theoretical judgments: the existing educational institutionalism, like the one that can be the replacement, mostly remains poorly researched; educational institutions as institutions moving to the digital plane, with appropriate traditional rules, norms, “ceremonies” need to be reformed; virtualization of the educational process requires careful planning, design and systematization; spontaneous situational use of virtual educational platforms now need to be considered as emergency measures to eliminate the current situation; the relevance of acquiring digital competencies is motivated and significant; modernization and adaptation of traditional pedagogical principles to changing the form of the educational environment shall be implemented in the educational process regardless of industry specifics; the introduction of large-scale measures to overcome “network inequality” shall be implemented simultaneously with the improvement of digital literacy and media culture of society in general; the study of virtualization of the educational environment within the framework of the theory of institutionalism shall be intensified within the framework of creating alternative approaches to the existing educational and pedagogical technologies for the functioning of the education system, etc.

In the institutional dimension, the interaction between the traditional educational system and its virtual innovation looks unbalanced towards

the informal component. In other words, there is a certain radicalism in the perception of changes in educational institutionalism towards virtualization: from awareness of the necessity to fundamental rejection. In educational institutions of different specifics and levels this issue is solved differently, but, as a rule, educational institutions that already had an experience of using elements of online education in the learning process were in a more favorable position. Harmonious use of the possibilities of digital technologies, virtual environments, network content within the traditions of educational institutionalism, regardless of situational circumstances and social challenges, can become the key to self-improvement and self-reproduction of the education system, which is constantly transformed and modified regardless of external changes and spontaneous processes in it.

In our opinion, virtualization of the educational process, despite its spontaneity and situational nature is an indisputable experience of both positive and negative nature to achieve efficiency within the framework of scientific progress in socio-philosophical research of educational institutionalism due to the introduction of quarantine measures on a global scale.

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