

LIFELONG LEARNING AND ADULT EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

Introduction

The last decade of the twentieth century was a turning point for Slovenia because of its independence, its integration into the EU and because of significant changes in social, economic, political, cultural and other areas. These are definitely landmarks in the history of Slovenia. This is the first time in modern history that our community has paved its independent way into the developed world with the knowledge and capacity the country has at its disposal. This also poses a great responsibility. Forming and laying the foundations for a social system are in full swing, and thus it is crucial that this groundwork be established professionally and properly for further development and enhancement. One of the cornerstones of social existence is education, which is derived from a basic human right and must, therefore, be appropriately updated, of good quality and in accord with the world, and especially with European standards, at the same time retaining national characteristics. This is a very demanding task, which our society will have to carry out in a very short time.

About Slovenia

In 1991, Slovenia gained its independence for the first time in history. In 2004 the country became a full member of the EU and in 2007 adopted the euro as its own currency. The Republic of Slovenia is a parliamentary democracy implementing the rule of law. It is a social state. The official language is Slovenian. In its bilingual areas, that is, in municipalities where Italian and Hungarian ethnic minorities reside, Italian and Hungarian, respectively, are also official languages. The State is separated from the Church. The Slovenian Constitution guarantees free education to Slovenian nationals. Basic education is mandatory and funded from budgetary resources. The State is required to enable its citizens to obtain appropriate education. State universities and professional colleges are autonomous. Members of ethnic minorities have the right to receive education and further instruction in their mother tongue. Roma are likewise granted

special educational rights. In recent years, approximately 6% of GDP has been spent on education. The population of Slovenia is 1,964,036 (as of the 2002 Census). In 2002, 67% of population had at least upper secondary education. Basic education (primary and lower secondary education) has been extended from eight to nine years.

1. The system of education in Slovenia

Global changes in Slovenia dictated rigorous changes in upbringing and education, which are pillars of the existence and development of society. The awareness of the importance of good education is reaching all the strata of society, though slowly. Due to the rapid development of technology, people have started changing their attitudes towards education. Education has numerous effects on the global community as well as on individual segments in the social and economic sense.

Due to these factors, the need for distinction and comparability of educational standards with other education systems and the accreditation of education have hastened the change of the education system, which from an organisational and content point of view has to be designed to be compatible with European and other systems. Here we have to take into consideration the growing awareness of the global community of the meaning and role of fulfilling human rights, and above all children's rights, as well as the legal standards of the country and the modern conception of democracy, tolerance and solidarity.

The new constitution, which was based on a series of changes, also dictated changes in legislation in all aspects of life, including education and schools. The previous legislation was based on the constitution from the seventies. Basic and necessary changes in the legislation took place gradually and were in agreement with the professional and other publics, which is a prerequisite for building a system which will ensure the incorporation of modern, social, legal, organisational and other measures and standards. The state's role here is to ensure the same conditions for opening private and public kindergartens and schools.

In 1991 we started laying the foundations for a new system, which developed gradually and is still developing in terms of organisation and subject matter. In organising and building this new system, it was necessary to observe positive experiences, systems and achievements from past years, along with experiences from foreign countries. We had to incorporate them into our system considering all the characteristics typical of our community. These changes have to be gradual and tested on small groups, so that we can avoid errors. By doing so, the state and local community take the lion's share in ensuring material and human resource requirements in organising the overall system of education. Others can also take part with financial means, which cover a certain share in the implementation of various programmes of formal and non-formal education.

In 1995 the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia issued a White Paper in which a global conception of problem solving, devising and executing systemic solutions in the field of education was introduced, which had mainly to do with organisational structure and form; modernisation of topics was going on simultaneously through curricular revision of the educational system, a process involving a broad circle of experts. The legislation was only supposed to determine the structural framework for changes but by no means to prescribe them in detail. After a longer discussion among the expert public and after three readings, Parliament passed six basic acts in the field of education in 1996: the Organisation and Financing of Education Act; Kindergarten Act; Primary School Act; High School Act; Vocational and Professional Education Act and Adult Education Act.

In this way the basis for a thirteen-year-long education up to university was set. Since the Higher Education Act has already been passed, it means that the whole educational system from preschool education to university was established and that the previous Education and Free Labour Exchange Acts which formerly regulated the financing of education became invalid. These laws are accompanied by sub-legal documents (regulations, ordinances, decrees) which regulate and define the legal provisions in detail.

Slovenia has been actively participating in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy since November 2002, when it appointed its representatives to participate in all working groups responsible for the individual objectives within the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Since 2004, when

Slovenia became a member of the EU, the country has also assumed responsibility for the implementation of these objectives.

II. Adult education and lifelong learning

The development of the lifelong learning concept and practice in Slovenia is closely associated with the endeavours of the adult education field, as well as with social, political, economic, cultural and technological changes that have taken place in the country over the last sixteen years. Although in the previous political configuration of Yugoslavia there was a commitment to "permanent" and "functional" education, both concepts were aimed at the adult population, the latter even more to the employed population.

Lifelong learning was equated with adult education, and in many cases still is, though the situation is slowly changing. The introduction of the concept in reality in Slovenia is therefore due to the endeavours of the adult education field. After 2004, when the phrase became commonly used in all policy papers, it was because Slovenia had joined the European Union. It is connected to the requirements and expectations of the Union concerning its members and ultimately to the Lisbon Strategy and "Education and Training 2010: diverse systems, shared goals" (2002), and an action plan with goals and benchmarks prepared to realise the Lisbon goals. In the last three years the meaning of LLL is much more related to the development of human rather than social capital.

The outcomes after the commitment to adult education and adoption of the legislation are impressive. In 1991 Slovenia had an inadequate educational structure of the population over 15 years of age. About 17% of the population had incomplete or nonexistent compulsory (8 years) primary education, 30% of the population had completed primary education, 42.5% of the population had finished upper secondary education (ISCED 4) while 8.8% had higher education degrees (ISCED 5 and 6). Adult education as a field was underdeveloped.

The 2005 results were favourable. Educational attainment of the population over 15 years of age showed improvement. The percentage of those without or with unfinished compulsory primary school diminished from 17% to 5.2%, as well as the percentage of those finishing only primary education (from 42.5% to 23.7%). The share of the population with upper secondary school (ISCED 4) increased and reached 55.6%, while the percentage of the population with higher education degrees reached 15.6%.

The patterns of participation¹ in adult education changed as well. While participation in 1987 was 27.6%, this figure reached 37% in 2004. The Lisbon benchmark, 12.5% participation of the population between 25 and 64 years of age, was reached and exceeded in 2003² (15.3% in 2005), which puts Slovenia in the 6th place among the EU-25, after Sweden, the UK, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands.

II.1. Definition of lifelong learning and adult education in Slovenia

As a concept, lifelong learning was introduced in Slovenia after the ELLI conference (European Lifelong Learning Initiative) held in Rome in 1995. At the beginning, lifelong learning was defined by ELLI as: "a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments". After the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, Slovenia understood lifelong learning as "a continuous activity taking place from cradle to grave, lifelong and lifewide, embracing formal, non-formal and informal learning". In the Strategy on Lifelong Learning in Slovenia, lifelong learning is described as "... an activity and process encompassing all forms of learning either formal, non-formal or informal which takes place in various learning settings and goes on from birth through early childhood to adulthood and to the end of life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences. Through learning we also gain interests, character, values, relation to ourselves and others and other personal characteristics" (item 4.1). In general one could say that policy documents in Slovenia interpret lifelong learning as learning for everyone in different forms and settings and with content enriching the individual's intellectual, emotional, spiritual, aesthetic and physical abilities, thus contributing to

employability, personal development, ability for further learning and active citizenship.

As for the definition of adult education, the first article of the Adult Education Act describes it as "... education, improvement, training and learning of persons who have finished compulsory schooling and wish to gain, update, widen and deepen their knowledge, and do not, at the same time, have the status of pupil or student in education".

II.2. Areas recognised under the definition of LLL and adult education

As noted earlier, lifelong learning in Slovenia includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. Though experts refer to lifelong learning as a process "from cradle to grave", its understanding in the overall policy is still varied. The strategy on lifelong learning speaks of "early life period" and includes pre-primary, primary and upper secondary education, followed by "the period of adulthood – continuing education" in which all adult education is situated and is concluded with the "higher education" section. Actually, though policy papers do speak of lifelong learning, some also of lifelong education, it is obvious that they primarily link it to adult learning.

Provision

Slovenia is among those countries which, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, did not leave adult education entirely to the market. During socialist times, the education of workers was in the interest of the government and the policy was that an institution of adult education should exist in every municipality. There were 60 municipalities and as many folk high schools. After one of the educational reforms, the education of youth, children and adults came under one law. This meant the "schooling" of the field and its gradual decline with regards to the overall development of the field.

Nowadays, adult education encompasses formal and non-formal education. There are special institutions for adult education (people's universities, fewer than in socialist times, but there are other institutions as well, e.g. private entities) which offer programmes of formal and non-formal education. There are also special units at upper secondary schools which offer programmes of formal education. The same principle applies within higher education. Institutions are public or private. Primary education for adults is free of charge, while the rest has to be paid by companies, individuals or others. Research from 2004 shows that the majority of adult formal education is paid by individuals

1 Measured as taking part in any organised learning activity twelve months prior to the interview.

2 Source: Lifelong learning (adult participation in education and training) – total percentage of the adult population 25 to 64 participating in education and training, measured by the Labour Force Survey and taking into account any organised learning activity four weeks prior to the interview; from 27 October 2006 – based on an annual average of quarterly data instead of one unique reference quarter in spring. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1996,39140985&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&screen=detailref&language=en&product=STRIND_EMPLOI&root=STRIND_EMPLOI/emploi/em051,21.08.2007.

or their families, sometimes by employment offices and the Ministry of Education within the provision of the National Plan of Adult Education, while companies usually pay for courses of short duration related to the workplace.

Administration system

The Ministry of Education and Sport is responsible for the policy on lifelong learning. Within the ministerial structure there is a sector for adult education which is responsible for the implementation of the National Plan of Adult Education. The bulk of tasks is also carried out by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. It is responsible for the unemployed and invests quite heavily in National Vocational Qualifications by the certificate system as well as in the National Plan of Adult Education. In 2007 it will contribute 73.1% of all public funds earmarked in the budget for the annual Adult Education Plan.

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education was established in 1991 to research, develop and promote adult education at the national level. The institute is entrusted with the development of adult education in accordance with the strategy and principles of lifelong learning, preparation of expertise for the development of a system of adult education, development and maintenance of an information system for the needs of adult education,

organisation and realisation of continuing education and training for adult education staff, research and development work, development of expertise for programming and organisation of adult education and for the preparation of a national plan of adult education, and international cooperation.

At the local level, municipalities are responsible for lifelong learning and adult education. They should contribute to the implementation of the National Plan of Adult Education. In reality, the majority contribute to primary adult education, since it is a legal obligation, although they also fulfil their founders' responsibilities (to varying degrees) towards people's universities (folk high schools), financing or co-financing the staff, premises and maintenance.

Total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP in Slovenia was, according to Eurostat, 6.02% in 2003 and 5.96% in 2004.³ There is no reliable data as to what the percentage is for adult education in terms of GDP. The last data from 1995 indicate 0.08% of GDP,⁴ and the estimation is that by 2007 it has not reached 1%.

³ Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training, 2007 Report, Table 2.1, p. 64.

⁴ Source: Nacionalni program izobraževanja odraslih, strokovne podlage 1 (Expertise on the National Programme on Adult Education 1), Andragoški center Republike Slovenije, Ljubljana 1998, Table 1, p.37.

Statistics

Table 1: Adults in formal and non-formal education – end of school year

	2004/05		
	Total	women	%
Primary education	2,127	643	30.23
Upper secondary	18,942	9,538	50.35
of this: 2–3-year vocational ed.	5,982	2,974	49.72
4–5-year upper secondary	12,960	6,564	50.65
Higher vocational ed. (1-2 years), non-university	8,525	4,292	50.35
Higher professional ed., non-university	41,235	23,276	56.45
University ed.	49,994	30,887	61.78
Post graduate – specialisation (1 year)	1,249	677	54.20
Master	6,165	3,472	56.32
Doctorate	946	444	46.93
TOTAL – formal	129,183	73,229	56.69
Non-formal	151,610	74,380	49.10
TOTAL formal and non-formal	428,918	230,376	53.72

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, various reports.

Taking into account the participation of generations in adult education in 2005, adult education as defined initially, there were on average 5% of adults in the 15–49 age group attending programmes of formal education, and 13% in programmes of non-formal education. This percentage does not include the 15–24-year-old generation that continued their studies immediately after finishing primary or adequate upper secondary education.

Three surveys were carried out in Slovenia on a representative sample of the population (1987, 1999 and 2004) researching participation in adult education twelve months prior to the interview. The results of 2004 survey show 21% participation of adults between 15 and 65 years of age in formal education and 37% in non-formal education (Report 2005, p. 37), while participation in 1987 was 27% and in 1998 – 31% (Report 2005, p. 29).

II.2.1. Partnership

Stakeholders

In formal adult education the major stakeholders are two ministries at the national level – the Ministry of Education and Sport and Ministry of Higher Education and Science. At the local level, the partners are public (people's universities, schools, institutions of higher education) and private (with concession) educational institutions.

The situation is different in non-formal education and in education and training. There are various and diverse stakeholders: the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs in the case of the unemployed population, the Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Crafts, trade unions, various public and private (profit and non-profit) providers, as well as NGOs and training centres in companies and enterprises.

Responsibilities and funding

The main providers of adult learning are two ministries: the Ministry of Education and Sport and Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. The Ministry of Education and Sport finances primary education for adults, study circles, literacy courses, centres of self-directed learning, information and educational guidance, programmes of active citizenship and programmes for the Roma population. These programmes are free of charge for the participants. Through the annual plan of adult education the ministry defines the extent of funds earmarked for these activities. Furthermore it co-finances completion of studies defined in the

National Plan and Annual Programme of Adult Education, learning exchanges, Project Learning for Young Adults and in-service teacher training. Again, the extent of funds is defined in the annual adult education plan.

The Ministry of Education and Sport is responsible for the whole sector of education and proposes laws to Parliament. It is also in charge of preparing adult education policy and implementing it in the field. According to the Adult Education Act, it will have to prepare a new National Plan of Adult Education when the current one expires.

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs finance training of the unemployed according to the programme of active employment policy, and the National Plan of Adult Education. In accordance with the arrangement with the minister of education and sport, it finances the annual national survey of adult education provision, the national coordination of the Lifelong Learning Week, as well as 10 issues a year of bulletin *Novičke* (The News), which brings up-to-date and concise information on adult education in Slovenian and 3 issues of the same bulletin in English.

This ministry bears responsibility for the preparation of the methodology for the standards of knowledge and skills in the certificate system through which National Vocational Qualifications are recognised. Assessment and recognition of NVQs are also the responsibilities of the Ministry of Labour.

Both chambers – Commerce and Crafts – as representatives of employers, are entrusted with the preparation of the standards of skills and knowledge for the certificate system. They also offer training programmes to their members in their respective fields concerning management, legislation, quality, etc.

Centres in companies and enterprises are mainly responsible for in-service training of their workers and employees. NGOs and trade unions take care of education of their membership in their respective fields.

Coordination

There are several ways in which partnerships are coordinated among stakeholders. In accordance with the legislation on the organisation and financing of education, there is a Council of Experts for Adult Education at the national level (there are three of them) which, among other tasks, recommends the adoption of programmes to the minister. The members of the council are nominated by

the Government (14 plus the president) on suggestions from the field and come from the stakeholders – 4 members are nominated by the ministries (usually Education, Labour, Research and Culture), 3 are nominated by relevant chambers, 3 by trade unions (representative ones), 2 by the Association of Public Institutions for Adult Education and 2 by other institutions of adult education or their associations.

Another way of coordination is through the governing boards of institutions for adult education. In public institutions, according to the law on public institutions, the members of the governing boards are the representatives of the founders, employees and users, and interested public.

Best practice

Two practices are worth mentioning. The first relates to the establishment of four councils at the national level, giving opinions to the Minister of Education and Sport and to the Minister of Science and Higher Education in matters defined by respective laws. These are the Council of Experts for Adult Education, Council of Experts for Vocational and Professional Education and Training, Council of Experts for General Formal Education and Council of Experts for University Education. All councils, with the exception of the one for general formal education, are structured according to the principle of social partnership.

The second example is the annual conferences of adult education, which draw together providers from all over Slovenia and both ministries (Ministry of Education and Sport, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs) to discuss issues arising in the field.

II.2.2. Learning environment

Support

Since 1996 when Slovenia organised its first Lifelong Learning Week, this event has been organised under the Slogan – “Slovenia, a learning country”. Lifelong Learning Week is one of the endeavours to sensitise the population and partners from the non-educational fields of the necessity of learning. But so far the concepts of “learning citizens”, “learning cities” and “learning communities” as such have not been introduced in the whole territory of Slovenia. Therefore the existing networks of new forms, content and programmes in adult education (study circles, reading circles, centres for autonomous learning, learning exchanges, Project

Learning for Young Adults, etc.) are steps towards implementation of the above concepts.

The National Plan of Adult Education aims at increasing investment in all aspects of lifelong learning (individual, community, enterprise and state). For achieving the concept of “learning cities/regions”, for example, the emergence of regional development agencies is important. The Government also seeks to ensure effective cooperation and coordination among providers of guidance at national, regional, local levels in the provision of guidance services in order to widen access and to ensure the coherence of provision, especially to groups at risk (National Report on Slovenia: Mirceva, J., LLL2010 project, 2006, p.7). The same efforts are being made concerning the provision of educational programmes. As for “learning organisation”, the idea and implementation of the concept is promoted by the Institute for Learning Organisations, established in 2000 by 18 successful Slovenian companies. It gives the name “learning organisation” according to previously adopted criteria.

Approach

The most systematic approach to linking a range of actors in order to shape an effective environment at a national level is the National Plan of Adult Education. There are also various other national plans (health, environment, higher education, social development, culture, informatics, etc.) which are already adopted or in the process of adoption. The local level is far too fragmented to be effective in linking different factors together. This was the basic idea of regional developmental offices, and some are doing quite well.

Recognition

Within the introduction of the concept of lifelong learning, the accreditation of prior experience, learning or work has been present in Slovenia. In the mid-90s, the idea was to establish centres for recognition, validation and accreditation in every statistical region of Slovenia. It seems the idea was too radical, and such centres were not introduced. There was more or less unanimous opposition from the formal education system. Nevertheless, work went on (accreditation, validation, certification, national vocational qualifications) and its results were tested in programmes of non-formal learning. In the process of Slovenia’s accession to the European Union, the results of the projects were used in the Phare MOCCA project (Modernisation of Curricula, Certifications and Assessment

in Vocational Education of Youth and Adults), which was a joint programme of the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. The conclusion of the Phare MOCCA programme meant the introduction of national vocational qualifications by the certificate system. A law on NVQs was passed in 2000, amended in 2003 and again in 2006. At the moment, national vocational qualifications constitute a framework, not a system. Qualifications are only valid in the labour market and in almost all cases financial recognition of a qualification is left to the will of the employer. In two cases, the collective agreement of social care and the road transport sector, national vocational qualifications are in 3rd (moderately demanding work) and 4th (demanding work) place on the pay-roll list, and are financially equivalent to salaries given to those who gain qualification through education.

As pointed out earlier, NVQs are not a system but a framework. When a person obtains national vocational qualification it is not equal to the level of education or qualification obtained through the education system. With respect to accreditation and validation, Slovenia intends to work along the lines of the European Qualification Framework.

Conclusion

After 1991 and the plebiscite when Slovenia became an independent state with a political system of proportional representation, the education system faced and still faces rigorous change in terms of organisation as well as content. Not only are these changes the result of political and economic changes, but also the result of changes in professional and scientific views and paradigms. This is a logical continuation of development and further changes, and not only their end result.

Adult education represents a broad and complex field where formalised and very structured forms of education, leading to certificates and degrees, are included, as well as non-structured and non-formal forms, in which adults enrol because of their wish to acquire various kinds of knowledge for their personal and professional growth and development. This complexity and dispersion of the adult education field is mirrored in the diverse network of educational institutions dealing with adult education, as well as in various types and forms of educational programmes in which adults participate.

As for adult education, the most significant achievement in the field in the last ten years was

the adoption of the Adult Education Act (1996) and later the adoption of the Resolution on the National Plan of Adult Education until 2010 by the Parliament of Slovenia (June 2004). The Resolution systematically governs adult education in the country. The document is implemented through annual programmes of adult education. Realisation of the plan is reported annually to the Government and biannually to Parliament.

The policy has accepted the term and uses it in various policy papers as "lifelong learning" and "lifelong education". But looking at what the phrases refer to, it can be seen that lifelong learning mostly refers to adult education.

Therefore, there are many challenges ahead, the first of which is the realization of a lifelong learning strategy and its operational plan where the foreseen activities and partnerships will be elaborated. Within this strategy there is also the question of recognition, validation, certification and equality of qualifications gained through the school programme. There is also the question of coordination of various lifelong learning activities to achieve greater synergy. All these endeavours will certainly be carried out in line with the latest strategic documents at the EU level, i.e. the communication "Adult Learning: It is never too late to learn" (COM(2006) 614 final) and the "Action Plan on Adult Learning: It is always a good time to learn" (COM(2007) 558 final).

Secondly, there is a need to achieve real social partnerships in education as such. Without these partnerships, lifelong learning will remain an educational matter. Concerning adult education, the biggest challenge is how to retain the level of provision (legal, financial, programmatic) which has been achieved so far. All the results that Slovenia can point to arose from the mid-90s onwards.

However, the fact is that adult education is growing irrepressibly in depth and breadth. It is present in the workplace, at home and in the local community, in all places where people at all levels shape their lives. But it is of vital importance to all of us that lifelong learning become the real need of every individual and that the learning society become a reality. This is truly the greatest challenge to our society.

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