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NEEDS AND TRENDS IN SLOVENIAN ADULT EDUCATION

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In Slovenia we all remember not-to-distant times when attempts were made at extending initial education beyond schooling with its fundamental element of compulsion, its predominant goal of socialization, its authoritarian teacher-taught relationship, its curriculum restricted to what sponsors (mainly the State) rather than learners wished. Certainly such adult education is far from freedom, lack of institutionalization, great responsiveness to changes, etc., what has always been considered as characteristics of adult education. Nevertheless, at some time or at some point of its development, such adult education was not, inconceivable, in any of our countries.

In fact, the initial education and adult education in particular in our country were by and large meeting less the needs of students and adult students and much more the needs of the State. In those days in former adult education was restricted to basic education, vocational education, para-military socio-political education, in form, topics and function very close to initial education. Moreover, adult education was mostly second-chance leading to low scale jobs and there was only very little *general informal education or education for life*.¹ An exception, however, was an attempt at introducing the so called *School for parents*. The prospect of achieving lifelong education by the extension of the initial education would have been remote even if it had been attempted.

One can easily understand the described situation, if one bears in mind that those were the times of standardized industrial production, producing standardized products for massive consumption: the times of production and consumption regulated and planned ahead, and the times of stable, politically centralized, pyramidal societies. In addition to that, those days were characterized by a relative social and political continuity and supervision. Why is this important to mention? Whenever a society is stable, pyramid ally organized, centralized, supervised by a number of mechanisms and structures, etc., the adult education is responsive mostly to the needs of the society and its structures and less to the needs of the individuals, the latter arising mostly from interruptions, transitions and changes in one's personal life and or in society.

¹ General informal education meaning education for personal interest and development, education for social action and changes .

This period in the development of Slovenian adult education comprises the time from the end of the Second World War and the birth of the socialist state Yugoslavia to the establishment of the new sovereign state - Slovenia in 1991. The general political and ideological conditions affecting adult education were typical of a socialist state and did not change much throughout the period. The old tradition of cultural pedagogy and education for personal development was obliterated for political reasons. The principal social values marking the direction of adult education development were: production, productivity, labour, industry, political activism and Marxist ideology. Very soon (1950) culture was completely separated from education.

Educational programmes of this period can be divided into three groups:

- socio-political education
- vocational and professional education
- general education

Each of these areas had a special socio-political and financial-economic status, the differences exceeding the issue of content. The state financed, primarily, political education, carried out by »workers' universities«, and the courses run within political organisations. A new type of a political secondary school was also established, which helped people to quick social and economic rise and promotion to leading positions.

Vocational and professional adult education and continuing professional education (which gained in importance in the late sixties) were mostly organised by industrial and other organizations for their employees. These organisations paid for formal education courses of their staff. Every work organisation allocated a certain percentage of its revenue (2-4%) for education of its staff. Professional education courses were held either at workers' universities or in the educational centres at the premises of work organisations or else within adult education units attached to regular schools. The allocation of funds, raised as a training levy decreed by law, remained questionable throughout the period. If it was not spent on education of workers, the money was used for organisation of excursions and celebrations. Training and education had - compared to other functions in industrial and other organisations, commercial or technical – a very low status. An engineer who joined trainers immediately lost in status, which was a reflection of the prevailing social conditions and the established hierarchy of values.

The situation today has changed considerably. The well-fare state has been slowly withdrawing and social, political and economic changes are tremendous, inducing

important cultural changes in lives of our citizens.² The so called “transitional demands” were imposed on our countries regardless of our history and culture, which consists an immense break with the past. Moreover, none of ex-socialist countries could not get affected by *world wide changes of all kinds* like: *neoliberalism, privatization of human health, privatization of knowledge, privatization of the access to information, globalization and social sufferings it imposes, privatization of what used to be public, the arrival of the so called Mc Donald culture, computerization etc.* Moreover, there has been an important *shift from common, collective, to individual*. It is therefore understandable that adult education trends reflect mostly the needs of the individuals and to a lesser extent only the needs of the state. As a result of it, more and more we are talking about what is personal. i.e. *adult learning* and less what is common, socially organized i.e. about *adult education*.

All these social, cultural, political and economic changes have brought about important new individual and social subgroups’ needs in adult education. And what is more, their diversity and their number have increased so much that the state is not a position to meet them.

Taking into account the above changes and the present situation in Slovenia, I am going, to the extent of my knowledge and on the basis of my experience introduce you, not so much to the system of adult education in Slovenia, but to **the needs and the trends in this field**. And also to what I would call ***the right of any adult to have access to education***. Namely, *it is easier to talk about each grown-up individual and his or her right to education than to focus upon the phenomenon of life-long education*. Why so? Because experience has shown that whenever in different settings life-long education is mentioned it is generally accepted that everybody knows what life-long education is. We think that we all know what we are talking about. But in fact, most of the time, we still think exclusively of formal school education and formal adult education or informal adult education related to work.. We easily forget, as far as adults are concerned, that education of adults is for adults regardless of their age and social status There is a tendency, for instance, to forget about elderly workers over forty whose access to education is often denied, people about to retire in need of pre-retirement education, people in the third age following the retirement or being out of work, having withdrawn from paid work, people in the fourth life period in the state of dependency, social groups and categories of people living at the societal margin like functionally illiterate, rural population especially women etc. Functional illiteracy, among other, is a result of this social injustice.

Democratization of Adult Education in Slovenia

² Culture is what certain groups of people have absorbed being at the same time responsive to the achievements of the present days.

Democratization has been best shown in the area of *general informal adult education* carried out by (1) a network of associations, like the Third Age Universities, (2) a network of institutions like folk universities, (3) a network of study circles supported by the Andragogic Centre of Slovenia (4) The Andragogic Summer School in the field of community education, (5) in the field of Basic education for the functionally illiterate (6) by Centres for Autonomous Learning (7) etc.

When in 1991 Slovenia separated from Yugoslavia, the process of democratization of adult education intensified. It would be inaccurate to pretend that it started only after this date. Some trends in adult education were namely announcing the future political changes. Thus The Third Age University movement in Slovenia came into being. This was the first vast civil and educational movement, through which (Andragogic Society of Slovenia and Department of Andragogy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana, or to be exact a number of friends and colleagues) we were trying to introduce changes into formal education, focusing on the individual, his or her learning and life, re-establishing the value of voluntary work of OLDER PEOPLE and other social groups, changing the public images of the elderly, changing the understanding of the role of education in one's life. In 1984 it was for the first time that we gained public attention to the need of general adult education. Nowadays, there are third age universities in 20 Slovenian towns, one in Zagreb and one in Belgrade with about 10.000 students in Slovenia and more than 1000 mentors, tutors, teachers.. Nowadays it has become a movement intended for all those in the third life period, or state who do not work for living, who do not have paid work, and in some places these universities have changed into intergenerational structures. Their contribution to the image of the learning adult and especially to the role of culture in education in our country has been very important. Moreover, the Third Age University was the first to introduce study circles in Slovenia.

1. Networks of associations - Slovenian Third Age University the very first attempt at the democratisation of adult education

Several reasons prompted the founding of the Third Age University in Slovenia. Its origins date back to the creation in 1984 in the Centre for Foreign Languages, Ljubljana, of the first study circle (the French language studz course) for the retired, led by the mentor Dušana Findeisen. In the mid eighties aspirations towards democratisation of Slovenian society and education became increasingly pronounced, coinciding with the emerging "political spring" of nations in socialist countries. Repressive policy of the regime's rightest frantion whose pressure from 1976 forward concentrated in particular on the school system, education, importation of foreign literature and persecution of intellectuals, left the retired unaffected,

thus allowing more room for action and, ultimately, for the creation of the Third Age University.

The democratisation of education in Slovenia can therefore be said to have actually started with study circles at the Third Age University. They brought the idea of "edutainment" (education with joy) on the Slovenian social and cultural scene and encouraged individual educational and cultural pursuits. Adults other than pensioners, as well as children in the schooling system, thus had an opportunity to see functioning an individual centered education that starts from the student and is adjusted to him, in contrast with the state-set programmes of instruction and educational coercion prevailing in their immediate environment.

One of the reasons for the foundation of the Third Age University was the growing awareness among the public of the need for lifelong education. As there had been no lifelong education intended for people in later life, the implementation of the concept of education for OLDER PEOPLE considerably changed the view of it.

Another pertinent reason was the need to prevent social exclusion and marginalisation of pensioners and to give them an opportunity to go on with their active and socially participative life after their retirement.

A rather formal reason for the foundation of the Third Age University was a rapid increase in the number of pensioners and a sharp downward shifting (down to the age of 45) of the early retirement age. Slovenia has today 530.000 pensioners out of its total population of two million.

Close long-standing contacts between the Adult Education Department of the Ljubljana Faculty of Philosophy and experts in other European and North American countries and UNESCO have provided an opportunity to follow the development of adult education elsewhere. In this respect, the French and German experience and attainments in third age education have been invaluable.

The Third Age University was formally founded in 1985 within a non-governmental voluntary organisation called the Adult Education Society of Slovenia. The activity of the University was carried out through forms of voluntary work which during the nineties won social support in the newly created state, and in line with the European endeavours for promoting self-organisation, voluntary work and the setting up of societies in former socialist countries.

The foundation triggered off an avalanche of spontaneous reactions by mentors and students. The number of the applicants grew so rapidly that it was difficult to handle. The media, to which the education of pensioners appeared a peculiar phenomenon, gave the event prominent coverage in TV and radio programs, newspaper reports ... The news about the foundation of the Third Age University was spreading fast, changing the attitude to and prejudices against the elderly, opening up the possibilities for a new quality of life, new ambitions and new prospects for the elderly.

Structure and Organisation of Slovenian Third Age University

The U3A was founded in Ljubljana and that is where the coordination and development service for the entire country started operating. The activity of the university began with a one-year training of prospective mentors. Shortly afterwards third age universities were opened in Maribor and Velenje, followed by smaller towns in other parts of the country. Today the Network Slovenian Third Age University includes 19 universities and is joined each year by new members. Students attending study circles number more than 10.000. As heads of programmes endeavour to maintain the original quality of educational work (small groups, close interpersonal relations, active forms of education), waiting lists are a common occurrence at all third age universities. Qualified mentors and adequate premises are searched for concurrently. Programmes are expanded gradually and carefully, and new study circles are formed only after the necessary conditions have been secured.

In organisational terms, the Third Age University is now operating within the Slovenian Society for Education of Third Age in the framework of which other forms of education are also being developed, such as pre-retirement education, leisure-time education and inter-generational tandem education where OLDER PEOPLE represent an inexhaustible source for the implementation of lifelong education for young people as well.

Study circle is the basic organisational cell. Experts have chosen this democratic form of education in small, intimate groups after the model of Swedish study circles and socio-cultural animation as practised in France. What is original, however, is the network of *amateurs*, chosen students issuing from each study circle, working on a voluntary basis for the benefit of their group and for the university as a whole.

One of the study circles is responsible for lining with media, covering various issues related to the living of the elderly. Some of the study circles, however, have been concentrating on the education for voluntary work and social inclusion.

are not the only organisational form. There are others, like educational camps, summer university, study trips, cultural tourism, lectures, occasional seminars, etc.

Structure of Activity of the Society for Third Age Education

SLOVENIAN SOCIETY FOR THIRD AGE EDUCATION

THE THIRD AGE UNIVERSITY OF SLOVENIA

local 3rd age university local 3rd age university local 3rd age university local ... 3rd age university

- PRE-RETIREMENT EDUCATION
 - INTER-GENERATIONAL TANDEM EDUCATION
 - EDUCATION OF MENTORS
 - EDUCATION OF PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH OLDER PEOPLE
 - EDUCATION OF OLDER PEOPLE FOR VOLUNTARY WORK
 - SUMMER RESIDENTIAL THIRD AGE UNIVERSITY
 - PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR STUDENTS OF ADULT EDUCATION SCIENCES
 - INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EXCHANGES
 - RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY
 - PUBLIC CAMPAIGNING
 - PUBLISHING
-

A study circle comprises 10-14 students interested in the same subject. They join in of their own free will and choose the field of study in accordance with their own inclinations. The circle is led by the mentor. One of the students assumes the role of animateur, maintains contacts with other study circles and the administration, and attends to the implementation of ideas and suggestions for more active forms of study. If circumstances so require, communication between the mentor and the study circle goes via the animateur. Information flow along formal and informal lines. The students and the animateur meet outside the study course too.

Quality of Education

Close interpersonal relations, curiosity and satisfaction with the progress attained are common to all study circles. The circles function as primary social groups, students displaying a marked sense of belongingness, mutual care and shared joy. Courses take place once a week, and outside them students associate with each other according to their preferences. Judging by research data, study circles function as relatively closed groups. They are not open to other study circles or joint services. Links between different study circles are established mainly through those students who attend several circles and through joint evening lectures, joint excursions and other occasional forms of companionship. The latter are rather superficial in nature (Krajnc, Findeisen, Šantej, 1992).

Research shows that mentors find great personal satisfaction in working with study circles. It is psychologically rewarding and enriching work through which they brace for efforts required at their regular workplace, in the family and in public life. Students and mentors are both eager to extend their engagement at the Third Age University over a longer period. First generation students (from the year 1984) still keep in touch with the University. Their knowledge of the French language had so improved by the year 1996 that they were able to translate Slovenian poetry into French. There are almost no dropouts of study circles, for study becomes a way of life for the attendants (Mijoč, Findeisen, Krajnc, 1994).

Years spent in study circles perceptibly influence personal growth and development of new traits in some students. Thus, for example, they become more self-confident and self-assertive, their attitude to the environment and their self-perception change, their ambitions and the ability to set goals increase, and they develop new interests. Close interpersonal relations in study circles leave deeper traces, too. Students often recognise that they have learnt things they never believed they would master (Findeisen, 1977).

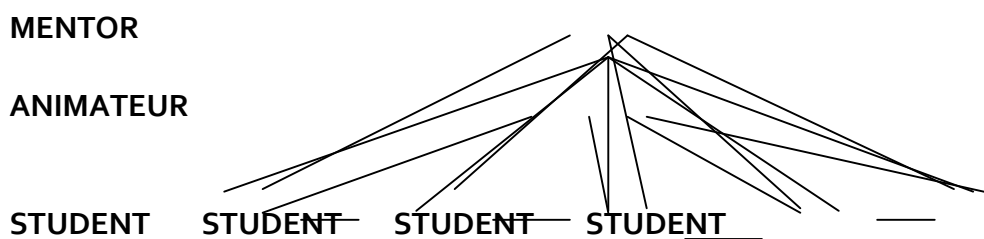
Achievement Evaluation

The age of students at the Third Age University ranges between 45 and 85. Candidates aged between 85 and 92 appear only rarely. The evaluation of individual study circles has revealed that despite their age old people learn foreign languages very quickly if the mentor does not rely on mechanical memorising but on a complex perception associated directly with personal experience. An important factor in the study of languages is the motivation to learn a language and continue studying it, using informal, individual sources and learning modes such as listening to the radio, watching foreign TV programmes, travelling and experiencing the native language and cultural environments, visiting exhibitions, reading foreign magazines, establishing contacts with foreign sources via the

internet etc. The results achieved by old people sometimes stand comparison with the results of four-year language study in primary schools where foreign languages are taught as compulsory subjects (Findeisen, 1997).

The fields of knowledge which students at the Third Age University in Slovenia are interested in studying are similar to those in other countries.

Study circle organisation chart:



People change their view of the world and life upon retirement. They look inwardly, taking stock of their unrealised ambitions and long-cherished interests. The environment changes rapidly and in order to cope with it they must understand it, otherwise they would feel even more insecure. These considerations largely determine the choice of educational programmes. Desirous to enhance their abilities for communication with the world, OLDER PEOPLE often study foreign languages, learn how to improve proficiency in their mother tongue, attend study circles for creative writing, correspondence and journalism, and gain skills in pottery, sculpture, painting, music, dance and ornamentation. Through these various activities they seek to impart to others the wealth of their personal life experiences.

Another group of programmes has developed out of a common wish to understand the world better. Interest in the study of history and geography is perceptible. The art history programme records the largest enrolment. Other study circles within this group deal with psychological and sociological topics, interpersonal relations, futurology, computer technology, philosophy, parasciences and mysticism. The range of programmes is very wide and depends on the availability of appropriate mentors, i.e. those who are prepared to cooperate with students in study circles as closely as they expect them to.

Guidelines for Further Development

In the opinion of associates of the Third Age University, the major tasks ahead for the University are: to expand programmes by including natural sciences and technology, to establish closer cooperation with the local environment, to promote the role of OLDER PEOPLE as teachers in inter-generational programmes (OLDER PEOPLE as an untapped well for lifelong education), to expand the network and open new third age universities in localities where they do not exist and, given the growing needs of this segment of the population, to create conditions for a larger number of prospective students to be admitted to the University.

Another task would be to set up a national resource centre pertaining to the field of education in later life and a national consultancy service. Moreover through this centre other new structures for living and working of OLDER PEOPLE are to be set up. And there is also a need for creating an exchange link for elderly people interested in temporary work.

By introducing new organisational forms such as Seniors' Club (advisors and experts), the service for periodic activities, and various projects involving inter-generational linking and cooperation we expect to provide greater possibilities for the application and public recognition of knowledge and self-actualisation of older people.

2. A network of institutions - folk high schools and the like

As concerns the network of institutions, it has been found that they are either educational or in a fair number of cases other, i.e. non-educational institutions whose primary activity is not an educational one. Among these institutions there are: folk high schools or former workers' universities, adult education centers, secondary schools dealing with the education of adults colleges and universities, research institutes, public administration institutions, drivers' schools, chamber of commerce, museums, political parties

From the aspect of education of adults, the nineties are a very dynamic and eventful period. Some programmes and forms of education are disappearing, others are springing up. We are witnessing an unprecedented proliferation of adult education providers of widely differing levels of quality.

Political changes occurred suddenly, giving rise to economic and social changes. Formerly stagnating and static, the society found itself in a whirlpool of abrupt changes, conflicting

trends, uncertainties and experimentation. With the creation of the new state in 1991 there arose new needs and possibilities for the education of adults. People were facing new situations and new problems, and the knowledge needed to cope with them was in short supply far and wide. The explosion of adult education in Slovenia actually started in the early nineties. Different types of former institutions for adult education reacted differently to the new state of affairs.

Workers' universities, the only public network of adult education institutions, immediately changed name to folk high schools thus emphasising their long tradition and historical connection with folk high schools in Europe. Their programmes on the whole remained unchanged. By the year 1995 the number of folk high schools dropped to 31 thereby leaving many a municipality without its folk high school as the central local institution for adult education (Klemenčič, 1995, p. 67). According to 1998 data folk high schools account for only 16% of the institutions providing education for adults, excluding societies and other non-institutional forms of adult education (Rems, 1998, part 3, p. 1).

With the adoption of a new legislation the number of municipalities rose to 150, with the tendency to rise further since some areas continue to insist on having their own municipal governments. The development of local self-government depends to a large extent on the pace at which education is adapting itself to individual local needs and conditions. Folk high schools have a long way to cover before they become able to keep pace with the social, economic and political development in municipalities, the democratisation of the society, the transfer of social power to the local level and the strengthening of local self-reliance.

Education and training centres within institutions were best developed in large enterprises like Iskra, Sava Kranj, Lek, Železarna Štore, TAM Maribor, Krka, Litostroj, Peko Tržič, Meblo Nova Gorica and others. A great many enterprises which once employed thousands of workers and had very developed education and training centres do not exist today, others have either diminished the scope of or completely "frozen" their educational activity due to difficulties in production. As a result, the number of education and training centres in enterprises has been sharply decreasing. This trend runs contrary to the growing need for specific knowledge and supplementary employee education, i.e. the education that is peculiar to centres in enterprises and, consequently, cannot easily be provided elsewhere. In 1982 education and training centres numbered 98, to drop to 39 in 1995 (Klemenčič, 1995, p. 67). In the meantime, the Association of Education and Training Centres ceased to exist. According to 1998 data, education and training centres currently account for only 9% of total adult education institutions (Rems, 1998, part 3, p. 1).

In the field of employee education the declining role of education and training centres is being counterposed in large measure by the growing role of professional societies, various

associations, scientific libraries, professional literature and reviews. Better educated employees avail themselves of training abroad or learning via the internet. The use of computers in education plays an increasingly important role.

Although people still lack adequate formal education, the number of students in regular schools' departments for adults has been declining during the nineties. According to 1998 data, units for adults at secondary schools account for 15% of all adult education institutions (Rems, 1998, part 3, p. 1). In 1995 departments for adults existed at 56 secondary schools (Klemenčič, 1995, p. 67). Adults mostly enroll in vocational schools. Although the number of students attending grammar school programmes is gradually increasing, the value of a general-education secondary school at the present stage of development is not yet widely and properly recognised in Slovenia. People appear to believe that by enrolling in the evening grammar school they set themselves too distant goals (study at the university). Therefore they prefer to enroll in a vocational school, which seems an easier attainable goal, even though most of them later decide to continue education.

There is an increasing number of younger adults (aged 15-24) who enroll in secondary schools to complete secondary education which they had discontinued for various reasons at some point of regular schooling. Aware that without the secondary education they have no chance to find employment, they return to school to resume and finish formal education. The possibility for adults to acquire secondary education is provided to a certain extent by folk high schools, an advantageous circumstance for areas which have no secondary schools. Some secondary schools for adults are operating within private adult education organisations, e.g. the catering school within Tolminka of Tolmin, the private hairdresser school VITEZA in Ljubljana, the secondary commercial school, school for shop assistants and school for lower managers within the MEMORY private centre of Dutovlje, the secondary secretarial school and three one-year post-secondary programmes (for business secretaries, sales officers, accountants) within the DOBA Educational Institute of Maribor. The number of those attending formal education programmes at private adult education organisations has been growing fast as people assess that these organisations excel others in terms of flexibility, individual approach to students and the amount of effort invested in bringing the education of their students to a successful close.

In the second half of this decade the pattern of concentration of education providers remains on the whole unchanged. Thus Ljubljana region accounts for 40%, Maribor region for 10%, Gorenjska for 10%, Celje region for 7% and the remaining regions for much lesser percentages of programmes for adults. The network of units for adults mirrors the network of regular secondary schools. The highest concentration of both is in Ljubljana, whereas educational needs of smaller regions are catered to less adequately.

Slovenia has no open university, nor is there a college or advanced school that admits adults who have not completed formal secondary education. The pressure on adults to acquire secondary education therefore is twofold: they must meet both the increasingly complex job requirements and the requirements for admission to further learning. Procedures for the recognition of informally acquired education are possible, but have not been introduced in practice. So adults, regardless of how much knowledge they possess, are forced to return to secondary school programmes. Such formalism seriously affects the motivation of adults for learning. Mentors complain that some students only come to collect certificates and are not genuinely interested in gaining knowledge. Students, for their part, complain that programmes are too "schooled", too similar to regular programmes of instruction and unadapted to the specific needs of individual groups of students and the specifics of adult learning.

Private Organisations for Adult Education

Much like other activities, adult education in Slovenia started to privatise the moment the new state was created in 1991. Private institutions were spreading rapidly, bringing in a wide diversity of types and quality of programmes. The demand for knowledge was so acute that it became a market commodity. The debate on whether education should be a profit or non-profit activity is going on *ad infinitum* and opinions on whether to market the educational programme and whether it should proceed from the existing needs of the population remain divided. Some defend education as a universal spiritual value and a humanising process, others treat it as a predominantly economic category. So Slovenia too has its hodgepodge of post-modern concepts of education.

Over a few years private organisations' educational offer exceeded all other networks of adult education institutions. In 1998 private organisations accounted for 38% of adult education institutions, the next largest group (folk high schools) for only 16%, and others for much less. In the Ljubljana region, where the concentration of the intellectual potential is the highest, the number of private adult education organisations has reached 48% of all the related institutions in the region. Private adult education institutions also play a very important role in regions which are the least responsive educationally – Kraško-notranjska (60%), Posavska (50%) and Zasavska (50%). The emergence of private institutions contributed to the decentralisation of adult education. For people in areas where adult education activities once barely existed they opened up new educational possibilities within reach of home (Rems, 1998, part 3, p. 1).

Numerous as they are, private institutions now play the leading role in the system of adult education in Slovenia. As they increase in number, their role only strengthens. Because of

the lack of coordination in decision-making by the owners of individual private institutions, such institutions cannot follow any uniform educational policy of the state. The Ministry of Education can exert some influence, at least by promoting the programmes of private institutions which it finances, but such programmes represent only a small part of the total. The number of those who pay for their own education is increasing as most of the educational programmes must be paid for by students themselves. Endeavours to provide for every individual an education voucher or credit which he would use in accordance with his needs and interests are only just beginning. As for other forms of education crediting, we do not know of any of them. Is adult education getting out of the public hand? What about the uniform national educational policy in a situation where private institutions prevail? Is the government losing control of adult education? People are glad that the supply of educational services is expanding since the need for knowledge is great and acute and the government is unlikely to make a move in the field of adult education soon.

The privatisation of adult education and private adult education institutions have brought along some advantages:

- greater diversity of educational subjects and offers
- greater flexibility
- heightened responsiveness to and faster pace of introduction of innovations
- personalisation of education
- closer relations between mentors and students
- accelerated attaining of knowledge and greater efficiency of education
- extension of adult education to new fields (personality development, communication, family role education).

It can be said, then, that private adult education institutions have been the motive force of the development of adult education over the past decade.

3. The network of study circles

The study circle movement was conceptualized by some of the founders of the third age university movement, and it has been supported, developed and carried on by the Andragogic Centre of Slovenia. There have been some 1500 study circles in existence over the country touching upon a great variety of topics.

The Network of study circles has developed immensely from 1993/94 on. At the beginning there were 36 study circles with 316 participants. In 1994 /95 their number was increased to

83 study circles with 796 participants in 1996/ 97 1179 participants were enrolled in these circles.

Slovenian study circles started as a network in 1993 share common features with the Scandinavian ones: they are a planned, structured, decentralised form of informal adult education. They are accessible on local level and to the greatest extent possible, built into the individual's everyday life. (Drofenik, 2000).

The first study circles, however, were formed before as the basic educational form of the Third Age University back in 1984 (Krajnc, Findeisen, Šantej, 1992). The quest of less rigid, democratic forms of education started with the first intimations of the "political spring" when the state was still holding most of education under strong repression. Study circles of ten to twelve members with mentors and animateurs worked in a relaxed atmosphere and with joy. Education permeated the lives of students in and out of study circles.

In 1992 Nena Mijoč, the founder of the 2nd Third Age University in Slovenia, and her associates at the Andragogic Centre of Slovenia launched the research and development project Study Circles and Sociocultural Animation. The objective was to extend study circles as a specific form of education to all adult population and, in particular, smaller communities in Slovenia. The team drew on the knowledge and experience of Swedish study circles and the socio-cultural animation societies, institutions and movements in France. In 1993 Paul Lengrand visited Slovenia and personally assessed the activity of study circles. As the overall social climate was very favourable, a real social movement started off (Mijoč, Findeisen, Krajnc, 1994).

Training of mentors and the promotion of the new network of study circles were organised within the Andragogic Centre of Slovenia. Some circles started operating within different societies, folk high schools and private educational institutions, others quite independently, on the local initiative of those concerned. A specific feature of study circles in Slovenia was that the goal of education was always linked with an ultimate practical goal. People studied what they wanted to engage in, perform or organise later, e.g., to prepare a tourist-guide book, to start a new museum, to prepare an exhibition, to organise the construction of a petrol station or a tennis court, to open a photographic exhibition etc. The idea was for people to learn how to correlate their education with their actual needs as closely as possible. In other words, to help them become more autonomous and self-reliant instead of expecting their affairs to be resolved by someone from above. This goal was of foremost importance to the entire psychosocial shift in the views and attitudes of people. The sociocultural animation was, hopefully, to bring about a change in the behaviour of people accustomed to the totalitarian system.

The response was massive and spontaneous. There was no doubt that study circles had met the needs of the place and time.

With a view to strengthening the network of study circles, ensuring high quality standard of work and spreading the concept of education among people, we started training mentors and leaders of study circles at a local level. Study circles with trained mentors received financial support from the Ministry of Education and Sports. That is why only the records for the Ministry-subsidised study circles exist. The number of study circles was growing by leaps and bounds from 1993 until 1996, to start stagnating after the inflow of funds subsided and genuine incentives for sociocultural animation began to give out. In 1993 study circles recorded 318 participants and by the year 1996 the number increased to 1202. The number of study circles increased from 36 initially (in 1993) to 125 (in 1996). Private institutions ran 37% of total study circles, folk high schools 30%, societies 12% and other organisations 19%. The number of private institutions engaging in education grew at the fastest pace, whereas the number of other providers began to stagnate as early as in the second year. Private institutions showed more enthusiasm and greater interest in new forms of adult education and sociocultural animation (Černoša, 1998).

The popularity and attractiveness of new forms of adult education gave rise to the propagation of study circles that had no formally trained mentors or "the Minister's money". Such circles are still cropping up and thriving as a form of companionship of people who have a common interest in a specific kind of knowledge. They obtain the necessary information on how to set up a circle from previous circles. On the whole, the basic concept of a study circle and sociocultural animation is familiar to the Slovenian public and has its multiplicative effect. They form on an individual initiative and are not recorded anywhere, just like their architects had meant them to.

Individual study circles promote their activity and achievements through public appearances, TV and radio reports and participation in exhibitions and presentations. They are developing into spontaneous forms of companionship and learning in small groups.

The democratization of adult learning has been for some years now celebrated by the Adult Learners' Week supported by the Andragogic Centre of Slovenia. It has become an important national and international event supported by most various institutions, societies, etc and what is most important by the media.

4. The Andragogic Summer School for Local Development in the field of community education

Community education in Slovenia has only started to develop. Industrial development has put an end to the old ways of learning from each other in villages and neighbourhoods. Under the socialist regime local communities had no chance to prosper since they had no political power and decision-making was concentrated at the top of the state. As conditions changed, the need for community education increased sharply, as did the role of adult education in local development.

With the change of the political and economic system in Slovenia adult education was assigned new social roles. The relationship between the individual and society has changed. Old habits and patterns of behaviour no longer serve the purpose. Once dependent on decisions coming from above ("dependents"), individuals and communities today are impelled to be independent and self-reliant, to assume responsibility and take correct decisions.

People are generally wary of civilian education since their memories of the imposed, politics-dominated education are still fresh. But they also feel the need to change. They hate collectivism and are discovering the merits of individualism. With such attitudes it is difficult to develop community education which by definition covers the whole range of knowledge and skills needed for quality life in a community, including self-knowledge which only becomes meaningful when shared with others. Even job-oriented education is not an end in itself, but a support to an individual's dialogue with the community.

Community Development Educational Project

In order to bring adult education and the needs and problems of people in a local community into as close, beneficial and successful a relationship as possible, a group of educators and researchers (Ličen, Findeissen, Govekar, Jelenc, Krajnc), under the management of the Pedagogy and Adult Education Department of the Faculty of Philosophy of Ljubljana, in 1994 started a development project on community education. The project includes the following segments:

- development of the concept of community education adapted to the cultural and social circumstances in Slovenia,
- cooperation with community education specialists from Ireland and England, the countries in which community education has a tradition and is well developed,
- promotion of community education through articles, public lectures and cooperation with the media,
- case study of a selected municipality and cooperation in the development of the experimental municipality,

- training of adult education specialists for the spreading of community education across Slovenia (Summer School for Adult Educators),
- publication of articles in professional journals and preparation of a manual,
- mentored home study for mayors
- advanced training abroad and international cooperation.

The aim of the project is to accelerate, develop and enforce a new quality of adult education, support local development, assert new social roles of adult education, train experts for adult education and development at a local level, and bring community education to the status it enjoys in developed countries.

Andragogic Summer School for Local Development

The Andragogic Summer School for Local development was started six years ago. introducing *community education* for all social groups of local inhabitants joining them in a common vision of the development of their settlement. The aim of the Andragogic Summer School initiated by the members of the Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy is to not only to disseminate knowledge but also to be active for the development of the community in which the School has been set. As a result of six Andragogic Summer Schools the local community of Ajdovščina has experienced several changes: cultural tourism has started developing through the establishment of a local educational and tourist agency, the local high folk school has expanded its activities, a Third Age university has been established, the study circles movement expanded, the number of adult education students from this region has increased, many new societies have been established supporting local identity and culture.

Thus the Summer School for Adult Educators (APŠ) is an annual seminar established in 1995 and uniting, above all, educators interested in development and innovations. Each year the School hosts an internationally renowned foreign specialist. Group activity, workshops and communication with the population of the municipality in which the APŠ is held are conducted by domestic experts. Field research and interpretation of the results, talks with the hosts and cooperation with the media are carried out by the participants under the guidance of mentors. The material of the School is published in the national review for adult education *Andragoška spoznanja* (Studies in Adult Education) and thus made available to the general public.

Over the years dynamic forms of interactive education have developed through contacts of the APŠ participants with the local practice and different groups of local population. The School selects a different target group each year - young uneducated and unemployed people, the elderly, the unemployed, the functionally illiterate, the employed, members of

different societies etc. In this way community education is dealt with step by step and by segments (Krajnc, 1997/2).

Interactive education is a form of encroachment upon the immediate environment. All the participants are learners. Even the hosts discover details about themselves of which they were not aware before. Educational programmes for the development of a locality are a result of direct intercourse with the environment. No expert can prepare them by himself. Local people alone can provide him with the details and specifics of their community and assess which jobs have the conditions to develop in their locality.

Contacts with the environment are established at several levels. Educators must be acquainted with local history, cultural tradition and customs. They cooperate with local coordinators and chief representatives of the local culture, social security, health care, government, economy, town-planning, education, small business and the media. They become better acquainted with local conditions when they get in touch with people at their homes, in different societies, at social events and in public places. Programming is very important for the implementation of community education. The contents of programmes are chosen carefully in taking into consideration the specific circumstances of individual localities.

The APŠ has been developing the strategy of community education through identification of the needs of people, selection of the contents (programming) and adaptation of the forms of education to local circumstances (planning). The educators monitor during the year the course of education in a given municipality (evaluation). The development of a locality can be supported by different forms of education: study circles, activity in dramatic clubs, training in commercial companies, activity in societies, preparation of exhibitions, participation in the creation of a new local facility for advanced studies. Contents and forms of education that are unrelated to local conditions are not of much use for the development of a locality.

Understanding community education

Democratisation of a society depends in large measure on decentralisation and the transfer of decision-making and political power to the local level. The number of municipalities in Slovenia has increased. In the amendment to Article 21, the Law on Local Self-Government lays down explicitly that the municipality is "bound to create conditions for the adult education which is of concern to the development of the municipality and to the quality of life of its inhabitants (Novičke newsletter, 1998/12, p. 6). The law, however, needs to be translated into practice. Municipalities need assistance in the implementation of the law, they need a joint concept and professional support for developing education in practice, for sustaining local economic development, for decentralisation of power and

democratisation of social relations. Decentralisation of the supply of education in Slovenia is also badly needed. The supply is the greatest in the Ljubljana region (40%) and in other parts it is only developing. The development of an area is the development of people (Rems, 1998, part I, p. 1).

The previous political system rested on the industry and army as the mainstays of development. People were divided into communities of enterprises and local needs were of minor concern. Given such legacy, the education for local development can only make its way bit by bit. Selling products and inducing people to buy them is becoming more important and more demanding than producing them. So it is people we must bear in mind. The expansion of the tertiary industry is another factor contributing to the growing importance of people, small groups and local environments. While industrial education is declining, education through informal modes, societies and the media within the local community is expanding.

At the time of globalisation and internationalisation people satisfy their need for social identification in a local community. They forge ties with one another, devoting their time and efforts to the immediate environment. Neighbourhood and local community are today what once were the factories which gave thousands of people employment, security and means of survival. Data have persuaded us that identification with the local environment is increasing in Slovenia. People increasingly pay attention to the appearance of their physical environment, seek contacts with neighbours, set up groups and societies of common interest - things which they were not in the habit of doing before. Almost every smaller area (up to 8,000 inhabitants) in Slovenia has its radio station, and medium-size areas have local television studios as well. Local press has the largest reading public and local radio and TV programmes are popular.

Several components of community education, from informal types of learning from each other to more institutionalised and group forms, were developed during the nineties in Slovenia. We have now reached the phase where we should weave all these endeavours into one concept and bolster community education by a planned effort. "Community education is not about the exchange of knowledge alone. We are turning it into a joint endeavour to improve our life, solve some of our common problems, satisfy our interests and needs, and contribute to the development of our community or locality. Through community education we find solutions to our problems in the place in which we live. And it is us who decide, not some distant power" (Findeisen, 1996, p. 27).

The defining feature of a community are the characteristics shared by its members: cultural heritage, tradition, shared identification with the locality or neighbourhood, social ties, solidarity, companionship, joint experience, cooperation in enterprises and societies and

aspirations towards common political power. The key to solving unemployment, migration, economic stagnation, poverty and other problems is in the community itself. Solutions reached outside the community context are short-lived and ineffective. Raising people's consciousness is the first step. Public documents, laws, announcements and information must be written in the language which everybody understands, so that people can learn and participate. In the community knowledge and skills unite, thus enhancing the ability of the community to use the available material and intellectual resources. Community does not leave anyone out. One of the tasks of animators and educators is to prepare people with special needs for participation in the community - the disabled, elderly, young people at the threshold of life, refugees and others. Education prepares different target groups to participate in their own way in the development of their locality and region.

New emergence of community education

Community education first began to expand in smaller communities with the development of new cultural and economic standards in predominantly urbanised villages. The fact that in smaller communities people know one another and have closer mutual relations helps them to faster identify their common interests and needs. People from small communities in Slovenia were mainly employed as unskilled workers in industry and as such became the industry's first redundancies. They are taking great pains to secure existence through various activities - rural tourism, supply of facilities for recreational activities, culture, crafts, catering and tertiary industry. Over the past five years the latter sector has been expanding at a fast pace. In these efforts people rely on one another and are anxious to know what the plans for their community are, what is in store for them in the future. If they knew, they would intensify efforts. Let me quote here a metal worker who set up a home workshop for fine metal fittings for hospitals. Asked what he was lacking the most, he answered: "Knowledge. Nothing but knowledge." Who will awake him to matters that concern him in his region and community? Where will he find the associate with enough knowledge to meet his needs? Not in his village.

In consequence of centralisation of adult education and the nature of the school system in the past, knowledge circulating in smaller communities is rather inadequate. In such circumstances people soon realise that they depend on one another more than those in a developed urban environment. Let me cite a few communities which stand out in terms of the development of community education: Kog; Mengeš, Grajska vas v Savinjski dolini, Radovljica, Ajdovčina, Radlje ob Dravi, Radgona, Dutovlje na Krasu, Tolmin, Ormož. The more events take place at a local level, the more incentive will be to seek knowledge for common solutions.

As an off-spring of the Summer Andragogic School *Spring School of Young Andragogues* has been set up and students of andragogy regularly come to Ajdovščina organizing and performing there educational events. Last year their School was devoted to studying needs of rural female population in terms of living, work and education. This year an event is going to be organized in a village, supporting literacy practices.

6. Basic education for the functionally illiterate

*In the programmes of basic education have been enrolled some 600 participants since 1994 when the project was started. I.e., about 150 per year.. Illiteracy can be considered as personal and social dysfunction, a result of a long lasting social and school differentiation and a result of the industrial way of living and production.*³ The problem of literacy has been addressed, although other terms have been used, by a fair number of concerned individuals in different countries: Condorcet in France, Blaž Kumerdej, Janez Krek in Slovenia, experts like the economist Adam Smith.. Namely, in his *The Wealth of Nations* Smith asked, what would become of people, who would throughout their lives perform the same number of simple tasks over and over again? Would this not lead to the deterioration of their mental faculties? How would one expect over specialized workers to develop a sense of citizenship and a devotion to the common weal?

The level of functional illiteracy, i.e. the number of people who can not understand, read and write simple texts in relation to their everyday life and who do not use reading and writing to improve their own life and life of their community⁴ in Slovenia is high from 40 to 70 % on different levels as concerns verbal, documentary and numeric literacy in men and women. This makes functional literacy a State affair, an affair of different policies, different partners and particulars. It has been recognized that in present economic and political conditions only those countries focusing on the education and literacy of all their inhabitants will be able to advance.

The high level of illiteracy indicates that the access to written culture and culture in general in many countries has been denied to every individual, due to the lack of solidarity, to school and social differentiation or even polarization, to the absence of equal opportunities. Moreover, the relation between the central and local Government on one hand and citizens on the other, the type of relation in which citizens are not seriously considered as partners can end up in hardly understandable messages which in their turn can have an impact on the spread of illiteracy.

³ Emile Durkheim in his doctorate thesis » *The division of Labor in Society*« underlines that certain types of labor, but also of other functions, were allocated to specific groups of people.

⁴ Unesco's definition of illiterate people from the year 1994 which we still consider as very close to our reality

The issue of literacy requires, however, a much less institutionalized approach than the one that has been adopted in Slovenia so far.

In the conditions of the present world developments there is an existing need for an *education of consumers*. So, that they could understand that economy is not whole life. That a consumer should be enlightened, able to choose, negotiate, to co- create his or her consumption. Consumers should also understand that such economic *models of consumption and production* should be introduced as to address all people, and not only those who are involved in the competitive market economy.

Education for active citizenship is still mistaken for former socio-political education. There is little understanding in Slovenia that we are born as a citizen, but that it needs a lot of knowledge and skills and culture to become an active citizens. As Eurodelphy research in which Slovenia participated in 1994 shows, the need for this kind of education is much less expressed than in western European countries.

In 1994 an important step has been made in the field of adult education. The first Slovenian adult education magazine was introduced giving voice not only to professionals but also to the adult education parishioners.

7. Centres for Autonomous Learning

Intent on boosting informal modes of adult education, the Adult Education Centre of Slovenia in 1993 launched a project for the development of centres for autonomous learning. It followed the example of similar centres in England and Denmark and established direct contacts with them. Public places offer multi-media equipment and collections of programmes for autonomous learning which an individual cannot afford at home. At the same time, centres for autonomous learning offer young people the opportunity to meet and discuss matters with other knowledge seekers, to consult and emulate them and thus form the general criteria and standards of learning. Autonomous learning in the centres helps them to overcome the negative effects of social isolation and distance learning. Relationships between users are relaxed and friendly, based on an equal footing and democratic.

The number of centres for autonomous learning grows from year to year. In 1995 there were 5 of them and in 1998 they increased to 26, of which 12 in private institutions, 10 in folk high schools, 2 in a library, 1 in a school centre and 1 in a bookshop. Since the setting up

of centres is contingent on the amount of funds which the Ministry of Education and Sports provides for equipment and other necessary expenses, and these funds are each year limited by the available budget, the remaining 43 institutions that have expressed readiness and the wish to organise centres for autonomous learning will have to wait for some time yet. Centres are founded within folk high schools, private institutions, libraries and bookshops, and at schools. The number of users varies depending on the quality of ambient animation in individual centres and amounts to over 200 annually. The hours the users spend in the centres come to 6,000 a year (Benedik, 1998).

General education prevails. Foreign languages and computer technology are currently the most sought after branches of knowledge in the field of adult education in Slovenia. People also seek to learn history and economics and display interest in learning about entrepreneurship, management and leisure time occupations. Users have wide interests but must confine themselves to what particular centres make available. All centres are equipped with some type of standard multimedia aids for foreign-language learning and constantly enrich their video and CD-ROM collections. Computers, access to the internet and electronic mail are also available (Benedik, 1998).

Centres for autonomous learning are envisaged to also cater for students interested in distance learning by making available at a local level all they need for this mode of education. Distance learning has so far been offered by the faculties of economics and electrical engineering. Correspondence education for adults is traditionally carried out at the secondary-school level.

The users of centres for autonomous learning are people with secondary-school and higher educational backgrounds, women slightly outnumbering men. They are mostly under 30 years of age and half of them are unemployed. Obviously, the needs for education are the greatest in this target group and centres would do well to adapt their services to them by offering answers to questions such as how to identify one's professional aims, how to improve one's chances for employment, what are the key competencies required of man at the present stage of development, how to seek a job, how to improve one's capacity for communication etc. Evidently, the users are desirous of knowing and learning autonomously, but they do not hesitate to seek advice from mentors in the centres. Heads of centres note that users who come to learn regularly throughout the year are not many. More numerous are those who come occasionally to satisfy curiosity, examine conditions for learning or seek specific data and answers. Users who engage in a serious study and are autonomous in their work usually visit the centres several times in succession.

Counselling work in centres for autonomous learning is very important. "Centres in which the personnel occupy themselves with users more intensively record better results"

(Benedik, 1998, p. 4). Deficient and poorly developed intellectual habits and learning techniques, lack of autonomy in learning and diffidence may soon leave a candidate in the lurch. That is where heads of centres play a very important role, for they can help candidates to improve the method and tempo of learning in the process itself, give them coaching and guidance for intervals between visits and thereby help them to overcome difficulties that might cause them to give up learning altogether.

"The development of counselling work is closely associated with the development of centres for autonomous learning and programmes for autonomous and distance learning. Experience confirms that the role of counsellor in the centre is of crucial importance" (Benedik, 1998, p. 8). Experts view the development of counselling work and the training of personnel for counselling, coaching and guidance as a priority task in the further development of the network of centres for autonomous learning.

The network could play a more important social role in the future if it becomes closer connected with distance learning. Centres would then operate within the system and therefore more systematically, instead of being left to the initiatives and wishes of individual users alone. In view of the general shortage of access to the internet at public places and the fact that attempts to introduce cyber-café in Slovenia are only isolated examples, centres for autonomous learning could well perform this service for the public too.

Conclusion and evaluation

Needs and trends in Slovenian adult education reflect social, political and also economic changes accompanied by important changes on the personal level. In the new conditions of living the need for new knowledge and skills is important. It is amazing however that the number of adults involved in the adult education is not adequately high. Nevertheless, important democratization of adult education has brought about new networks focusing on general adult education meeting many existing needs and also generating new ones. The most difficult however remains combating illiteracy, demanding a deinstitutionalised approach and a vast support of partner organizations and of the Government.

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