

Tradition And The Present State Of Intergenerational Education And Learning In Slovenia

Introduction

About intergenerational learning, intergenerational education and community

Structures for intergenerational learning and education are needed in order to re-establish intergenerational ties and intergenerational communities. In Slovenia the revived popularity of community today is being seen as a response to the today's crisis of solidarity. Namely, throughout history relating to others, belonging to community of all generations has been a way to get protection against hardships and to get recognition from the others, to shape one's identity and *to learn from each other*. But, the greater autonomy and freedom, the less we feel indebted to anterior generations and the less they are sensible to the fate of future generations.

Communities can be based on ethnicity, religion, class, or politics, territory, cultural heritage, interests, as they can be based on learning and education. *The nature of intergenerational community is a creation of its members*, and it can not be imposed on them. Thus Cohen(1985) argues that community is to be understood more as *a symbolic structure than a social practice* and attention has been shifted from traditional community as a form of social interaction based on locality to a concern with *meaning and identity*.

Slovenian Tradition of Intergenerational education and learning

In the 19th century, in the times of the constitution of national states, intergenerational learning and education as well as voluntary work were well developed on the today's Slovenian territory. There were reading circles, saving houses, political camps uniting generations and enabling them to learn from each other, get common education and work together towards a common objective. Having a common purpose is still extremely important for the generations learning together. However, this tradition of voluntary work and intergenerational learning

was interrupted during the Second World War. Emergence of communism and consolidation of the socialist State led to the disappearance of civil society following Karl Marx's doctrine that the State should totally and completely take care of the citizens. As a result of it, voluntary and intergenerational learning and educational initiatives were hindered by the State, voluntary initiatives became suspicious and the existing ones were not built bottom up but, on the contrary, were »imposed« on the citizens. In those times voluntary work was mostly limited to collecting donations for the Red Cross, to academic folk art societies, intergenerational voluntary brigades building roads and bridges, etc. Building roads was accompanied by political instructions, a kind of civic education stressing the interdependence of all citizens. Nevertheless, all the so called voluntary and intergenerational activities were considered to be supportive of the then political regime and were of »political« and not civic nature.

To sum up, intergenerational learning, educational and working communities were organised top down as a part of political education, as "intermediate communities" ensuring cohesion of society and the preservation of the existing political regime.

Today's Providers of intergenerational learning, education and training

In Slovenia intergenerational learning, education and training are currently not provided by a wide range of providers. Nevertheless, those who are specialized in education of older adults sooner or later started being interested also in the education of younger adults providing it with the help of different generations as learners and providers of knowledge. Most of them are specialized in the education of older adults which they extended to the education of younger adults: Anton Trstenjak's Institute specialized in programmes for quality ageing and intergenerational co-habitation, Slovenian Philanthropy delivering education for volunteering and cooperation of generations, Slovenian Adult education Institute with the network of study circles, exchange links, Andragogic Summer School run by Faculty of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana in a small locality in the West of Slovenia uniting the inhabitants in common projects. Providers of occasional intergenerational learning are also older people's homes, centres of daily activities of older people, societies of retired professionals, theatres, municipalities, schools,

tertiary educational institution . There are also other societies providing education for all generations (Projekt Človek), Alcoholics Anonymous, Mladinski Ceh, etc. Not all their programmes could be defined as intergenerational though they are meant for older generations to take care of younger generations and the other way round.

Unfortunately during the year of Active Ageing some nation wide initiatives have been set up, which can not be called educational, being more of a promotional character. They promoted learning of ICT skills for older people and volunteering of younger generations for the benefit of the older learners. The "training" sessions lasted only some hours and the publicity leaflets were more against older people and the public image of their abilities (stereotypes like older people are poor learners) etc. The initiative called Symbioza promises something that could not be promised very much reminding us of initiative like "Mandarin in two weeks" etc. Also Slovenian Third Age University set up an intergenerational event uniting primary school students and third age university students in a common activity. A round table, common singing a song which celebrates living etc. In this group of para intergenerational learning events can be inserted also the Third Age Festival celebrating its 10th anniversary this year providing a meeting place for different generations where they can learn about each other. Nevertheless Slovenia still miss real intergenerational learning programmes and therefore we should try to make a clear distinction between what is an intergenerational learning or educational programme and what is not such a programme.

Cultural mediators in museums and other public institutions- and intergenerational educational, training and civic engagement project instigated by Slovenian Third Age University

Slovenian Third Age University network has been developing and has been experimentally implementing a new, comprehensive model, aiming primarily at the education of the elderly for personal growth and voluntary work and civic engagement in general, and simultaneous "education" of the representatives of public institutions to integrate volunteers in their activities. The programme was for

different generations a common one pursuing the same goal and purpose - introduction of new social roles for older people in public institutions and transformig their views and the views of the staf as regards volunteering. After the implementation of the educational and training programme, musems and other public institutions are enabled to integrate highly educated older people as volunteers and older people are able to take on voluntary roles that are far from being traditional since older people's individual culture and newly acquired knowledge and skills are taken into account. Not only do the volunteers fit in the existing institutional structure, but they also contribute to shaping their voluntary role within it. More importantly, this new model comprises also parallel public campaigning for raising public awareness about new social and volunteering roles of the elderly, about intergenerational learning and above all interegenerational co-operation.

This model can be said to be a new major breakthrough in adult education and interegenerational education in Slovenia. Namely, Slovenian Third Age University – together with selected institutions – has been offering opportunities to older adults to learn and to work together with the staff which is composed of different generations . Thus older students ,learn together with other generations and work with them as volunteers in public institutions in the fields of culture, education and health care as well as preserving bio- diversity. Moreover, Slovenian Third Age University offers opportunities to public institutions to experience transformative learning and thus to be closer to their visitors. What makes the difference here? These volunteers do not only fit into the preset structure of the institutional activities, but they learn together with other generations pursuing a common pourpose- and this is important for interegenerational learning and education- contributing their knowledge from which staff and institutions may benefit and, consequently ameliorate their activities.

The new model draws upon past and new experience

Slovenian Third Age University Network (45 universities, more than 21 000 students, 2000 mentors, 1000 volunteers) was founded relatively early, much earlier anyway than in most other European countries. Moreover, EUROSTAT statistics have shown that among 18 European countries included in its survey, Slovenia is second – behind Austria as regards the level of participation of the elderly in education. The role of Slovenian Third Age University in relation to these results is naturally important. Today, alongside the popular and extensive network of folk high schools and study circles, Slovenian Third Age University has become the most extensive

network in adult education. Now, we hope that the new model and its implementation will also be a new chance for elderly people to participate more and better in society and that their contribution will be more visible and better understood and also that the ties with middle ages generations broken at the older people/s retirement could be restored though common work and common learning.

Since its establishment back in 1984 the University – started by experts in the field of adult education – has grown from mostly participative research of the induced practice. As a result of it, Slovenian Third University has developed its own concept and theory of education of the 50+. So far it has established a fair number of educational and other models, reflecting cultural and social changes and has – to some extent – been successful in anticipating social developments as well as in meeting the educational needs arising from them. In fact, the educational programmes of Slovenian Third Age University have never been merely a simple response to the participants' wishes and needs. Never has been left out of sight the social role of Slovenian Third Age University. If this had not the case, the University could easily change into a simple 'provider of educational programmes'. From time to time, though rarely, participants have tried to put some pressure on the University leaders in order to have their particular needs met. *»Why do we not forget about volunteering and simply pay higher fees? Why do we need study visits and research? Why do we have to use our newly acquired knowledge of English for translation, or for guiding foreign delegations, or for translating books? Why do we not deal with esoteric subjects and popular psychology?«* were their reproaches. How easy it would have been to give in to their wishes, and how quickly the University would have become a failure!

In 1984 when the first mentor was, together with her first students, paving the way for the University, she was deeply aware of the fact that education of the elderly should by no means be merely an interesting episode. Her experimental work should be used to build up the mission of the University and its organisational model and to establish the first programmes. She was in favour of instituting permanent organisational and educational structures following a changing model dwelling upon continuing research. A model into which new, valuable findings could be integrated. In 1986 when her colleagues and herself founded the University, they were –right from the star – in favour of the idea that it should bring new content to older people's life, but it should also enable them to increase and to improve their participation in the society, and not least, it should enhance local capacity for community

development. Needless to say that all their imperatives were not in harmony with the then socialist policies focusing on caring for elderly people.

Cultural mediators and intergenerational learning at the National Museum of Slovenia

In the light of the anticipated needs of the emerging subsidiary State¹, and also to some extent under the influence of the European project Lifelong Learning and Civic Engagement of the Elderly (LACE)², a new range of programmes were created at the Third Age University of Slovenia in Ljubljana. The authors of these programmes – *Karel Brišnik* an actor of The Ljubljana Puppet Theatre, Dr *Maja Zvanut* a historian of the National Museum of Slovenia, *Rajka Bračun* an art historian and a museologist and Dr *Dušana Findeisen* an adult educator of the Third Age University of Slovenia – have been developing educational programmes and shaping institutional cooperation. *Nina Skubic*, a student of educational sciences and andragogy has been investigating the implementation of the programme, thus contributing to the slow emergency of a new model of both education of the elderly volunteers and education of public institutions' staff for the new volunteering roles of the elderly and the new duties for the staff.

How does this group of programmes make a difference? Students – future volunteers – acquire new topical knowledge studying contents proposed by the mentor as well as the study contents they propose themselves. Through mutual and reciprocal learning, the knowledge acquired has characteristics of new knowledge students and their mentor construct together. For instance, students may study religious history and identity of Slovenes, they may learn about rhetoric and group dynamics, they may be introduced to a museum or a hospital etc. and at the same time they prepare for work as voluntary cultural mediators. The first institution to approach in this way was the National Museum of Slovenia.

At a joint educational meeting at the National Museum of Slovenia, representatives of the Third Age University of Slovenia, Slovenian Philanthropy – a national volunteering organisation – and experts from the National Museum of Slovenia paved the way for future volunteer work of cultural mediators – students of the Third Age University of Slovenia. What needed to be done to this end? The University

¹ A subsidiary state is a state which transfers responsibility for meeting the needs of its residents to organisations, local communities, and individuals.

² For further information on the project, see <http://www.univerzazatreteobd-drustvo.si/mednarodnadejavnost.htm>.

examines the needs of the National Museum, with which it has reached an agreement on the employment of volunteers, volunteers whom the two institutions educate together. The emphasis is on professional content and on the social mission of voluntary work to be performed by the elderly in public institutions.

The knowledge of the elderly, and the ways in which such knowledge is being passed on to others have become -owing to this model -formalised and institutionalised and have thus become more visible for everyone. There is, namely, a stereotype – one out of many when older people are in question – that education and learning of the elderly can serve only them and nobody else, that their learning, so to say, has, no wider impacts. What a mistake!

If educating for active citizenship is described as educating for understanding and interdependence within community, this initiative is worth being analysed. It offers elderly participants in the programme and the community an opportunity to enjoy a whole range of wider impacts of learning. It is about personal growth- gaining new knowledge, becoming more self-confident, more tolerant, ready to help; moreover, this learning has, definitely, a strong impact on the community at the same time. There is also an explicit link between individual learning and its impact on the community, that has been made visible, the link that is quite often missing. When education of marginalized social groups is at stake. The authors and instigators of the project had been aware of the “missing visible link” between the learning of older people and the impact of their learning on the community. Thus, they decided to formalise and institutionalise this link and to make it visible in a number of ways: (1) formalised agreement between the institutions, i.e. the training institution and the public institution receiving volunteers (2) voluntary work in public institutions (3) raising awareness of all the participants of their social roles (4) public campaigning. *The project has been devoted chiefly to demonstrating the value of older people's learning not only for themselves and their social network but also for the community as a whole.*

How is this practice related to policy on local, regional and European level?

Lisbon strategy, Employment Directive, Communication on demographic future, European Strategy for Social Services of General Interest, Lifelong learning policy, and other documents all explicitly or implicitly underline the need to increase *the level of participation of older people in society due to the fact that demographic changes are important in Europe. Participation of elderly people in society has been considered lately as their right and to some extent also their duty.* Namely, it seems impossible- within a society undergoing all sorts of rapid changes- to have such a numerous social group being and remaining supported prevented from taking on activities that benefit to the society and themselves.

How was the practice analysis done

The practice analysis has been done mostly through observation, action research, discussions uniting all the stakeholders (leaders of the project, the volunteers, the teachers, the representatives of the institutions). Moreover, public appearances and collecting responses of the general public have also been a research method.

Since the project is an innovation it has been analysed since the very beginning. The leaders of the project analysed the results of the animation processes carried out within Slovenian Third Age University, of the first meeting of the group of potential volunteers- especially their motives and expectations which proved to be mostly personal and not at all social- the response of the National Museum to the proposed agreement- the impact of the first conference organised jointly by the two institutions on the spot, at the National Museum premises, the consecutive response of the staff.....the response to the TV shows and radio programmes presenting the issue of cultural volunteering in later life, the reluctance of the media.....the overall results: the practice induced and the chance for its survival after the planned withdraw of the University.

U3A and its older students hand in hand with public institutions

In 2006 a new cluster of educational programmes were introduced at Slovenian Third Age University new study groups aiming at introducing organized volunteering of older students in public institutions: mediating in culture , (volunteering in museums, hospitals, schools, Botanic gardens Ljubljana) art of story telling (in kindergartens, schools, companies, old people/s homes, cultural events etc.) interpersonal relationships (help lines, guidance, counseling for older peers. Potential cultural mediators, supposed to transmit their knowledge and culture to museums visitors, to small children visiting museums, patients in hospitals or their families) were recruited also from other study groups (anthropology, art of argumentation, history, art history etc.)

For their recruiting our usual channels have been used: electronic news, different web sites, national and local journal, radio stations, TV stations etc., our boards for announcements et.)

Some 50 potential cultural mediators gathered at the initial meeting to participate in a guided discussion that revealed their motivation. All of them had been following their personal motives: "It is nice to work in the field of culture." I have never worked there before, It's something new. I can learn a lot... no social motives were present at the very beginning. Two years later at the same type of meeting our cultural mediators were able to defend the same theses we had been defending setting up this innovative project. They knew how important their voluntary work was for them and their community and they were able to defend the mission of their public institution. This is the kind of transformation of identity we had been looking for.

Even before the first meetings with potential cultural mediators we laid down two types of contracts with the selected public institutions. One binding U3A and the public institution and one binding the cultural mediators and the public institution. The contract was reflecting our common motives and objectives in introducing voluntary work for U3A students. We agreed upon the fact that the name of U3A and the name of the public institution should be systematically mentioned in public

when presenting the common project. The staff of the public institution will participate together with our students in educational programmes presenting the issues of older people, their education, the new social roles for older people, volunteering...the public institution and its departments. They will also contribute towards the process of raising public awareness.

Both institutions were supposed to participate in a vast public campaign together with the students, cultural mediators themselves. A research work was conducted involving all actors in the project.

The situation today. The introductory educational program has been repeated several times, allowing new U3A students and the staff to join the programme. 5 museums have been included in the network of cultural mediators, 1 hospital, as well as Oncological Institute Ljubljana, Botanical gardens Ljubljana. Cultural mediators have stimulated setting up new museums programmes or studies or even new exhibitions. They definitely brought new dimensions to the work of the museum staff, they contributed to their exhibitions by offering them their video and documentary skills. Some 200 volunteers have been working in these institutions on a voluntary basis approx. 4 hours a day. For those who remain engaged in volunteering accompanied by education and the fact that they become a sort of staff participating in most of the events within the public institutions is very important and is a good motivator for their staying at work. Most of the engaged cultural mediators are now ready to study other subjects knowing that thus gained knowledge will be useful for their voluntary work. An important objective has thus been achieved. Older people's participation in society and participation in public sphere.

Through organized volunteering in public institutions supported by permanent education delivered by both public institutions and the U3A older adults transform their learning into a socially useful and recognized activity and so do the staff. Going out into public sphere is for older people essential, allowing them to participate in social development. In this process older people are not to be alone.

Also the public institution' staff should be involved in permanent growth through their inclusion in working with older people and in educational programmed-

Slovenian Third Age University and its intergenerational projects and activities for better employability and employment

Intergenerational projects based on reciprocal and mutual learning and joint work of young, middle aged and older generations can contribute towards maintaining and raising the employability of all generations. First, they offer younger generations a quicker access to labour market owing to non- hierarchised work opportunities they get within such projects. Next, they enable middle aged generations to experiment with their work better than they can do it in their professional working environment. Finally, such projects offer possibility for the elderly to evaluate their past experience and knowledge through working and learning in intergenerational projects and to upgrade them. In addition to that, all generations involved in intergenerational projects have significant opportunities to learn from each other on condition, however, that those who plan such projects are knowledgeable and able to, shall we say "organise" opportunities for them to do it. A successful intergenerational project is to be carefully planned and conducted taking into account various aspects and goals and more importantly the need for exchange among generations.

Slovenian Third Age University started as an intergenerational project meant to become a permanent intergenerational activity . This was an intergenerational project though it was basically meant for *education of older people* and education about older people. 29 years ago it started as a voluntary intergenerational project of older retired professionals, active professionals and experts in different fields and young university students of educational sciences.

In those days the project was mostly focused on cultural education. The initial idea was essentially to enable older people to strengthen their social identity through

getting aware of their cultural role in the society and to pass their knowledge, experience and culture onto younger generations. But, it quickly turned out that also younger generations had their knowledge, their own experience and culture. Thus, from the very beginning knowledge, experience and culture were also passed by younger generations on the older ones. *Intergenerational learning and education are a two-way process taking place over a longer time.*

Moreover, hand in hand all generations started building together Slovenian Third Age University. In this common activity past knowledge and skills were revived and new knowledge and skills were constructed together by all the participants. Young students of adult education started setting up study circles together with older people, retired professionals and middle aged professionals. They all got involved in common learning and organisational activities. They also got involved in common activities for the benefit of the local community. They learned painting and each year they set up an exhibition. They learned translating and they translated interesting texts to improve the life of older people. They translated books dealing with psychological problems of for instance hyperactive children... which was for the benefit of all generations. They studied art history and they took on work of cultural mediators in museums. They learned research methodology and they conducted research work for the national museums. They learned about the media and they produced their own magazine, a series of radio programmes broadcast on the national radio, a series of television programmes.... They learned art history and local history and they got involved in cultural tourism.... They set up drama groups producing their scripts and they start performing for various institutions in the local community. Which was for the benefit, of course, of everybody in the community. They learned transactional analysis and about the needs of grandchildren and they set up a new organisation " Adoptive grandparents..."etc. They learned about new technologies and they started producing web pages for different civil organisations. At this university which has developed in a true social and educational movement, targeting social changes retired professionals continue teaching their peers and younger people thus maintaining and upgrading their professional knowledge and

skills. At Slovenian Third Age University special study groups were created along with the study circles for older students.

Numerous learning and other activities have been performed by young, middle aged and older generations as a result of their joint theoretical and practical learning, their theoretical learning and learning by doing aiming at a tangible result (a survey, a book, an exhibition, a radio or a TV programme, a new temporary or a permanent activity, a service etc. Many members of Slovenian Third Age University, regardless of their age- turned their knowledge, skills and competencies they had acquired there into a professional, first or second career. Many others who got involved in the education for voluntary work set up new civil organisations or joined the existing ones in the local community (help lines) etc.

Slovenian Third Age University started in Ljubljana with six older students over 55 and a 32 years old mentor. It was not an easy undertaking in the former Yugoslavia where civil society did not have "le droit de cite". Nowadays, there are 45 universities in 44 four towns striving for a better position of all generations in the society, providing educational, training, learning and working opportunities for younger and older generations.

FOUR INITIATIVES

Social Network Of Intergenerational Programmes For Quality Ageing And Solidarity
Co-Habitation Of Generations

is a system of programmes It comprises 24 programmes supporting either older people or intergenerational relationships or both. The programmes can be adopted by local communities wanting to set up an intergenerational centre. The Anton Trstenjak's Institute has been setting up intergenerational groups preparing young people for socializing with older people. Over twenty years more than 2000 younger people have been educated all over Slovenia for setting up new groups and for socializing with older people.

<http://www.inst-antonatrstenjaka.si/medgeneracije.html>

Slovenian Third Age University

Slovenian Third Age University (a network of 47 universities in 44 localities) has conceptualized and launched several intergenerational initiatives pertaining to both older people's learning and working as "professional" volunteers. It has introduced cultural mediators in museums and cultural mediators in hospitals and is about to adapt the developed model to garden volunteering and learning. In the three above mentioned cases a partnership of the Third Age University with public institutions has been set up, based on older people's learning and consequent older people's voluntary co-operation with younger employees at their work place. *Garden volunteers* is, the most recent among the three initiatives, has been developed following the EMIL meeting in Lisbon and under the influence of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's priorities. www.univerzazatretjeobd-drustvo.si

Study Circles Network

The Slovenian Institute Of Adult Education (SIAE) in initial cooperation with the founders of the Slovenian Third Age University who conceptualised the Slovenian type of study circles (different generations learning and working together for the benefit of the local community) set up a large network of study circles which are learning and action oriented and exist all over the country even in very small localities. A specially (at the SIAE) trained mentor coordinates the sessions, and sets, together with all the other members, specific learning and action goals. The SC have been very popular in Slovenia since the beginning and are currently spreading all over the country even in very remote places. The topics SC have dealt with so far are language learning, learning about other nations' culture, customs, folk music, culinary art, geography, history etc. <http://sk.acs.si/>

Intergenerational Community Centres And Fruits Of Society

In accordance with the previous strategies for Quality Ageing And Intergenerational Solidarity new intergenerational centres are being set up and will be set up in single municipalities also in accordance with the new Strategy. Also Intergenerational

volunteering has been set up. An Example of such centres is Fruits of Society (Slov. Sadeži družbe based in Murska Sobota)
www.sadezidruzbe.org

Conclusion

In order to bring back organised intergenerational learning and education we have to move from a world of doctors, teachers and experts dictating what has to be done or taught to a world of individuals having to build their knowledge and skills with the help of mentors. This is a true come back but also a true revolution which can be done only if education is not separated from other sectors of the society.

How to act to implement this idea? We have to create opportunities for people of all generations to meet, to get to know each other and to learn together. We need to connect them and enhance the influence they exert on each other so that the world of monopolies and institutional authorities will be transformed into a world of mutual servants, servants in the noble meaning of the word, or perhaps into a world of partners creating new opportunities for mutual learning and common action.