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## Abstract

### Developmental challenges of adult education in Slovenia

*A brief presentation of the development of adult education in Slovenia from independence onwards*

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Workshop: *Dove siamo/Wo sind wir*

Slovenia's independence, with its consecutive modification of political and economic development in the beginning of the 1990s, confronted the entire system of adult education with new dilemmas: how to respond to the appearance of a huge number of unemployed people with insufficient vocational and expert training; how to ensure sufficient competition knowledge for new economic integrations, etc. It was a time of thorough professional work for defining new strategic directions, which rounded up with the adoption of the Resolution of the Adult Education Master Plan, adopted by the Slovenian parliament in 2004.

At the same time various system measures for substantiating a different developmental strategy have been implemented:

? adoption of various normative acts (such as, the Adult Education Act, the Decree on the Standards and Norms in Adult Education, the Decree on Minimal Human Resources and Spatial Conditions in Adult Education, Instructions for adjusting programmes of vocational and expert training to adult participants);

? renovation of verification procedures (renamed into the procedures for registering into the educational organizations report);

? founding of the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, which helped in developing systematic and in-depth training of adult education personnel on all levels of adult education, and enabled systematic, developmental and research work;

? implementation of in-depth evaluations of national measures for increased participation of adults into education;

? formation of special national curricula for adults (primary schools, foreign languages, computer science, etc.);

? methodical and substantial investment into supplementary education of personnel working in the area of adult education, vocational and expert training in particular, etc.

In this manner various factors (national, administrative, research, developmental and operative) gradually started building a wholesome strategy for formation and implementation of various measures, encouraging a methodical approach to the development of quality adult education.

This also triggered responses in practice: adult education in Slovenia has in the last fifteen years been marked by a relatively fast expansion of offer of new educational programmes, methods and forms of adult education, as well as of providers of such services, all followed by the appearance of a relatively fast changing market of educational services, which has positive as well as negative consequences.

Positive consequences can be defined as fundamental improvement of educational levels of adult population, high participation of adult education in education in general (above EU-defined level), wide offer of providers and programmes, and increased accessibility of education. However, the following can be considered weaknesses of the above mentioned phenomenon: a small number of adult population, with an at least 4 year secondary school education, and very bad literacy (knowledge quality) of adults, even those with formal education. Other problems are the same throughout the EU: a high number of dropouts, insufficient orientation to natural science or technical programmes.

Implementing organizations and their associations:

System changes among other things also lead up to the formation and establishment of educational market in the field of adult education. In addition to public institutions for adult education (adult education centres or folk high schools, schools), private organizations for adult education appeared as well.

Hence, in Slovenia there is a rail of associations of implementing organizations in the area of adult education:

1. Association of Slovenian Adult Education Centres (ZLUS):

It is the oldest association of public organizations for adult education, founded by local communities. First adult education centres (folk high schools) were founded back in 1921, but abolished jointly with the association during the World War II. However, they were founded again in 1959, together with the association. Basic duties of the association are the following:

- informing and counselling members, and their representation on national level;
- partnership cooperation in solving system and normative issues on national level;
- educating managerial and expert workers;
- management and coordination of common national and international projects;
- international cooperation.

The association combines and unites 31 members in Slovenia. It is the only association with professional service.

2. Association of organizations for adult education in secondary schools:

It was founded in 1997 as a voluntary organization striving for:

- equal status of adult education in secondary schools;
- higher professionalization of expert workers;
- appropriate organization of this activity in schools.

The association includes 50 secondary schools and more than 50 individuals.

3. Association of private educational institutions:

Founded in 1997 with a purpose of:

- levelling the activity of educational institutions in private sector with national sector;
- raising the level of professionalization of educational services;
- raising the quality of services;
- easier international cooperation, international projects.

The association combines various organizations dealing primarily with informal education in Slovenia. They also include some private secondary and technical schools. Altogether the association numbers 57 organizations.

Adult education centres (folk high schools) as parts of public network and providers of public services in the area of adult education:

Adult education centres, even though they are public institutions, on average earn more than 50% of their income with the sale of their services on the market. Therefore, study promotion centres must:

- be flexible to the highest possible extent, and quickly respond to educational needs in the area;
- preserve a wide palette of programme offer as possible;

- ensure quality and accessible offer to all target adult groups.

Programme offer of adult education centres is therefore very rich. They organize and implement adult education on various areas of formal and informal education:

- education across the entire vertical (primary school for adults, programmes of secondary expert and vocational education, college and higher education expert programmes);

- general education (free time, healthy living, study clubs, ecology, etc.);

- programmes of functional literacy for adults;

- expert training and study courses (foreign languages, computer science, etc.);

- world centres (counselling and informing adults in their local space).

By means of the Resolution of the Adult Education Master Plan, Slovenia has defined strategic developmental goals until the year 2010, and has been ensuring resources for their realization through various measures and activities. Public service providers are chosen on the basis of yearly programmes and public tenders of various ministries. Adult education centres seem to be far more successful in applying to these tenders.

Due to their status and business orientation in particular, adult education centres are ideal organizations for implementing public services in the area of adult education. Hence, the majority of programmes and infrastructural activities, co-financed by the government through public tenders, are acquired and implemented by study promotion centres.

On the level of the Association of Slovenian adult education centres we have organized a special group for counselling,

educating and helping in preparing and applying for public tenders, and managing these projects.

Future developmental challenges:

As the Association of Slovenian adult education centres we are clearly aware of all developmental strategies, goals, trends and dangers, we will not be able to avoid in the future. We are a part of a common social and economic EU space with equal global issues.

On the basis of analysis of the situation in the area of adult education in Slovenia, of examples of good practice of our colleagues in other countries, and of our own resources, we have prepared a very clear strategy and developmental goals:

1. Quality development in adult education centres:

Our goal is to include at least 75% of members into the POKI national project (offering adults quality education) until 2007. In organizing and implementing education we will examine and substantiate quality of services, and measure satisfaction of participants.

2. Functional literacy of adults:

International researches few years ago indicated a very poor level of functional literacy of adults in Slovenia. Hence, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education prepared five training programmes for raising functional literacy of various target adult groups under a common name UŽU (training for life-long success). Adult education centres are the most important providers of such programmes.

3. New learning methods:

The association and adult education centres are tightly cooperating with the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education in this area. Adult education centres are the bearing implementing organizations in the development



and introduction of new methods and forms of education and training of adults in centres for individuals learning, centres for youth project learning (PUM), and adult counselling centres (ISIO).

The association is also implementing e-education in the form of the project on 11 adult education centres. We have set up a model of virtual teaching environment, educated 30 experts in study promotion centres, and created three electronic adult instruction material in secondary school programmes. And yet, there is still so much more to do.

4. Common standards in the area of adult education:

The association was the initiator and partner of the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education in the preparation of unified standard and programme of adult training in the area of information (ICT) literacy of adults in Slovenia. The standard and the programme have been adopted by the Adult Education Expert Council. This then became the national standard and publicly valid adult training programme. It is being used in public tenders for co-financing adult information literacy.