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Adult Education in the Changing Social and Economic Circumstances: Rethinking from Slovenia

Abstract: The field of adult education can be very influential at ensuring social justice, for educational activities indirectly address and correct the various social issues. In the paper author is dealing with the opinion that neglecting systemic, economic and socio-cultural issues has weakened the field of adult education and reduced it to a market oriented activity and ideology of individualism. Due to the profitability, welfare, equality and justice are disregarded. From this point of view the situation in Slovenia is analysed; the unsuitable system regulations and the inappropriate system of financing of the public adult education institutions and programmes, resulted in the insufficient implementation of public service in adult education. The Nordic model is used as a model for rethinking possibilities for assurance of the public support to adult education with adequate educational policy.

Key words: neoliberal agenda, inequality, educational policy, public education.

Introduction

The field of adult education is marked by the diversity of goals and the multiple layers of the role of adult education, so it could be extremely influential at ensuring social justice (locally and globally), for educational activities indirectly address and correct the various social issues, such as for instance unemployment, inequality, racism, homophobia, illiteracy, as well as reach into the field of human rights, sexism, poverty, exclusion. A number of debates in the field of education and similar fields (amongst others Edwards & Usher, 2001; Edwards, Clarke, Harrison & Reeve, 2002; Field, 2000; Fragoso & Guimarães, 2010; Glastra, Hake & Schedler, 2004; Hega & Hokenmaier, 2002; Olssen, Codd & O'Neill,

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2004; Olssen, 2006; Tuschling & Engemann, 2006) show that educational policies are becoming less and less in favour of preserving the concept of education as a public good, as a factor of forming a democratic welfare society. I start from the assumption that education is a private and public good, thus also a social obligation. As a private good it is a market good (the interest of the individual is money, position, personal growth), while as a public good it has a number of dimensions – it develops moral, ethical, social, cultural and political awareness of all citizens and at the same time adds to the efficient performance of democratic processes (Olssen et al., 2004:148). The public benefits of education are not merely a sum of private benefits.

The theory and practice of adult education differs greatly between various countries and social systems, which makes it harder to generalize and search for successful theoretical solutions and models of good practice. Numerous competitive paradigms can be found in social sciences. According to Usher & Bryant, they can be incompatible, without any consensus, and yet they co-exist and through time their dominance changes (as cited in Foley, 2004:12), which can be seen even today. Many of the critical authors are of the opinion that neglecting systemic, economic and socio-cultural issues has weakened the field of adult education and reduced it to expert technicalism and a restricting ideology of individualism. In the paper I state that the current political and economic ideology place efficiency, measurability and adjustability (of the individual, circumstances, and similar) into the forefront, for they ensure greater profitability - at the expense of welfare, culture and justice.

Goals of adult education in a political perspective

Since antiquity onwards adult education has been aimed at intellectual, spiritual, ethical and aesthetical development of the individual and his understanding of the social essence. On the other hand, in the social sense, the role of adult education varied in importance throughout history; however it was often linked to social movements, founding social justice and the development of the community; adult education often followed socially critical and radical ideas for increasing equality amongst people, especially marginal social groups who could use the newly acquired knowledge to obtain greater power and influence. Within different countries the public social support for the various initiatives varied; in countries in which these initiatives were favourably accepted, e.g. in Scandinavian countries, a culture of learning and education developed, and its positive consequences can be felt even today.

In the past (as well as today) the critical question was posed as regards the scope to which adult education can be included into the formation of the social policy. The opinions of various authors are contradictory; behaviourists and humanists are mainly of the opinion that the key task of adult education is to create knowledge, spread it and respond to the pupil's needs. On the other hand the arguments from the more critical position represent adult education as a key factor in the process of establishing democracy; in their opinion the influence of the social policy on adult education is extremely important, for adult education represents an unaware culprit in its implementation (Quigley, 2005: 595).

We can ascertain that today in most developed countries adult education has suddenly obtained true political support; however this is mainly expressed on the level of the ideological discourse and is linked to the needs of the labour market. In this sense the adult educational policy is economically regional and calculating, instead of socially and developmentally oriented. Following the neoliberal agenda of the 1990s adult education became the central element of the national educational policies, economy and welfare and a key tool at equipping European citizens for competitiveness in the global market. The belief that adult education helps the economic growth and leads to a higher economic standard influenced the development of national and international researches of the diversity, appearance and efficiency of the systems and policies of adult learning and education. However, many experts see this as a problem. In the Western countries a critical discourse on the neoliberal and economy base of the current political initiative is taking place. Most of the debaters are worried for this base is ending an entire array of extremely important fields in adult education. They have ascertained that due to the neoliberal policy the educational policies are increasingly in favour of strengthening the economic power of the state, and less and less in favour of preserving education as a public good, as a factor of forming a democratic welfare state (Hega & Hokenmaier, 2002; Olssen et al., 2004; Olssen, 2006; Salling Olesen, 2004; etc.). With the disintegration of community values and the emphasis on individualism we are currently killing the enlightening influence of general adult education, the quality and dignity of human existence, and diminishing equality and justice.

The move into the field of the neoliberal paradigm was accompanied by the sudden enthusiasm for the concept of life-long learning (henceforth LLL), which ensured that the understanding of this notion changed into the exact opposite of its original meaning. A lot has already been written on the beginnings and the development of the concept of life-long learning; however with its sudden actuality the term has become one of the most commonly (wrongfully or misleadingly) used collocations. Walters, Borg, Mayo and Foley (2004) called this the 'political

soup' (p. 145) of life-long learning. During the last few decades the idea of LLL has been intensely debated through a number of phases; Rubenson (2006: 329) discussed three generations of the LLL concept. If we summarize in short: the first generation can be placed into the 1970s, and was denoted by an optimistic orientation; educating for a civil society was important as were the endeavours for an improved quality of life and smaller educational, social and economic differences between people. It accompanied the increase of the social importance of the meaning of adult education that followed the 1960s economic boom (Illeris, 2004: 26). Even though the reasons were of an economic nature at the beginning, the movement was broader, and had a strong humanistic emphasis. The state and market did not play an important role within this concept. When the slogan appeared in official documents, the market perspective was overlooked, its meaning for the general cultural and social development of the individual was emphasised, and this resulted in economic development. The second generation LLL appeared in the 1980s, when the increase in unemployment, lower production and other factors placed the OECD states into a more insecure position. The discussion on LLL gained a political and economic mark, for through learning individuals could adjust to the society and the changes that were taking place.

An important milestone in the development and fulfilment of the LLL idea was the 1996 OECD report: 'Lifelong learning for all' (OECD, 1996), which represented the end of the economic and the beginning of the neoliberal period; this report emphasised the importance of suitable financing and organisation of adult education, in which the political and economic ideology of the LLL concept is clearly expressed. At the time this started to substitute the humanistic and idealistic approach (Illeris, 2004: 29). Adult education was presented as a possibility for repairing the social inequalities generated by initial education, with an emphasis that at LLL it is also about personal growth (creativity, initiative, response, improved employability and higher income), economic growth and social cohesion.

On the political level the LLL concept (internationally, and as a consequence also nationally) placed numerous concepts (informal adult education, enlightening of the people, active citizenship, etc.) into the background. In the last decade this slogan has become a key political term in most technological and economically highly developed countries. Rubenson calls the current period the '*third LLL generation*' (Rubenson, 2006: 329). This ideological period is accompanied by the reduction in the use of government sources and a simultaneous introduction of vast structural reforms aimed at improving the conditions for life-long learning as defined by the free market, which consequentially lead to the neglect of social and individual problems. Ever greater socio-economic dif-

ferences, exclusion and marginalisation can be noticed; in this 'third generation' education and training are important factors that should increase social cohesion, participation in civil society and support democracy in its transition into a learning society. However, the LLL is the political projects, with which we should achieve good connectivity between the members of the expanding and different communities and develop excellence and competitiveness. As stated in numerous documents adopted under the European Community and OECD (the Lisbon strategy, the Memorandum on life-long learning, the documents 'It is never too late to learn' and 'It is always the right time for learning', the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council on the competencies for life-long learning, the document »Key Data on Education in Europe 2009« etc.) LLL is defined as the key strategy for achieving knowledge based society (or market economy). The Lisbon declaration (2007) states that LLL is formally (and informally) the main EU achievement, especially in the sense of regional development, integration, modernisation and promotion of human capital and employability. We can assume that the politically empty statements are predominantly aimed towards a single goal – reduce the responsibility of the state (and with this transfer the financial burden onto other actors, especially the individual). This unavoidably leads to an increase of inequality amongst the different social groups.

All three LLL generations deal with the transfer of responsibility between the three key institutional factors: the state, market and civil society. The first generation saw the central role in a strong civil society, the second in the market (alongside minimal support from the state and total negation of the civil society, at which this period is known for its privatisation and deregulation of the public education), while the third generation seeks for harmony between the three factors, however the market still has the central role, while the roles of the individual and the state are becoming increasingly visible. In the third generation it is also believed that the individual should take responsibility for his² education. The influence of economy that has replaced the humanistic liberal orientation in the education field caused drastic changes in its operation. Rubenson (2006) calls these changes 'the colonialization of the adult education field' (p. 328), and in these conditions the LLL concept caused the decline of the welfare state by reconstructing citizenship as the individual's responsibility for economic development (Rubenson, 2004: 29-31).

How is the individual's responsibility understood in this concept? Because LLL is understood as a market discourse that brings education closer to entrepreneurship, the individual is becoming its own 'learning entrepreneur'. His success

² Masculine gender is used for the sake of simplification.

depends on him and his decisions, the choices he makes; everybody is responsible for himself, his success and self-fulfilment. Olssen (2006) critically ascertains that the transfer of responsibility is only possible in an 'independently lead learning process' (p. 223) which represents a move from offer oriented to demand oriented education. Let me emphasise that at this the question as to whether all adults have the same possibilities to decide and chose is neglected.

In order for the learning individual to be able to switch between situations, institutions or countries, he needs skills and technical training, and not in depth knowledge and a critical approach. This ensures the control and discipline of the workforce (Illeris, 2004: 40), while at the same time reducing the protection of worker's rights (Olssen, 2006), which also includes the rights and obligations of the employees as regards education. These measures might offer the individual more freedom, but they are also linked to greater risks. At this the most problematic is that the individual also has to partially finance his own learning (Tuschling & Engelmann, 2006: 458).

Adult education in Slovenia – a means for increasing inequality?

In Slovenia a new White Paper on Education has been recently prepared and in the process of preparation of the document, plenty of problems were once more confirmed. Problems are the result of the unsuitable system regulations of the adult education field, the inappropriate system of financing of the network of public adult education institutions and programmes, which results in the insufficient development of the network and infrastructure activities for the implementation of public service in adult education. The offer is too spontaneous, regionally unequally distributed and not responding to the needs of different target groups of adults. The main principle of education in Slovenia is actually not the lifelong learning principle, which turn out that the field of adult education is not an equal component (comparing to the education of children and youth) in the whole process of lifelong education. Adult education is still not developed as specific, independent, complex and diverse system. At this moment the public policy in the field of adult education in Slovenia thus does not fulfil the idea of education as one of the basic rights of a citizen.

All these facts are emphasised by the process of other socio-economic changes in Slovene society, where it is obvious that the concept of the welfare state is making space for various services, so that the public sector would no longer be understood as an obligation of the community towards its members, but as an offer of services that would fulfil the demands of the users. In accordance to these prin-

ciples the field of adult education is also increasingly operated in accordance to the market rules, as an offer and demand on a free market. This privatisation process in the education field means that in Slovenia public and private organisations are competing amongst each other in order to obtain the possibilities of performing the education process, and these forces public organisations into additional market activities that provide them with financial sources necessary for their survival. In Slovenia public adult education organisations are confronted with hard times (Jelenc Krašovec & Kump, 2009) especially due to unorganised and instable financing, which endanger their existence. Public adult education organisations are not clearly defined, but in practice the only public organisations which fundamental activity is adult education, are People's universities (Folk High Schools), the founders of which are municipalities. People's universities are financed from different sources, but the obligation of municipalities (as founders) is not adequately regulated; municipalities devote their funds to People's universities by their freewill. Unlike the public organisations for children and youth, those for adults are not regulated by law. The role of the public organisations is to perform public service for adults on all levels, defined by law, and to fulfil the public interest in the field of adult education; however, as confirmed by national and international studies, private providers of adult education are on the increase, while the numbers of publically founded providers of adult education is on the decline (Drofenik & Zver, 2011; Study on Adult Education Providers, 2006). According to the data issued by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (Continuing education..., 2010) in 2008/2009 most providers of adult education were driving schools (142), private organisations (95), units in companies (40), units in schools (33) while People's universities (Folk High Schools) could be found as low as fifth spot (32), even though they are the only institutions intended exclusively for adult education. In other words, in 2008/2009 private organisations represented 73% of all providers of adult education, but public organisations only 27% (of those People's universities 13%) (Drofenik & Zver, 2011: 143). Over the last few years the number of People's universities has dwindled considerably, for there were as many as 45 in 1999/2000. This resulted in destabilised relations between various organisations and the local authorities, and the disintegration of the network of adult education institutions in Slovenia. It will directly influence the increase in social and economic differences between adults and lead to an even greater inequality and injustice as regards access to education. In such conditions it is impossible to implement 'non-profit' general education for the inhabitants, especially one that would be intended for the most vulnerable groups, which was the important task of the People's Universities. This education does not take place on the basis of the offer and demand, but demands clear planning of public care and the policy of reaching various groups of inhabitants (through differ-

ent types of financing). Development and preserving the general non-formal adult education was besides adopted as the first preferential goal in the 2010 Resolution on the national adult education programme in Slovenia (ReNAEP) (and is in this sense obligatory for the state), but is not experienced in practice.

This situation makes it harder to reach the nationally and internationally set goals such as rising the level of education, reducing the difference in the levels of education and access to education between the various groups of adults (especially as regards education and age), increasing the cultural level, active citizenship and enforcing democracy. General education which should be funded by the state, local community and individuals, soon finds itself in trouble when education is regulated by market mechanisms.

In Slovenia we can notice (in comparison to other European countries) an above average level of inequality in the possibility to access education (as regards education and age), for Slovenia is one of the countries with the largest differences in the level of participation between the ones with the lowest (ISCED 0-2) and the ones with the highest education levels (ISCED 5-6); amongst the most and least educated the difference is a multiple of the first (Beltram, Drofenik & Možina 2010: 119). The comparison between EU countries and Slovenia is presented in Figure 1.

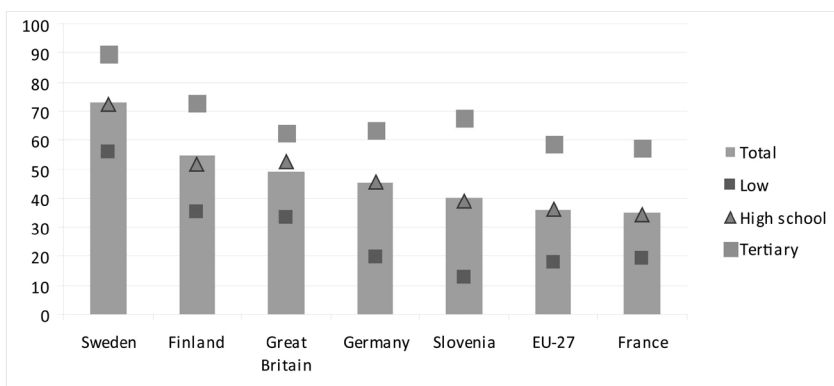


Figure 1: Participation of adults in formal and non-formal education, the gap between the least and most educated adults, Slovenia and some other EU countries, 2007, in %

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey, Slovenia, 2007.

A person's level of education plays an important role in participation in education in Slovenia; more than two thirds (68%) of people with tertiary education, 39% of people with upper secondary education and only 13% of people with basic education or less participated in adult education. Especially low is the

participation of least educated adults in non-formal adult education; the main reason is that education is too expensive and people cannot afford it. This obstacle is the most frequent obstacle in education in Slovenia (the share of people, quoting this obstacle in Sweden and Finland, is essentially lower). The reason is the low income of adults with low level of education in Slovenia, but on the other side it also shows that material (financial) stimulation from the state in Slovenia is insufficient (Čelebič, 2011: 75). On participation of adults in adult education influence also the economical activity of the individual; adults who are not economically active are significantly less active in adult education in Slovenia (see Figure 2). There is a difference between participation in formal and non-formal education; participation in formal education is higher at unemployed persons (due to the goal to increase the educational level and consecutively improve the employment rate), but on the other hand participation in non-formal education is higher at economically active adults (Čelebič, 2011: 75).

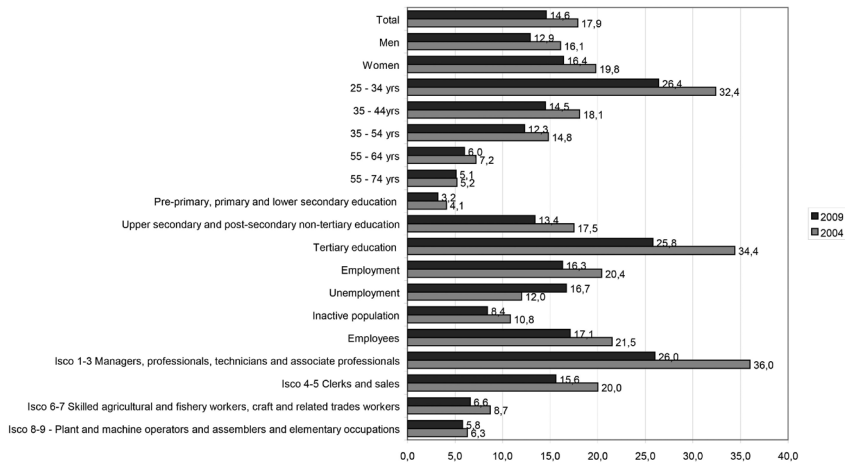


Figure 2: Participation of adults, 25 – 64 year in formal and non-formal education, Slovenia, 2004 and 2009, in %

Source: Eurostat, The Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Illeris (2004: 56-58) has ascertained that as a consequence of the gap between the desire to increase the offer of education programmes and the demands to reduce the costs, the users (individuals, companies and public institutions) and local authorities have to contribute an increasingly large financial share for education. Since 1990 the neoliberal governments in numerous OECD countries have adopted the policy that efficiently reduces the responsibility of the state for ensuring and preserving the general and available public education system (Ols-

sen et al., 2004: 198). In the recent years the new European Union states, i.e. the former socialist states, have intensively adjusted their policy to fit the neoliberal discourse and demands, even though the OECD countries have clearly shown the weaknesses and downsides of this approach already in the 1990s. Global economic changes that have influenced the social changes (demographic, cultural and environmental changes, changes in the educational, social and health system, unemployment, etc.) caused an increase in social diversification and poverty. In the new White paper on Education in Slovenia expert group for adult education states that ‘financing of adult education is one of the most critical elements of the adult education system in Slovenia’ (Ivančič et al, 2011: 373) since financing is one of the key political instruments that influences the participation and quality of adult education. The data about the financing of formal and non-formal adult education in the years 1998 and 2004 show (see Table 1), that in the both years the most important financers are employers, the role of the individual in financing it’s own education is more and more important and the share of financial sources from the state is decreasing (Drofenik, 2011: 105).

Table 1: Main financers of educational programmes (formal and non-formal AE), 1998, 2004, Slovenia

		1998	2004
1.	Employer	66	53,5
2.	Individual/family	25	29,5
3.	State	19	11,5
4.	Other	10	6,0

Source: Mohorčič Špolar et al., as cited in Drofenik, 2011, p. 105.

In Slovenia three models of financing are interweaved: socially equitable model, mixed state-market model and the model of human capital (Jarvis, as cited in Drofenik, 2011: 94). The first model is based on humanistic aspects of learning, devoted to vulnerable groups of adults with specific obstacles for education; in Slovenia this model is realised on the basis of the ReNAEP and active employment policy, but it is hindered due to the unsuccessful use of resources and inadequate systemic regulation of the adult education field. The mixed state-market model is based on state stimulations and private sources for education (Drofenik, 2011: 82) and it is applicable for education of adults, who have the desire and willingness to learn, but also enough money to pay/co-finance their own education (Drofenik, 2011: 83). The model of human capital is based on incentives for employers to stimulate investment in education, connected to work. Especially the socially equitable model is important for vulnerable groups of adults, having

the low level of education and low income. The socially equitable model ensure the adults the possibilities for being involved in education free of costs in the programmes of primary school for adults and in the educational programmes of the active employment policy (for unemployed adults). Funds are allocated directly to the educational institutions, to participants of education or to enterprises. For the educational stimulations of enterprises and of the individuals the system of reimbursement of training costs is applied (Drofenik, 2011: 95), which cause different problems, amongst others the fact, that adults with low level of education (and low income) cannot afford to pay for education (in spite of the fact that the money would be later reimbursed). The data in Table 2 show that in Slovenia some obstacles are much more distinctive than in other EU countries, among them the cost of education, the work schedule and the lack of educational offer.

Table 2: The percentage of adults, 25 – 64 years old, who did not participate in education but wanted to, by types of obstacles, Slovenia and EU-27, 2007, in %

	Did not have the prerequisites	Education was too expensive/ could not afford it	Lack of employer's support	Education conflicted with the work schedule	Didn't have time due to family responsibilities	Lack of educational offer in the living environment of individuals	Not confident with the idea of going back to something that is like school	Age and health	Other
EU-27	13,3	28,3	16,3	35	36,6	18,6	13,5	13,4	24,4
SLO	7,2	45,9	21,1	52,4	35,6	28,5	6,9	14,6	8,3

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey, Slovenia, 2007.

The current adult education policy in Slovenia is far from reaching the desired goals. Slovenia might be by its amount of public expenses for adult education, defined by ReNAEP, close to the liberal type of the welfare state, although estimations are approximate; since 1995 there is no data about the share of funds for adult education in GDP in Slovenia (last data in 1995: Slovenia 0.08%, Denmark 1%) (Ivančič et al., 2011: 385). Some calculation show that the share of funds for adult education is still decreasing. Adult education is in the ReNAEP defined as a public good (Beltram et al., 2010) and the factor of creating the welfare of citizens and democratic welfare society as well is the education defined as a factor of higher quality of living for all citizens, with special focus on educationally deprived groups of adults. But the analysis of the realization of ReNAEP has shown that the development in the area of adult education in Slovenia has

deviated from outlined directions (Beltram et al., 2010), which holds true also for the intentions to increase the educational level of adult population. On the basis of the available data was ascertained that adults are less likely included into primary and secondary school programmes over the recent years, although in the year 2008 there was still 24,2% of adults who had not completed their primary education or completed only primary education (age group 25 and more) (Ivančič et al., 2011: 377). The reasons can be ascribed to the lack of motivational and supportive measures that would help adults overcome the various obstacles that they encounter when deciding to get educated. The educational programmes are also not prepared 'to fit adult participants', but are carried out at the 'school manners' (like for children and youth). Alongside the programmes of vocational education or training additional funds and effort (in the form of informal general education programmes, preparatory programmes, motivational workshops, etc.) would be needed, especially for adults with a low level of education (and mostly with poor experience from their previous education).

The role of educational policy in a process of creating welfare.

What can we learn from the Nordic states example?

Tuschling and Engeman (2006: 452) ascertain, that the political rhetoric that was brought into the expert field when the new understanding of the concept and principles of lifelong learning was adopted, serve a single goal: to change the relationship between the individual and the state. The relations between the 'personal' and 'political', the general and vocational, are being set anew. The educational policy is thus an important indicator that shows how the state takes care of the welfare of its citizens, but it is strongly linked to other factors that influence the welfare of the citizens (e.g. social and health care). The key role of the public educational policy is to reduce the structural and individual obstacles for the participation in adult education (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009: 196), for the public educational policy (in relation to the type of welfare state) can directly influence the structural or contextual conditions faced by the individuals (at work, within the civil society, at home) and the individual's experience of the possibilities for education. Castles (2004) and Room (2002) draw attention to the fact that many countries do (traditionally) not even include education amongst the influential factors of the welfare state, which is most likely a consequence of the lack of data that would clearly show the effects of financing adult education by various protagonists, such as employers, state and individuals. The existing data is hard to read and can often not be compared.

The share of state expenditures for education and social care indicates into which type of welfare regime the state can be placed. At the same time it also indicates that individual welfare states have their own specific educational policy. An important question posed in the analysis of Kump (2009) is whether the educational policy can take over a compensational function within the frame of the goals of the reformed social policy that is trying to adjust the welfare system to the current demographic globalisation challenges? Education should have the function of reducing the negative influences of the deterioration of the welfare state, for it should allow the individual to improve his social and economic position (general and vocational), which should result in the decline of social exclusion and poverty. Within this process the new understanding of lifelong learning is therefore logical, for the reduction of the public funds influences the explicit transfer of responsibility (including financial) for education onto the individual.

The conclusions show that the social and democratic states intend more funds for education and social care (per inhabitant), while conservative countries give more funds for social care, but not for education (Hega & Hokenmaier, 2002: 18). Data shows that the expenditure for education and social care are usually inversely proportional; if the state invest more into one field, it is likely to invest less into the other. Similar was ascertained by Kump (2009) in her comparative analysis of twenty five European countries: the states in the Scandinavian group (social-democratic welfare state) are the only ones to intend a large share of their GNP for both, education and social security. The data in Figure 3 show, that compared to Scandinavian countries the states in the continental group allocate a much smaller share of GNP to education, but more or the same as the countries in the Atlantic group (liberal welfare state), which are below the European average as regards this expenditure. Similar holds true for the South European group of states with the Mediterranean welfare state.

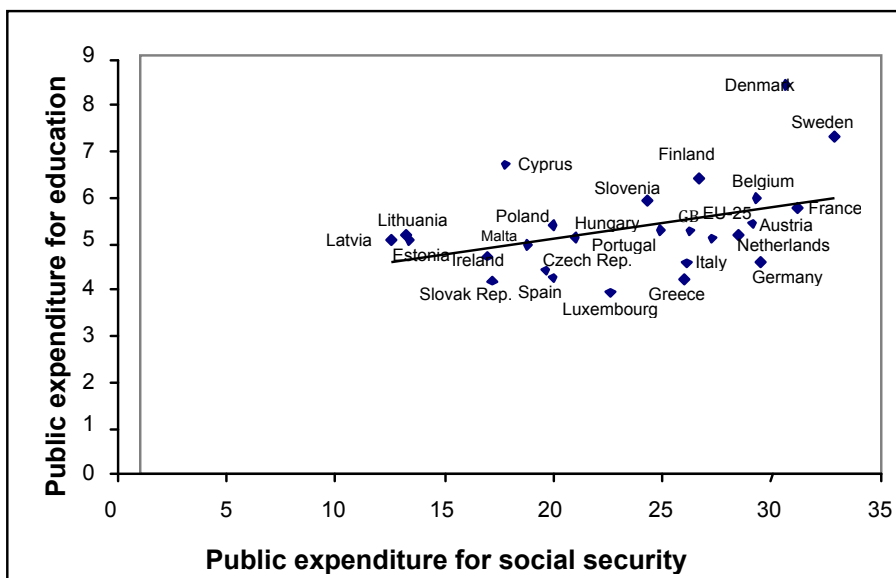


Figure 3: Links between the shares of public expenditure for education and social security, percentage of GDP - 2004

Source: Statistical portrait of Slovenia in the European Union (2007), Statistical Office of RS, as cited in Kump, 2009, p. 17.

In this analysis Slovenia is a hybrid welfare state (between the South European and Atlantic group of countries), in which an increasing trend of privatisation and marketing education services is noticeable (with which Slovenia is approaching the neoliberal regime). It is typical for the new EU members to reduce the public funds for social security and not increasing the public investments in the field of education, on the contrary, they are highly likely to reduce them (there is a noticeable increase in the funding by individuals, households and employers) (Kump, 2009: 19). In the new EU member states, which have previously lived in bureaucratic socialist systems, with a different tradition to that of the old European members, the pressure of the global organisations that encourage the establishment of the neoliberal regime is much more explicit and has a greater influence on the deregulation of the market, privatisation, reduction of the share of public programmes (educational, social, health care) and the intrusion of the market into the field of public goods and services.

The conclusions of Scandinavian researches show that the differences between the Nordic, Central European and South European group of countries also emerge from the inappropriate educational policies, which are more in favour of

supporting the formal than informal education and more in favour of vocational rather than general education. They have ascertained that the Scandinavian countries have ensured a sufficient share of (learning) active inhabitants and consequently a higher culture and quality of living through appropriate government support for developing informal general education (financing and systematic organisation) (Desjardins, Rubenson & Milana, 2006; Rubenson, 2004; Rubenson, 2006). They have also ascertained that in Central and South European states most adult education is financed by employers, who mainly finance the privileged groups of inhabitants, who thus influence the educational offer (this is the case in Anglo-Saxon countries and continental states such as Austria, France, Germany and Italy, but also in Slovenia). In most cases expert training is encouraged (developing practical skills and knowledge), while informal general education that is not directly linked to work is enabled only exceptionally. Andragogic research of the participation in adult education shows that in developed countries mainly higher educated individuals, employed in more demanding work posts, i.e. socio-economically privileged adults, participate in education; an exception can be found in the Scandinavian countries where adults with a lower level of formal education – a significantly higher number than in other European countries – also partake in adult education (Belanger & Tuijnman, 1997; Desjardins et al., 2006; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). This is a consequence of the long-term policy of the socially democratic states that invest more into education and social security than Central and South European countries.

It does not come as a surprise that the research results show a strong dependency between the level of economic inequality in a country and the literacy rates and participation in adult education. A society marked by a high level of social inequality also has large differences between the social groups as regards their achievements in literacy tests, and in the participation of various social groups in adult education. The IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey) comparison of the states shows important differences between developed countries as regards the participation of adults in the education process. On the basis of this comparison the countries have been divided into four groups (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009: 193):

- Group 1: adult participation in the education process exceeds 50% - Nordic countries, including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.
- Group 2: Anglo-Saxon countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Great Britain and USA, as well as Luxemburg, the Netherlands and

Switzerland), in which adult participation in the education process ranges between 35% and 50%.

- Group 3: some European (Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Spain) and some East European countries (e.g. Czech Republic and Slovenia), in which adult participation in the education process ranges between 20% and 35%;
- Group 4: other South European (Greece, Portugal) and some East European countries (Hungary, Poland), in which adult participation in the education process does not reach 20%.

We can notice that the difference in the adult participation in the education process is greater between the countries than one might expect when taking into account the small differences in the economic development of the included countries. The IALS and Eurobarometer data shows that the Nordic countries are the most successful at reaching the less educated, unemployed or poorly trained adults (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009: 201). In the Nordic countries 44-68 % of adults who experience certain institutional obstacles are still in the education process; even more meaningful is the fact that as many as 43-69% of adults who have expressed they have encountered dispositional obstacles are in the educational process. In other European countries the share of such adults varies between 7% and 33% (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009: 202). This is a consequence of the public funding of the sector for public adult education, which is complementary to the field of education for work and the needs of the market and fulfils the other needs of people. Data shows that the incentives used in the Nordic states can positively influence the readiness of adults to be educated.

The Nordic countries increased the share of funds for public adult education in the 1970s and 80s, for they were endeavouring to democratise their citizens and right the wrongs. In the post 1990 period they intensively encouraged adult education, especially when unemployment was on the rise (Swedish reform 1995, Norway 1997; Denmark 2000; Finland recently). Instead of the strict vocational education programmes, linked to the work market, they encouraged rising the educational levels of the unemployed and paid great attention to the development of education in the community (Rubenson, 2006: 330). In the Nordic countries the latter was a consequence of the tradition of public adult education, which is closely connected to the social movements (study circles, Folk high schools).

Why do Nordic countries preserve an important general education share? Let's take a look at the key specifics of the Nordic model (Rubenson, 2005: 22–23; Rubenson, 2006: 335):

1. High and equal participation of adults in the education process in Nordic countries is a consequence of the publically financed sector of public (general and non-formal) adult education that is supported by the state and the local community, thus the participation is mainly free and on a voluntary basis.
2. In a period when most countries are adapting their financing strategies in relation to the effects (market oriented), Nordic countries still have an alternative, compensational financing – special target financing of education for underprivileged groups of adults, who are motivated with special education funds. The funds are mainly intended for the unemployed, individuals with various disorders, individuals with low education levels, immigrants and others who have problems accessing education. The intention behind target financing is to achieve greater equality (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009: 199); they have ascertained that the general education policies have a limited effect on recruiting the underprivileged groups, because the traditionally strong groups use a greater share than allocated to them.
3. The Nordic countries also have a strong tradition of cooperation between the state and the organisations in the labour market, at which trade unions and associations of employers pay great attention to education and training (Rubenson, 2006: 336). This is a joint effort of the state, trade unions and employers, which alongside other state measures help adults, overcome the various obstacles for work related education.

On the basis of the IALS research data a detailed analysis was performed as regards the influence of the public financing of adult education. The research did not discover a connection between the public financing of adult education and the level of participation in the education and training processes, however it has shown that public financing has an important influence on the participation of those who are less likely to partake in education and training processes. The authors are of the opinion that it is the public support to adult education that provides the key differential characteristic of the Nordic model compared to other models of adult education (Tuijnman & Hellström, as cited in Rubenson, 2006: 338).

Conclusion

The 21st century educational policy faces a challenge if it wished to achieve efficient and qualitative education. However, the current lack of a coherent adult education system that is arising as a result of the political and economic pressures makes it difficult to evaluate the effects of the various possibilities of learning and adult education. Thus it is hard to define the national priorities for public financing (e.g. target financing for marginal groups). In order to achieve a sustainable adult education policy that would contribute to long-term social development, the financing of the programmes of general formal and informal adult education should be a part of the public educational policy, not merely economically rational and calculated but also socially and developmentally oriented. Thus a normative frame that would protect from further neo-liberal acquisition and once again link adult education to the concept of social justice and development is necessary. At the end of this paper I would like to offer a few open questions to which the answers are yet to be found.

- The needs of individuals and social needs often differ one from another, however they come the closest on the level of community. Community education, which has a long tradition in developed countries, is especially exposed in burning economic situations, for they influence the positive social changes, the quality of life, personal growth, improved interpersonal relations and solidarity. In order to successfully fulfil the interest of the state and the individual it is thus necessary to revive the importance of the community that allows diversity in values, norms and institutions, develop informal general education and straighten the civil society.
- In order to preserve the diversity and the specifics of the adult education field we need to establish complementarity between the formal/non-formal and general/vocational education; between the community, public adult education and the education for work. At this the partnership between the state, employers, trade unions and the civil society is of utmost importance. Instead of financing according to the effects (market oriented) it would be sensible to think about alternative (target) financing with a compensational charge through which we could ensure equality in the access to education.
- In the field of adult education there is a demand for ensuring sufficient operation of the public network of institutions and programmes for various needs of adults as well as for public financing of adult education (state and municipal funds), which should be supplemented by

proportional additional funds (from companies, participants and other sources). The diverse education offer should be ensured to reach the demand, however state interventions are necessary in order to increase the accessibility to education to those groups that show less self-initiative for joining.

The dilemma presented in this paper does therefore not allow simplifications and single sided conclusions. Without appropriate development of science, technology and various expert fields, to which appropriate education of the work force also belongs, the struggle for survival on the global market is most probably a lost battle. However, we have also lost the battle if we neglect the public good, social justice and cultural development within society.

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Obrazovanje odraslih u vremenu društvenih i ekonomskih promena: Promišljanje iz Slovenije

Apstrakt: Oblast obrazovanja odraslih može imati veliki uticaj na ostvarivanje socijalne pravde i na obrazovne aktivnosti koje se indirektno bave i ispravljaju različita socijalna pitanja. U ovom radu autorka se bavi razmišljanjem o zanemarivanju sistemskih ekonomskih i društvenih kulturoloških pitanja koja su oslabila sistem obrazovanja odraslih i sveli ga na aktivnost koja je orijentisana na tržište i ideologiju individualizma. Profit je uzrok zanemarivanja socijalne nege, jednakosti i pravde. Iz ove perspektive analizirana je situacija u Sloveniji; neodgovarajući regulatorni sistem i neadekvatan sistem finansiranja državnih institucija i programa u oblasti obrazovanja odraslih doveli su do nedovoljne implementacije javnih usluga u obrazovanju odraslih. Nordijski model se koristi za promišljanje mogućnosti osiguranja javne podrške obrazovanju odraslih putem adekvatne obrazovne politike.

Ključne reči: neoliberalna agenda, nejednakost, obrazovna politika, državni obrazovni sistem.

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