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# EDUCATION OF OLDER ADULTS IN SLOVENIA

*The aim of this paper is to closely examine the actual state of affairs and the possibilities of education for older adults in Slovenia. The article deals with a secondary analysis of the quantitative data that were collected in three Slovene researches dealing with the participation of adults in the education process in 1987, 1998 and 2004. The purpose of the analysis is to examine the changes in the participation of older adults, their motivation for education and barriers that have dissuaded the older adults from education. Special attention is devoted to the thesis that only education based on the principles of critical educational gerontology could reduce the marginality and empower the older adults.*

*Education of older adults (in the so-called third age) is becoming increasingly important amongst the different activities for older adults, above all because it empowers the older adults, while at the same time reducing their social exclusiveness.*

**Key words:** motives and barriers for education, educational gerontology, education in the third age

## Introduction

In a constantly ageing society it is important to change the attitude towards age, ageing and the older adults. Apart from the anthropologic, andragogic and sociologic researches, the medical researches also prove the positive influence of education on the older adults, which manifests itself on their health, their social activities and their capability of obtaining and preserving power and influence (Glendenning, 2000; Cusack and Thompson, 1998; Cusack, 1999; Jarvis 2001). Through education the understanding of old age as the 'remaining' inactive, socially marginal life should change towards a more positive search for conditions of the so-called 'successful ageing'.

In this contribution we wish to establish the conditions and possibilities of educating the older adults in Slovenia. We will present the conclusions of three researches dealing with the participation of adults in the education

process in Slovenia, at which we will especially expose the characteristics of the education of older adults. On the basis of the secondary analysis of the data from three researches, which took place within an seventeen year period (in 1987, 1998 and 2004), we will try to verify the thesis that in 1998 and even more in 2004 adults were more often involved in organised education programmes, that they had less barriers in their way and that they were more intrinsically motivated as in 1987. These presumptions derive from the fact that the offer of educational possibilities for the older adults has become more diverse and can be found in higher quantities since the declaration of Slovene independence in 1991. We are of the opinion that the educational offer is oriented towards the higher motivated and higher educated older adults. Apart from this, only education that sticks to the principles of critical educational gerontology can reduce the marginality and increase the influence and power of the older adults within the society.

## **Educational gerontology and gerogogy**

Years ago Battersby ascertained that 'there has always been a reluctance among adult educators to examine the principles and practices of teaching and learning as they might apply to the elderly' (Battersby, 1987, p. 4). Formosa agrees with this statement, for he has concluded that this feeling has not changed during the recent years (Formosa, 2002). Even though the number of publications in the field of educational gerontology is on the rise (Glendenning, 2000; Jarvis, 2001), Formosa draws attention to the fact that there is a lack of literature on the strategies for teaching the older adults.

Educational gerontology, which links the fields of adult education and social gerontology, explains that education in the older age depends on the individual's education throughout his life (Erikson, 1995; Sugerman and Woolfe, 1997; Glendenning, 2000). It emphasises the importance of education at reducing the marginalisation of the older adults, which arises under the influence of economic, social, political and cultural factors. Gerogogy<sup>1</sup> deals with the practical strategies of teaching in the process of the education of the older adults. In the European academic debates this term has been in use for over half a century, but it was often used in a rather 'benevolent' way. This is especially noticeable in John's book entitled '*Geragogy: a theory for teaching the elderly*' (John, 1988), where gerogogy is limited to the weaker and more vul-

<sup>1</sup> In the literature there is no general agreement about this term. We decided to use the term 'gerogogy' in this article.

nerable older people. Such an understanding of the older adults is on one hand considered as patronising, and on the other as ignorant to the older adults within the community (Glendenning, 1992, p. 16).

The reaction to the non-critical and apolitical stance of the generally accepted ways of thought and operation in the field of educational gerontology is represented by critical educational gerontology, which emerges from the radical endeavour to overcome the suppression which places the older adults into ignorance, poverty and frailty. The beginnings of critical educational gerontology are linked to Allman's political appeal concerning the education of the older adults in which he states that the rise of the quality of life of the older adults will not emerge due to any learning experience, but only through the liberating education experience (Allman, 1984). One of the paradigms of the critical educational gerontology is critical gerogogy, which is defined as an educational practice, the purpose of which is to emancipate and empower the older adults (Glendenning and Battersby, 1990). In opposition to the functionalist or psychological paradigm, critical educational gerontology advocates the 'critical' gerogogy practice, within the frame of which the older adults control their thoughts and learning process as well as have the possibility for future development, rethinking, questioning and reflecting upon the things they already know or the things they are learning.

As an educational practice of critical educational gerontology critical gerogogy understands teaching and learning as a collective and negotiable endeavour amongst the older adults. Such learning, which takes place on the basis of the principles of collectivity and dialogue, represents liberation and changes (Battersby, 1987). The emphasis is placed on education, which is not a neutral activity, but includes moral and ethic dimensions. The older adults should obtain greater power and control over all aspects of the educational activity including the contents, organisation and planing of the course (Glendenning, 2000).

Fifteen years ago Glendenning and Battersby (1990) drew attention to the fact that most educational courses for the older adults are based on wrong-ful assumptions, such as:

- the dominance of the psychological 'deficiency' model as regards the capabilities of the older adults for learning;
- the assumption that any sort of education contributes to emancipation and empowerment;

- non-critical acceptance of goals and purposes of the educational programmes for the older adults;
- not taking into account the various levels of marginalisation amongst the older adults;
- the assumption that the education of the older adults takes place in the interest of the older adults.

The perspective of critical educational gerontology includes the broadening of the social consciousness as regards the older adults as a collective body, which means that they are not there merely to accept help, but they are rather the subjects of the social transformation process. Currently, the prevailing intervention strategies do not include the notion of the potentially older adults; they are treated more like a problem, as people who need help. As a response to such general thoughts and wrongful assumptions Battersby and Glendenning (1992) proposed four basic principles of critical educational gerontology as regards the education of the older adults:

- establishing the social-political frame of dealing with the older adults in a certain society within the context of the economy and state;
- forming educational gerontology within the frame of traditions, literature, experience and discussions, which are present in the critical theory of the society;
- forming a new discourse, which will include concepts such as emancipation, empowerment, changes as well as social and hegemonic monitoring;
- founding critical educational gerontology on the understanding of the practice as a dialactic relation between theory and practice.

Currently, educating the older adults is a marginal activity in the political sense. This can be noticed in the field of financing as well as in systemic organisation of this activity. However, in societies that are constantly ageing a multi-layered professional and political support for the education of the older adults should be ensured. Due to this Formosa proposes the introduction of critical gerontology principles, which should introduce appropriate policies and reject the inappropriate standpoints that the older adults can be empowered and gain influence with any type of education (Formosa, 2002). Formosa warns that all segments of the older adults should be reached through education, however the emphasis should be placed on the education accelerators, who have to be the older adults themselves. Apart from this it would also be neces-

sary to introduce the self-help culture. Finally, the practice of critical gerogogy should take the role of a 'progressive' movement, which would also include the contra hegemonic activities.

## **The educational programmes for older adults in Slovenia**

In Slovenia the beginnings of education, intended solely for older adults reach back to 1984, when the first experimental educational programme for older adults was introduced (Findeisen, 1999; Krajnc, 1992). In 1986, upon the initiative of Ana Krajnc, the volunteers from the Slovenian Association for Adult Education set up the basis for today's University for the Third Age, which now operates as an independent association. The development of the University for the Third Age was accompanied by the public campaign for changing the attitudes towards education of older adults and their social situation. The University for the Third Age is an educational movement for the older adults, which is based on joint learning, shared responsibility, and voluntary work of all involved. Today Slovenia has 31 local Universities for the Third Age into which over 17.000 older adults are enrolled. Since 1984 - when the first group of older adults started their learning process - the number of study groups in Ljubljana (the capital of Slovenia) alone has risen to 222 (in the year 2003/4). The number of study groups and participants is on the increase every year, which shows an interest of the older adults to educate themselves. Within the University for the Third Age courses the participants can learn various subjects, such as for instance: history of art, the classical period of art and archaeology, music, Slovene and world history, literature, psychology, astronomy, calligraphy, computer science, foreign languages, etc.

Following 1990 a number of new education possibilities, into which the older adults could enrol, emerged in Slovenia. One of these possibilities is represented by study circles, which are suitable for the older adults due to their manner of work and their content flexibility. A number of study circles are of special interest to the older adults, for the contents are linked to the folk tradition, habits and rituals that are no longer known to the younger generation. Thus we can encourage inter-generation co-operation and help with the transfer of knowledge and experience from the older to the younger generation. In Slovenia a network of study circles has emerged, that are lead by public universities, Universities for the Third Age, public libraries and a number of other organisations. Because this is one of the most democratic forms of learning, which due to its nature of operation disables most of the barriers for

education, it is a form suitable for introducing to various organisations, where the older adults either live or work. The data as regards the age structure of the study circle members in Slovenia between 1993 and 2000 shows that the share of the older adults (60+ age group) participating in such groups was always around 10% or even a bit higher (Bogataj, 2003).

Most public universities (public organisations for adult learning) do not have special programmes intended solely for the older adults. Some perform programmes of the Third Age University and study circles, but in most cases they offer programmes of a general informal character, into which the older adults can also enrol.

Older adults in Slovenia can also educate themselves within the frame of certain organisations and programmes that are not exclusively oriented towards educational activities. At these the Pensioners' Associations are especially important - they prepare various sporting, recreational, cultural, educational, social and other programmes on a local level. Besides, the political party of the retired and the various fractions of the retired at other political parties are also extremely active. Education within various associations, clubs and other voluntary organisations can also be an important addition to the educational offer. Within the frame of their basic activities the various associations have a number of educational contents and try to encourage their older members to participate in the learning process throughout their lives. This holds especially true in associations that bring together people with chronic diseases (Diabetes Association, Coronary Heart Diseases Association, etc.), for the secondary lifelong rehabilitation plays a crucial part in the preservation of health and a high quality of life, while at the same time presenting an important source of social activities for their members. In a number of these associations older adults represent a significant share of all members.

Lately also inter-generation programmes are emerging in Slovenia. Through such programmes the co-operation and interaction between the generations is increased and at the same time the social networks of the older adults are strengthened. Through the inter-generation groups the older adults can satisfy their non-material social needs, the middle generation is getting prepared for their own old age, while the younger generation can discover the wisdom of the older adults. In the inter-generation programmes the older adults can become an important support for the others, for they encourage others to learn, as well as develop their personal and social life (Midwinter et al., 1997). Regardless of the fact that in Slovenia we are lacking behind a number of countries as regards the offer of inter-generation education pro-

grammes we have a few organisations that are developing such programmes. In this an important role is played by the Inter-generation Association for a Qualitative Old Age, Association for Social Gerontology and Geragogy of Slovenia, The Gerontological Association and especially the Anton Trstenjak Institute. With various programmes and volunteer education programmes they are developing a contemporary social network of inter-generation programmes for a qualitative old age.

## ***Involvement of older adults in education process in Slovenia***

For the analysis of the changes in the participation of the older adults in the education process we have used data from three researches dealing with the participation of adults in the education process in Slovenia, which took place at three points in time<sup>2</sup>, in 1987, 1998 and 2004. There are some differences between the researches as regards their methodological approaches, thus the possibility of comparing the gathered data is reduced to a certain degree.

The 1987 research included 1.934 adults aged between 18 and 70 years (only adults were included in this research, i.e. those who were within this age limit and were no longer pupils or students in the regular education system)<sup>3</sup>. The number of respondents in 1998 research (the second research) was 2.558 adults ranging between 16 and 65 years in age<sup>4</sup> and in 2004 research (the third research) 2.457 adults between 16 and 65 years in age.

The differences between the first and both later researches also appear at the data gathering process. In the 1987 research data as regards formal and non-formal education, selfdirected-learning and independent adult learning was gathered, while in the year 1998 and 2004 researches only data as regards the formal and non-formal education of the older adults was gathered (a nar-

<sup>2</sup> The first research entitled Adult education as a strategic factor of encouraging our social and technological development was performed by the Educational Research Institute in 1987, within the frame of the broader Slovene Public Opinion project (Jelenc, 1989). The second and the third researches from 1998 and 2004 entitled The participation of Slovene inhabitants in adult education, which represented a part of the International Adult Literacy Survey were performed by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (Mohorčič Špolar et al., 2001; Mirčeva, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Following a special procedure 420 settlements in Slovenia were chosen and within each settlement 5 persons within the selected age group were chosen. Thus 2.033 persons were selected and they represented 0,16% of the Slovene population according to the regional principle, from which pupils and students were excluded, so that 1.934 persons remained, i.e. 95,1% of the entire sample (Jelenc, 1989, p. 14)

<sup>4</sup> The initial sample from the national register encompassed 4.290 persons or 0,31% of the entire adult population. Out of these total 2.972 persons were questioned or 69,5% of the selected sample who were no longer pupils or students or were no longer involved in the formal education system (Mohorčič Špolar et al., 2001, p. 20).

rower sample). Respondents were ranked according to their participation in the education process into three groups: active, potentially active and inactive<sup>5</sup>.

## Comparison between years 1987, 1998 and 2004

In the 1987 research it was ascertained that 26.8% of all adults within the sample were active, 10.8% were potentially active and 62.4% of all respondents were inactive. Amongst all adults who were active in the education process (26.8% of the entire sample) only 5.3% were aged more than 60 years.

If we compare these findings to the participation of older adults, we discover that 15.6% of the 60+ age group were active in the education process, 2.6% were potentially active and a staggering 81% of all older adults were inactive in 1987. Amongst all other age groups (under 60 years) it was typical that the share of the active in the education process is just slightly lower than the share of inactive ones; that shows that by getting older people are less and less inclined to participate in the learning process.

The research data from 1987 shows that most of the 60+ group decided to learn with the aid of a radio or television (amongst all who have opted for such a form of education there were 7.8% in the 60+ group) and for education in associations and clubs (6.7% of all respondents who were being educated in associations and clubs were older than 60). This confirms the belief that the older adults most commonly opt for education that is either linked to their hobbies or improves their quality of life. Formal education and education for further employment is more appealing to the young, while the older adults are more involved in the non-formal education and more general programmes (Jelenc, 1989, p. 57). This can also be explained with the fact that before the transition there were very few education programmes (especially for non-formal education), which were intended and would satisfy the needs of the older adults. The main focus at the time was placed on the social care of the older adults.

In the entire sample in the year 1998 31.1% of adults were active in the education process, 27.5% were potentially active and 41.4% of all respondents

<sup>5</sup> Those adults, who were in the education process during the time of questioning or the previous twelve months (in various education programmes, regardless of whether it took place in educational institutions or other organisations), were considered to be active participants. Those who responded that they are currently not involved in any educational activity and were not involved in such an activity during the past twelve months, but showed an interest to participate in an educational programme in the future, were considered to be potentially active. Inactive were those who did not participate in any educational programme and stated that they will not participate in any such programmes in the future (Jelenc, 1989; Mohorčič Špolar et al., 2001; Mirčeva, 2005).

were inactive. Amongst the active only 1% were from the 60+ age group. If we look at the data from a different viewpoint we can observe that amongst the 60+ group there were only 3,6% of the respondents who were active, 21,7% who were potentially active and 74,7% who were inactive in the education process.

The data from the 2004 research show that amongst all adults 37% were active, 20,3% were potentially active and 42,7% were inactive. For the purpose of this article it is more important that 12,1% of the 60+ age group were active in the education process, 21,4% were potentially active and 66,5% were inactive in the education process.

**Table 1. 60+ age group, regarding their activity, potential activity or inactivity in the adult education programmes in 1987, 1998 and 2004**

	Active	Potentially Active	Inactive	Total
1987	15.6%	2.6%	81.8%	100%
1998	3.6%	21.7%	74.7%	100%
2004	12.1%	21.4%	66.5%	100%

Sources:

Jelenc, Z. (1989): Odrasli prebivalci Slovenije v izobraževanju (Adult Inhabitants in Education Programmes in Slovenia). Ljubljana: Pedagoški inštitut.

Mohorčič Špolar, V. et al. (2001): Udeležba prebivalcev Slovenije v izobraževanju. (Participation of Slovene Inhabitants in the Education Process) Ljubljana: Andragoški center Slovenije.

Mirčeva, J. (2005): Vključenost odraslih v izobraževanje (Adult Participation in the Education Process), *Andragoška spoznanja*, 4, 10-21.

If we compare the results from the 1987, 1998 and 2004 researches we can ascertain that the share of the older adults (60+ age group), who were attending some form of education during the time of questioning or the previous 12 months has significantly fallen between the first two studies and risen again from the year 1998 to 2004. In 1987 15% of the older adults participated in some sort of an education process, in 1998 this was reduced to a mere 3,6% of the older adults and in 2004 it increased to 12,1%, what is still lower than in the year 1987. In the seventeen years between all three researches the share of the inactive adults in this age group has fallen slightly, while the share of the potentially active has increased in 1998 and stayed mostly the same till the year 2004. This could mean that the barriers that stand in the way of the older adults and their education have become more important during this period, or maybe there are other reasons for this. Regardless of the increased offer of education for the older adults, participation in the 60+ age group has declined in various programmes.

The 1998 data on the educational structure of the older adults enrolled into the education programmes in Slovenia show that over 50% of the respondents in the 60+ age group have completed only primary school or less. One third (29,8%) of them have only 5 or 6 grades of primary school, which represents the group with the largest share from all age groups. One fourth (24,3%) of the over 60 age group has a two or three year secondary school course finished. In the 60+ age group 15,6% of the respondents completed a four-year secondary school education, while 7,3% have one form of higher education or another. In the year 2004 the share of the older adults with primary school or less has diminished if compared to the previous years and was 35,2% of the older adults. Approximately one fourth (27,2%) of the over 60 age group have finished vocational school (1, 2, or 3 years). In the 60+ age group 22,1% of the respondents completed a four year secondary school and 15,5% of the older adults have finished higher education or more. The data for both researches (1998 and 2004) thus show that the share of the older adults, who have completed merely primary school or less is significantly larger from the share of adults with the same education in other age groups.

The research data from 1987 shows that most of the 60+ group opted to learn in associations and clubs. This confirms the belief that older adults most commonly decide to choose an education that is either linked to their hobbies or improves their quality of life. Prior to the transition there were very few education programmes (especially for non-formal education) that were intended for older adults and would satisfy their needs. At the time, the main focus was placed on the social care for older adults.

In the 1998 and 2004 researches most of the active older adults responded that the main reason behind their education was their personal interest and not their professional career or work. In both researches nobody in the selected age group stated that they were in the education process in order to obtain any sort of formal education certificate, which of course, comes as no surprise. At their education or training they enrolled into activities that were offered by schools or faculties, associations, unions, chambers and private education organisations. In the questionnaires the respondents could not differentiate between programmes and organisations that catered specifically for older adult education, for the questionnaires did not include this option.

The data thus shows that more general non-formal education programmes need to be developed; most commonly they do not take place in education organisations, but rather in other organisations within the community.

## Why older adults participate in education process and why not?

Research shows that the older adults who participate in various education programmes enrol into such programmes mainly due to their intrinsic motivation. Enrolling into such activities offers them the fulfilment of their intellectual curiosity, self-realisation and control over their lives as well as the possibility for reestablishing a new bonds of friendship and mutual help (Fisher and Woolf, 1998; Gaskell, 1999; Findeisen, 1999). The motivation for learning at this age is often weak and is greatly dependent on the appropriate stimulation within their environment.

In the 1987 and 1998 researches over half of the respondents in the 60+ age group stated that their basic motivation for education was linked to their final motivation to 'increase their success'. This includes responses such as 'gain knowledge, enable self-development', 'improving my situation', 'success at work, profession, expertise', 'handling relations at work', etc. In both researches other motivational reasons were also important, reasons that could not be listed in any of the categories – for instance 'reach a goal', 'have an organised environment', 'take pleasure in nature', 'need for certain knowledge', etc. An important reason for the older adults enrolling into an education processes was their 'joy for learning', at which the 60+ age group was ahead of all other age groups in both researches. 10% in 1987 and 17% in 1998 of all older adults stated that this was an important motive. This does not come as a surprise, for with age – especially with the higher educated individuals – the motivation connected to work and employment start to decrease and older adults take time for self-realisation and improving their quality of life.

Research from the year 2004 was methodologically different from previous two researches; respondents were assessing motives for education by importance (no importance, medium importance, high importance), while in previous two researches (1987 and 1998) they had to choose the most important from among given motives.

In the year 2004 the 60+ age group gave the high importance to this motives for learning: joy of learning (61% of the respondents); learning because of companionship (64%), learning for being more successful (32%); other reasons were not important motivational factors for the older adults in the year 2004, which is not surprising since all other reasons are connected to work, employment.

In all three Slovene researches respondents were asked to choose between several barriers that would (or did) prevent them from attending educational programmes. The most important reasons are stated below.

The results of the 1987 research show that age significantly influence the participation in the education process. For all of the eleven barriers that the participants stated in the past it has shown that already from the age of 40 onwards people had a significantly greater number of barriers to overcome in their quest for learning then the younger adults (Jelenc, 1989, p. 164). When the respondents thought about the barriers as regards their future education it emerged that the younger mainly stated situational barriers (being too busy, family commitments, costs and location of education), while the older adults mainly stated dispositional barriers (age, previous education). At the institutional barriers (programmes, organisation of education) the differences between the younger and older with regard to the education are not statistically significant.

In 1987 the two most common barriers for the 60+ age group on the route to their education<sup>6</sup> appeared to be that they were too busy (36,4% of the older adults) and had family commitments (36,4%). This was followed by the high costs (31,2%), location – the study place was too far (25,1%) and the problems that they had due to inappropriate previous education (19%). The same group (60+ age group) saw their age as their greatest barrier at their education in the future (this was stated by 61,9% of the respondents) and they were also worried that their previous education would make it hard for them (19,5%). As an important barrier at their future education they also stated a demanding education programme (16,9%), high costs (13%) and their fear of exams (12,1%).

In the 1998 and 2004 researches only the active and potentially active respondents were asked as regards the reasons that would put them off education (in 1987 this question was posed also to the inactive adults). The 60+ age group in 1998 stated that the most important barrier was that they were too busy (35%). A much smaller share of the older adults stated that insufficient education programmes (16%) and family commitments (14%) posed an barrier. High costs (11% of the respondents) also deterred the older adults from further education, while their previous education no longer seemed to represent an barrier.

<sup>6</sup> At this question the respondents could chose amongst a number of barriers, thus the total share of adults who have defined the individual barriers is over 100%. At this research the percentages are correct to one decimal point and this has been used at the presentation; at the 1998 research we have used merely the percentage data, rounded up to whole numbers.

In the 2004 research<sup>7</sup> the 60+ age group assigned the high importance to the following barriers for learning: being too busy (45% of the respondents); family commitments (28%), health problems (26,7%) and high costs of education (20,5%).

If we compare data from all three researches we can observe that the older adults were 'too busy' was the greatest barrier for furthering their education in 1987, 1998 as well as in 2004. Family commitments, high costs and previous education did not seem to be such great barriers in 1998 as they were in 1987, however the poor offer for this target group seemed to represent a greater barrier in 1998 then in 1987. In 2004 the different methodology which was used aggravate direct comparison.

## Conclusions

In the conclusion of this contribution we try to ascertain the implications for the policies and research in the field of education for the older adults, by using the conclusions reached by the previous Slovene researches as regards the participation of the older adults in the education process. The data from three researches on the participation of adults in the education process (researches from 1987, 1998 and 2004) that we have used for ascertaining the changes in the participation of the older adults show that their participation has declined and increased again during the seventeen years. The decline of the participation in 1998 is surprising, for taking into account the diversified and expanded offer of the educational possibilities for the older adults that has emerged since 1991; it would be expected that the older adults would be encouraged to educate themselves. The new possibilities for education are mainly offered by the expanding programmes at the Third Age University and the diversified network of study circles. These two options are also supplemented by the inter-generation programmes and the self-help groups that are performed by certain organisations (e.g. Anton Trstenjak Institute, Association of Social Gerontology and Geragogy of Slovenia, Gerontology Society, Inter-generation Associations for a Qualitative Old Age).

The older adults can also enrol in the formal and non-formal education programmes in various education institutions, which are intended for all adults. The data from all three researches on the participation in the education

<sup>7</sup> The methodology of ranking the barriers was different in 2004 as in the previous two researches (1987 and 1998). As with motives also with barriers respondents were assessing barriers for education by importance (no importance, medium importance, high importance), while in previous two researches (1987 and 1998) they had to choose the most important from among given barriers.

process in Slovenia show that the older adults mainly enrol into non-formal education programmes that are organised by various, sometimes even non-educational organisations.

The data from abroad also show that the share of the older adults (60+ age group), who participate in the formal education processes is low – Mid-winter (1997) mentions 2% of the older adults. There are socio-economic and cultural explanations for such a situation, which show that there are a number of factors that influence the participation of the older adults in the education process. Amongst them we can find particularly economic, demographic, sociologic and psychological factors (Van der Kamp, 1996); a strong influence is also presented by the education and the socio-economic situation of their parents and by the education during their childhood and youth (Dronkers, 1997, p. 373). The results of the vast international study show that most of the older adults who find themselves in the education process have a higher level of education, a relatively good income and a relatively high level of functional literacy (Bélanger and Tuijnman, 1997). The data also show that the older adults who are in the education process are relatively intensively included in the other spheres of social, cultural and political life.

In this relation the results of the Slovene research<sup>8</sup> on prose, document and quantitative literacy draw attention to the necessity of a higher participation of adults in the education process (Mohorčič Špolar, 2001). The data from the research has shown that from the view of literacy some segments of the population are more endangered than the other. The measures for raising the level of adult literacy in Slovenia would be more effective if they were target oriented and would take into account the characteristics and needs of the marginalised groups. Amongst the endangered groups belong also the older adults (Hanžek and Gregorič, 2001, p. 117), who are becoming an increasingly socially isolated group due to their low level of literacy. The data also show that there are great differences in Slovenia between the younger and the older generation as regards their written achievements in all literacy fields; amongst the older adults there are at least three times as many adults on the lowest literacy levels when compared to the younger adults. Amongst the age groups the worst literacy level is recorded in the age group between 55 and 65; their average achievements are at the lowest levels on all three literacy fields: prose, document and quantitative literacy (Pečar, 2000). If we compare the results in Slovenia with the results in other countries that were involved in this survey,

<sup>8</sup> The research *Participation of Slovenes in the adult education process* is a part of the international Adult Literacy Survey.

we can observe that from all of the countries Slovenia has the highest share of adults in the age group 56 to 65 on the first and second level of literacy, which also means that the difference in the quality of prose literacy (average written achievements) between the oldest and the youngest generation is amongst the largest. In Slovenia (when compared to other countries included in the survey) it holds even truer that the older adults with a completed secondary school did not manage to preserve their written skills that would be comparable to the written skills in the younger age groups. This points towards the fact that adults are not prepared for continuous lifelong learning and that there is little encouragement and poor possibilities for education in the environment in which the older adults live.

Older people are a group, that are more likely to start learning due to their 'joy of learning' compared to other age groups; it is surprising that their participation is so low. It seems that the possibilities for education, which would lure in the older adults are still insufficient, because the older adults do not participate in education regardless of the intrinsic motivation. In continuation, our research of the participation of older adults in the education process is focused on qualitative research in order to study the characteristics of the education of the older adults and the deeper reasons for their poor participation in the education process. The data are already gathered and findings are forthcoming.

In the light of critical educational gerontology it would also be necessary to reconsider the possibilities that are offered by the education in the sense of establishing social networks for the older adults and the possibilities for a more active integration of the older adults into their environment. Through education the number of social support sources would increase and at the same time education would encourage all four dimensions of social support, for it offers the older adults social companionship, emotional, instrumental and informational support.

Even though there are great cultural, political and legislation differences in relation to the older adults in the various countries there are certain endeavours in the EU, which are also important for the development of the education for the older adults in Slovenia. These are predominantly endeavours in offering the older adults to remain active even after they retire; the older adults should be encouraged to think about their individual development, personal growth and co-operation within the community. On the other hand changing the values of the general public is of extreme importance, at which every person should be accepted as an individual and not a member of a certain

age group. Within society we should be moving the gravity from the age differentiated towards an age integrated society and at the same time draw attention that the older adults will have to ensure an appropriate social status by themselves. This is a move from an understanding of the older adults as non-productive and economically dependent towards the understanding that the older adults could also become an economically active group. In this relation Moody proposes that in existing stratified society there should be a move towards an age integrated society in which people of all ages would have the possibility for education, work and leisure time (Moody, 1998). Some experts predict changed forms of social behaviour of the older adults, which will be recognised in pressure groups. These groups will endeavour to change policies – they will operate in syndicates or other forms of joint operation within local communities, in extreme cases they might even operate within the frame of social movements, which will try to re-establish a new understanding of ageing (Thurow in Pečjak, 1998).

The role of education of the older adults would thus be focused on changing the attitude of the entire society and especially the older adults towards old age, activating the funds of knowledge and experience of the older adults, obtaining new knowledge and skills so the older adults would find it easier to adjust to the new circumstances and encouraging individual development and personal growth. At this it is extremely important that the older adults are the prime movers and originators of the content and execution of the educational activities.

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## OBRAZOVANJE STARIH U SLOVENIJI

*Predmet ovog saopštenja je participacija starih u procesima obrazovanja i učenja. Osnovni cilj odnosio se na proučavanje aktuelnog stanja i mogućnosti obrazovanja starijih odraslih u Sloveniji. Želeli smo ispitati promene u participaciji starijih odraslih, njihovu motivaciju za obrazovanje i prepreke koje starijim odraslim osobama sprečavaju učešće u obrazovanju. Naši zaključci i teorijska uopštavanja zasnivaju se na sekundarnoj analizi kvantitativnih podataka, koje smo sakupili u tri istraživanja o participaciji odraslih u procesima obrazovanja tokom 1987, 1998. i 2004. godine. U ukupnim aktivnostima starijih odraslih obrazovanje zauzima sve više mesta i postaje sve značajnije. Ono je snažan mehanizam njihovog osnaživanja i smanjenja njihove socijalne isključenosti. U radu je posebno elaborirana teza da samo ono obrazovanje koje se bazira na kritičnoj obrazovnoj gerontologiji može smanjiti marginalnost starijih odraslih i stimulisati ih u socijalno-psihološkom smislu.*

**Ključne reči:** motivi i prepreke za obrazovanje; obrazovna gerontologija, obrazovanje u trećem životnom periodu.