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## Initial and Continuing Professional Development of Adult Educators from an Educational - Policy Perspective: Rethinking from Croatia

### Abstract

Notwithstanding the fact that adult education is accepted as an equal subsystem in all European countries, it is still characterised by a distinct level of differentiation in the approach and offer, and by a pronouncedly disorganised legislation, which may be seen in the heterogeneity of competences and qualifications expected from adult educators. To be able to professionally respond to the requirements and necessities of contemporary society, adult educators must continuously develop subject-professional, pedagogical-teaching and andragogical competences. Today, the majority of adult educators in Croatia do not have the basic andragogical knowledge and skills because of, among other things, insufficient opportunities for such an education. Starting from this assumption, in the first part of the paper we have described the impact of European policies for adult education on the national strategic and regulatory documents. The central part of the paper is dedicated to an overview of initial and continuing professional education of adult educators in Croatia. The final part of the paper consists of recommendations for the professionalisation of the adult education system.

Keywords: initial education, continuing professional development, adult educators, educational policy

### Introduction

Adult education is a field that has been in the centre of interest of developed countries for the past decades. From a regulatory point of view, it is still the most disorganised part of the educational system, with the least resources and good policy will. At the same time, it is the part of the lifelong learning system with the longest duration, the largest heterogeneity of educational needs, the most diverse human potential and perhaps, the biggest expectations in terms of contribution to the development of a knowledge economy.

Every serious discussion on the quality improvement of adult education essentially deals with the question of professionalisation, i.e., an initial education and continuing professional development of adult educators (Buiskool et al, 2010; European Commission, 2007; Nijssen et al, 2008; Ovesni, 2011; Popović, 2010), which is primarily connected to the educational policy in a single country. The term *continuing professional development* is used in the paper to signify in-service training, while the term *professional development* encompasses the entire teacher education, i.e. pre-service and in-service training.

Considering that there is no unique educational path for adult educators, the entry requirements have a very diverse definition within European countries, and therefore it is difficult to determine the standards of the profession of adult education. With regard to this, Nijssen et al (2008) state that educating adult educators depends on the importance given to adult education, on the social and

professional position of adult educators and on the preconditions for their access to the profession.

Apart from an adequate initial education, adult educators are also expected to continuously upgrade their professional expertise, through a continuing professional development, which is important in order to improve the quality and efficiency of education, and to encourage educators' commitment to learning, responsibility, identity and professional satisfaction (Čepić et al, 2015).

Out of numerous professional development paradigms that have been developed in the past decades, the Competency-Based Approach and the Holistic or Reflective Approach are considered as the dominant ones (Creemers et al, 2013). The first approach is focused on teaching competences or standards that teachers must master, while the second one is focused on teaching practice reflection, experience and the development of values. Finally, it can be said that traditional models of continuing professional development are usually transmission-oriented and take place in the form of short workshops and seminars and are mostly organised on a one-time basis. On the other hand, the newest models normally occur over a longer period of time, within a particular context, in the form of practitioner inquiry, mentoring and study circles. Notwithstanding the model, the purpose of continuing professional development is, first of all, to be of benefit not only to teachers, but also to schools and students (Dawkins, 2011).

Professional development is a collaborative process that provides follow-up, implies continuity, individual and institutional responsibility, material and professional support, relevant sources, satisfying the needs of teachers and schools, social recognisability and credibility and differentiation regarding specific needs.

It is questionable as to what extent the professional development of adult educators really satisfies the stated criteria. Recent studies have shown that the initial education of adult educators in Europe ranges from an academic education to simply possessing work experience in a certain field and that the continuing professional development system is poorly developed. The lack of development is due to insufficient funding of adult education institutions for training, as well as the unattractive employment status of adult educators (Nijssen et al, 2008), which is undoubtedly also the case in Croatia.

This paper will give an overview of the current initial education and continuing professional development offers for adult educators, from an educational-policy perspective of the Republic of Croatia and the European educational area.

### **Reflections of current EU educational policies on the professional development of adult educators in Croatia**

EU institutions dedicate significant attention to teachers' competences, therefore we can rightfully talk about a Europeanisation of teachers' education policy. In line with this, the challenges faced by teachers' initial education and continuing professional development are common to most European countries and are linked to the introduction of national competency standards and to the concept of teachers' lifelong education (Eötvös Loránd University, 2014). On the other hand, the location of governmental responsibility for adult education varies within EU member states, as does its legal status (Milana & Holford, 2014).

In their study's conclusion, Nijssen et al (2008) suggest that in many European countries there are no prescribed initial qualifications, formal requirements or structural measures to promote adult educators' training. The development of learning organisations and the creation of collaboration networks are hardly present in the area of European adult education, hence it may be concluded that continuing professional development is highly individualised and most frequently dependant on the employment status of adult educators. Čepić (2008) wrote about this topic emphasizing that nationally, the support of educators' professional development in an adult education institution involves the responsibility of each employee, but also of the entire management board, and can be achieved through the creation of learning organisations.

Even though the implementation of European educational policies mainly exists in the framework of the so called soft law, movements and changes in the adult education sector in Croatia (document production, adoption of principles, definition of priority areas and goal setting) are harmonised in time and content with the European policy on adult education (Council of the EU, 2011; MZOS, 2014).

The key actors for adult education nationally are the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, passing laws and regulations and following their implementation, the Council for Adult Education, a professional and advisory body of the Croatian Government and the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, following and improving the work of adult education institutions.

According to the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education data from 2015, in Croatia there are 569 adult education institutions, 10793 adult educators and 249775 attendees who, most frequently, enrol in professional training programmes (about 60%), secondary school programmes and pre-qualification (about 23%), as well as professional improvement programmes (about 9%).

Since 2007, the adult education activity in Croatia has been regulated by the *Adult Education Act*, according to which "adult education is based on the principles of professional and moral responsibility of adult educators and on the guarantee of the quality of the educational offer", while "the programme is carried out by teachers, professors, professional associates, lecturers, coaches, coordinators and others", who "must fulfil the conditions prescribed by the programme" and "have the right and obligation to professional and andragogical development" (Official Gazette 17/07, 107/07, 24/10). According to the same *Act*, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education is responsible for programmes of continuing andragogical professional development. The working norm for adult educators is defined in accordance with the regulations on educational activities (Official Gazette 17/08) and it represents one of the key forms of structural support for continuing professional development as teachers in Croatia, just as in most European countries, spend more than half of their time in classes, while the rest is utilised for other activities, among which is professional development. For beginners in the formal adult education system, a period of apprenticeship (12 months) is prescribed, during which the apprentice is being introduced to the work, followed by a license examination.

In a recent document regarding our educational policy, the *Strategy of Education, Science and Technology* from 2014, it is possible to see a prospect for the professionalisation of the system through the establishment and implementation of: (1) a lifelong professional development system, adult educators' licensing and qualification standards' development; (2) a programme for psychological, didactic-methodical, andragogical and additional education and training; and (3) projects that will precede the definition of a lifelong professional development system, adult educator licensing and qualification standards' development for adult educators (MZOS, 2014).

The European Public Policy harmonisation processes regarding the adult education sphere were additionally reinforced by the implementation of the Grundtvig and Erasmus+ programmes and with projects co-financed by the European Social Fund. In the context of the realisation of common European strategic goals, the current ESF project *Development of occupational standards and qualification standards for experts in adult education*, carried out by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split, holds a special place. The aim of the project is to strengthen adult educators' competences through the development of occupational and qualification standards and the preparation of a higher education curriculum for their education, while its foundation can be found in the mentioned *Strategy's* third measure.

The second important project being implemented with the European Commission's financial help is the project *Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning*, carried out by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport. Within the project's framework, the *Recommendations for the development of quality in the system of adult education and lifelong learning in the Republic of Croatia* (MZOS, 2015) were published as a result of the analysis of strategic documents, forums and a SWOT analysis of the system. Among the results concerning adult educators' competences, the following were mentioned: correspondence between the European and the national strategy, questionable quality of classes and educational programmes, insufficient competences of adult educators, the need to invest in professional development and find additional sources of financing, and to encourage staff mobility. Among the weaknesses of the adult educational system, the SWOT analysis has ranked the non existence of initial andragogical education as an entry requirement, and the fact that continuing professional development is not a condition for the employment of adult educators, which is something that the scientific community has already been pointing out for some time (Čepić, 2009; Kušić, Klapan & Vrclj, 2015).

### **Initial education and continuing professional development of adult educators in Croatia**

One of the main goals of the interested adult education scientists and practitioners is the standardisation of competences and qualifications of adult educators.

In Croatia, educators employed in adult education are experts of different profiles with a degree in non-pedagogical studies or pedagogical studies. The majority of educators in Croatia (regardless of their starting qualifications) work part-time in adult education.

Based on the *Adult Education Act* (2007), teachers employed in formal education must possess subject-professional and pedagogical-teaching competences to work with children in elementary and secondary schools. For those working in non-formal adult education though, there are no regulated conditions, qualifications and competences. Absurdly, andragogical competences are not compulsory to work in the adult education system.

It must be emphasized that a degree in andragogy has never existed and still does not exist in Croatia. Currently there are courses aimed at the acquisition of andragogical competences in Croatian universities, but andragogy is still traditionally understood as a pedagogic discipline. In accordance with this, andragogy is a compulsory subject in the curriculum of pedagogy undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate degrees in Zagreb, Osijek, Split and Zadar. The only existing andragogy department in Croatia is at the Department of Pedagogy in Rijeka, where Andragogy and Adult Education and Local Development are carried out as compulsory courses, while Adult Education in the Conception of Lifelong Learning, Adult Teaching Models, Andragogy of Target Groups, Knowledge Economy and Business Environment are elective courses.

Although the mentioned national documents highlight insufficient competences of adult educators as a key challenge in adult education, it seems that the offer and continuity of professional development programmes is smaller than the actual demand. In Croatia, continuing professional development of adult educators is primarily carried out nationally, usually on a one-time basis, in the form of a workshop or conference, and generally focused on knowledge acquisition and attitude development. Given that these programmes do not represent a condition for employment, they are primarily the responsibility of individuals or institutions and generally not differentiated with regard to the specific needs of the length of service or institution.

A significant role in the implementation of continuing professional development programmes was held, and still is, by adult education associations, competent administrative bodies and adult education institutions. The Summer Andragogical School is an example of good practice which, apart from short closure periods, has existed since 1958. Besides the Summer Andragogical School, an important role is also held by the Winter Andragogical School. Both of them operate even today in the organisation of the Croatian Andragogical Society, under the name Andragogical Conference. Verified training and improvement programmes for gaining andragogical competences are also carried out by the Zvonimir Learning Institute in Zagreb.

A crucial adult education institution is the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education. From 2009, the Agency has been periodically carrying out two free continuing professional development programmes, resulting from the CARDS 2004 programme: Andragogical Teaching Models (20 hours) and Andragogical Didactic Application (16 hours). Furthermore, occasionally it organises forums and seminars, and the International Andragogical Symposium since 2013. In 2016 the Agency is carrying out the second cycle of the free Curriculum globALE workshops. It is an internationally recognised educational programme for adult educators (660 hours).

Except from the sectorial, in this context, the role of the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes and its Grundtvig and Erasmus+ programmes, cannot be

disregarded. For instance, from 2010 to 2012, Croatia has received 981.859 euros for the sector of adult education, while in 2010 and 2011, 92 individual mobilities were realized (available at: <http://hr.statisticsforall.eu/statistics-llp-grundtvig.php>). For most adult educators, these programmes represent a unique opportunity to participate in high quality international in-service trainings and mobilities.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The current situation in Croatia suggests the need for a more comprehensive research of adult educators' needs. Based on research results, it would be possible to develop high quality continuing professional programmes by including different approaches, methods and models. In doing so, special attention should be paid to ensuring the continuity of professional development and launching long-term local programmes, aimed at developing the reflexivity of teachers.

In addition to legislation and strategic documents, appropriate infrastructure and financial support, a key role in the education of adult educators is covered by the assurance and development of quality on a systematic level. Croatia needs a university degree in andragogy, which could be carried out independently or combined with other study programmes. Furthermore, it is possible to introduce optional modules with andragogical content, even in degrees related to other profiles and develop specialised andragogical programmes offered in the framework of lifelong learning university programmes for additional education.

The development of andragogical competences should go from being a dominantly centralised model to being a part of regional strategies, which could contribute to the realisation of common socio-economic goals. This also implies the possibility of local funding for professional development.

The following key component is the support of the administration of adult education institutions to those participating in continuing professional development and promoting the importance of internal education in the institution. It is necessary to build networks that encourage and support horizontal learning, for instance professional learning communities, through which it would be possible to share knowledge and experience, encourage innovation and act as a stimulant.

Finally, in order to work with adults, we consider the introduction of regulations for continuing professional development as a particularly significant condition for practising the profession of adult education. This is necessary if we wish to achieve the desired changes.

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