

Lifelong Learning and Higher Education Institutions: Through Implemented Example to Systemic Solution

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As a result of the third industrial revolution, the thirty-year-old idea of lifelong learning (Eurydice 2002) has been gaining particularly strong ground in the last decade. Lifelong education is a strategic principle which traverses the whole education vertical without depleting itself (Zgaga 2002).

Today's rapidly changing environment calls for new knowledge and skills that had stayed out of reach for the beneficiaries of the Slovenian education system in the past, and still remain largely unattainable through those forms of formal schooling that lead to a bona fide degree (higher education qualification). The main reasons are to be found in the deep-rooted traditions and substantial autonomy of the Slovenian higher education system – the system, institutions and individuals – as well as in its distinctive approach to adopting study programmes.

This article focuses on adult education within a higher education system. After discussing certain theoretical assumptions, we proceed to describe an example of 'good practice' set by a higher education institution, which has offered several modern courses, specially designed to meet the needs of their target population, as part of the Phare 2000 project. These courses have enriched the selection of education programmes in the Slovenian market and, most importantly, given the participants an opportunity to upgrade their formal education. For Slovenia, with average educational attainment less than a secondary school-leaving certificate (SURS 2002), this development is crucial, especially on the threshold of the EU, as Slovenia will have to become an equal partner and competitor in both the education and labour market sectors.

FROM 'LIFELONG EDUCATION' TO 'LIFELONG LEARNING'

Even before the beginning of the third industrial revolution at the beginning of the seventies, which is the main reason for the rapid alteration of

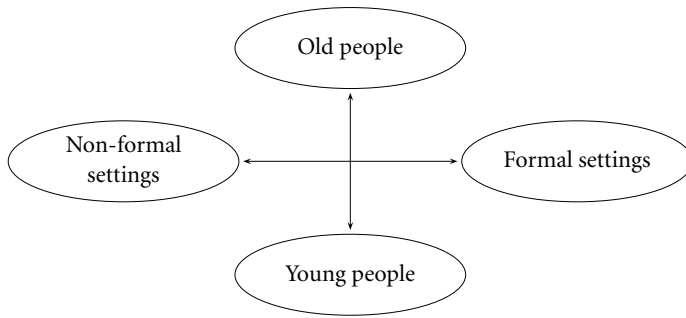


Figure 1: Dimensions of lifelong learning (adapted from Bushier 2001)

the existing knowledge, UNESCO introduced the idea of the right and the need of every individual to learn throughout life. Therefore governments have to play an active role in removing the obstacles to the access to formal or informal forms of education. (Eurydice 2002). The Faure report from 1972 emphasized vertical integration – learning from an early age until old age (the so-called education from the cradle to the grave) and horizontal integration, where formal as well as informal forms of education become connected (Boshier 2000). Both types of integration and the democratization of education lead to the so-called learning society (ibid.).

Psycho-social and structural barriers prevent people from taking decisions about education from ‘the cradle to the grave’. Structural obstacles in vertical integration can be eliminated by appropriate legislation (Boshier 2000) and the flexibility of education institutions. Mere availability of education is not enough for success, because the integration in education can, in some environments, very often be connected with negative associations of participants/students stemming from their full-time studies in education institutions, which can be the cause of various psycho-social obstacles. In learning, it is important what knowledge an individual acquires and not where and how this knowledge was acquired. Therefore the concept of lifelong learning connects both formal and informal education (Boshier 2000).

Limitations in public spending in the seventies were an impediment to the realisation of lifelong education. Only in the middle of the nineties did the concept of lifelong education become of interest again, this time in the form of lifelong learning. Even today both terms are used – lifelong learning and lifelong education. The former may bring to mind various

negative and unpleasant ideas, mainly because of the formal compulsory education, which is why the term lifelong learning is more often used (Eurydice 2002), especially in OECD countries (Boshier 2000). The term lifelong learning relates to an individual, who behaves as a customer in a consumer society – searches for the best offers on the market and takes independent decisions for learning.¹ Learning is predominantly the activity of an individual, whereas education is connected with the activities of the state – education policy and ensuring resources – as well as with the activity of the institution which is engaged in education. In the education context, the individual is a citizen looked after by the state. (Boshier 2000). The fact remains that education represents a wider concept than learning, as it involves both teaching (an activity carried out by the teacher) and learning (an activity carried out by the learner). The state is involved mainly through its education policy which regulates and directs education. Regardless of the term used, we speak about lifelong learning or education when learning or education last throughout life and can be done in a formal or informal way or acquired on an occasional basis. Lifelong learning awareness should be built at an early age, mainly during compulsory education. In his report, Boshier (2000) pointed out the need for restructuring of education institutions, which have to include the component of lifelong education into their strategies.

The Delors report (Delors 1996) described four main functions of lifelong learning, the four pillars:

- learning to do,
- learning to know,
- learning to live together,
- learning to be.

The existing education systems are too often based only on ‘learning to know’, sometimes also on ‘learning to know how to work’, whereas the other two types of learning are rather neglected (Trunk 2002, 142). Only the learning based on all four pillars will make it possible for individuals to discover their own creativity (Delors 1996, 21) and be able to adapt to the rapidly changing environment.

Delors (1996) believed that higher education is a driving force of economic development and found that in the last ten years almost everywhere tertiary education has faced a crisis, mainly due to the number of unemployed graduates. Modern technologies make knowledge obsolete, thus shorter education programmes and constant care for lifelong

education and learning will come to the forefront. Social changes, together with development of the market, initiated the creation of numerous educational institutions and new fields of study, because of which higher education institutions have lost their central position. The quality of programmes is becoming more and more important, therefore it is of extreme importance to educate university teachers, connect them with other institutions and with the economy.

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The concept of lifelong learning, included in the Memorandum on lifelong learning (2000), is a part of numerous national programmes and also a part of the Slovenian national programme on higher education.

The term lifelong learning is difficult and indefinable. Marks (2002) believes that lifelong learning can be considered as a 'second chance' for adults, who did not have an opportunity to enter tertiary education when young or had not been successful during their previous studies. It can also be considered as education for the development of certain skills or for promotion to a higher position in a profession or job. Taking both definitions into account, it can be said that lifelong learning has been present in Slovenia for a rather long period, above all in the form of part-time studies,² which makes it possible for the part-time students to obtain formal education even in their later life. Post-graduate studies in Slovenia are also on the increase. The number of master and specialist degrees between 1998 and 2001 grew on average by 6.4%, the number of PhD degrees by 3.9% (SURs 2002, 134). Jelenc Krašovec (2003, 16–7) speaks about a minimalist approach to lifelong education, where the central role of such education seems to be placed on the educational institution and on the widening of institutional education, and not on an individual, who is willing to accept the initiative for acquiring new knowledge (maximalistic concept). Slovenian tertiary institutions offer education in which participants gain formal education or vocational education,³ as well as education for specific skills.⁴

The European Commission 2000 put forward a Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000), in which the following was stated:

- Gaining new or updating existing knowledge, by providing equal lifelong learning opportunities for all. Thus it is necessary to:
- raise levels of investment in human resources,

- ensure adequate and high quality information about available learning opportunities,
- introduce innovation in teaching and learning,
- change the way in which learning is understood – it can be a result of formal or informal/opportunity learning activities, and
- provide lifelong learning opportunities closer to home, which is mainly possible through the use of information-communication technology.

Lifelong education is a strategic principle, which has to be present in the whole education vertical, from primary to tertiary education, as well as after the completion of formal education (adapted from Zgaga 2002, 143). Lifelong education is not only related to the area of adult education, but also to educating children and young people.

LIFELONG LEARNING AT THE FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT
IN KOPER (FM)

At the FM we have tried to improve part-time studies, as the only form of lifelong learning, because we are aware that lifelong learning can be implemented through at least two activities:

- Raising students' awareness about learning as a lifelong process, which is why knowledge and learning skills (learning to learn) become a part of all study programmes.
- Carrying out different education programmes for our graduates and graduates coming from other institutions. Participants in these education programmes are offered new professional knowledge.

In the academic year 2002/2003, we prepared a programme designed for upgrading knowledge within the Phare 2000 project⁵ and in accordance with article 33 of the Higher Education Act (1999), named Educational Programme – Management, Administration and Tourism. Under the terms of the project, the programme was mainly aimed at the unemployed in the Savinjska region.

Rapidly changing conditions, and people who are unable to cope with them, are reflected in the labour market, mainly in the number of unemployed. The Savinjska region, which is the third biggest region in Slovenia and the most complex region after Podravje, belongs to a region known for depopulation, which is a consequence of the lack of employment and career opportunities within the region (adapted after ZRSZ).

Despite the fact that unemployment has been decreasing since 1997,⁶ it is still higher⁷ than the Slovenian average (ZRSZ, SURS).

The purpose of the programme of upgrading entitled, Educational Programme – Management, Administration and Tourism, was to offer new skills and competences and to encourage participants to continue their studies in tertiary education. In addition, the programme should increase productivity and encourage self-employment activities for the unemployed. Its long-term effect is to be revealed in an important rise in the educational level, as well as in the economic success in the region and the state.

106 The programme was prepared for those who had at least completed secondary education, as it was meant for upgrading secondary or higher education, and for those who were mainly employed in tourism and business services. The programme was implemented over 4 months, with lectures going on continuously for five days a week, in a similar way as full-time studies. An important role was given to the so-called motivational workshops, organised by the FM in cooperation with the Employment Services of Slovenia. The majority of participants who completed the education programme and received a certificate (79%) actively participated in these workshops.

Participants could select from among fifteen subjects (modules), each lasting for 60 hours (30 hours of lectures and exercises and approximately 30 hours of independent learning and preparations for various projects). In order to receive a certificate – upgrading study programme – the participants had to pass examinations in at least ten subjects, which amounted to 30 credits.

Altogether, 79 participants joined the programme, of which 72.2% were unemployed. Because of different psycho-social obstacles, 10 participants withdrew from the programme before its completion. The majority of participants were female (77%) and less than 30 years old (75.6%).

Considering the fact that mainly the unemployed participated in the programme and that one of the main reasons was to encourage participants to continue their studies, various teaching methods were used. Teachers and staff spent 45% of hours lecturing, whereas the remaining time was devoted to other active teaching methods (team work, individual work, discussions, and case studies). Active methods, with the exception of individual consultations with the teacher, were keenly accepted – especially team work. There was somewhat less motivation from the part of participants for methods which involved presentations. Taking

Table 1: Comparison of some personal characteristics of Phare programme participants and students of sM Koper

Characteristics of participants/students	Phare programme participants		Students of sM Koper	
	M	SD	M	SD
Study abilities	3.1	0.6	3.2	0.7
Creative abilities	3.4	0.8	3.4	0.9
Organisational abilities	3.4	0.8	3.7	0.8
Managerial abilities	3.4	0.9	3.5	1.0
Interpersonal abilities	3.6	0.7	3.9	0.9
Average	3.4		3.5	

into account the characteristics of the participants (the unemployed), the lack of self-esteem is quite understandable. Unwillingness to give presentations in front of an audience can also be related to rather poor initial knowledge.

Some personal characteristics of participants were compared to the results of research carried out among students in three higher education institutions, and completed two years ago,⁸ namely among the students of the former School for Management in Koper (sM). The comparison of average grades⁹ of some personal characteristics can be seen in Table 1.

As seen from Table 1, the self-evaluation of average abilities of participants shows that these abilities are slightly lower in programme participants than full-time students. The biggest differences are seen in organisational and interpersonal abilities, where programme participants have a slightly lower opinion of their abilities, which, once again, points towards the lack of self-esteem, characteristic of the unemployed.

Sixty-nine students completed the programme of upgrading. Of the fifteen subjects on offer, 66.7% passed ten or more examinations and acquired a certificate, which made it easier for them to continue their studies at our three year higher education programme.

A detailed statistical analysis was used to see if there are any statistically significant correlations between success of the participants and other variables, especially between the employed and unemployed, age and sex. The results of the analysis are given in Table 2.

It was found that there is a statistically significant correlation between employment and age, as well as between the person's age and the number of examinations passed. The analysis showed that younger partici-

Table 2: Statistically significant correlations between employment, age, number of examinations passed, and sex of participants

Nr.	Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.
1.	Employment				
2.	Age	0.50**			
3.	Number of examinations passed	-0.29*			
4.	Sex				

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

Table 3: Comparison of the role of subjects for the attainment of programme objectives

Programme objectives	Participants' opinion	Teachers' opinion
Improved work quality	3.2	3.1
Excellent promotion prospects	2.2	3.1
Contribution towards success of the company and region	2.7	3.1
Greater employment opportunities	2.8	2.9
Readiness for the processes of globalization	3.0	3.2

pants were usually unemployed (0.50) and that the unemployed passed more examinations than the employed (-0.29), which indicated that the unemployed were more serious and conscientious during their studies, because they were likely to consider gaining new knowledge as a way towards improving their position.

The final questionnaire, in September 2003, provided data about the reasons for participation in the programme. More than one half of those who completed the programme by acquiring a certificate (58%), said that their main reason was a wish to acquire new knowledge. Participants believed that the knowledge acquired in the following subjects would above all increase their employability: personal efficiency, e-commerce, and the rights of employed and unemployed persons.

Participants of the upgrading programme assessed individual subjects for increasing their employment opportunities in the field of tourism and business services. In their opinion, the most important subjects were: services marketing, e-commerce and English.

Interestingly, different grades were given to various subjects by participants and by teachers. A comparison is shown in Table 3.

The most obvious difference can be noticed in excellent promotion prospects. Obviously, participants who were mainly unemployed did not see, in their newly acquired knowledge, so many prospects for promotion as did their teachers. On average, teachers believed their subjects were more important than did the participants.

One of the programme objectives was the increase in the participants' willingness to continue their education. Three participants decided to continue their education immediately after the end of the programme, whereas 12 participants wished to continue their studies in the near future. Only one third of those questioned (31.8% or 7 participants) had no intention of continuing their studies. Half of the participants willing to continue their studies were thinking about business studies.

The success of the programme is also revealed through the decision of participants (91.7%) who said that they would warmly recommend the programme to their friends and acquaintances. They would recommend the programme mainly because of:

- acquiring new knowledge,
- interesting and useful content,
- method of implementation (running continuously).

The programme would not be recommended only by 8.3% participants (2 participants), because it was too comprehensive and did not lead to a certificate that would represent a higher education attainment.

The programme of knowledge upgrading was well accepted¹⁰ by participants, teachers and the local community. On average, the programme was given a grade of 8.1 on a scale from 1 to 10.

Table 3 shows that the chosen subjects and their implementation contributed substantially towards achieving the set objectives. Most certainly, one of the most important objectives in lifelong learning, i. e. the willingness to continue education, was completely fulfilled, because of the candidates' wish to continue their studies in tertiary education. Only slightly less than one third of participants (31.8%) do not intend to continue their education.

UPGRADING PROGRAMMES – ONE OF THE POSSIBILITIES FOR
LIFELONG LEARNING IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

The programme of knowledge upgrading showed that the minimalist approach to lifelong learning in tertiary education can be surpassed in

Slovenia. Educational institutions can, by being slightly more flexible, offer interesting and useful programmes on the market of educational programmes.

Our case proved that legislative obstacles, as well as the rigidity of institutions in the field of education can be overcome, but some efforts will have to be made with regard to psycho-social obstacles. In our case, motivational workshops had a favourable influence on their elimination, as well as the use of active teaching methods and excellent cooperation with participants, be it by the education organisers or teachers and staff. Teaching methods, on the other hand, could be improved, as well as the preparation of teaching materials, which should, in future, take into account various levels of knowledge of participants, and also their professional background.

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The response of the unemployed to the programme was favourable, but we can still not conclude that the readiness for lifelong learning of Slovenians or inhabitants of the Savinjska region is satisfactory. The employed did not show a keen interest in our education programme, which is a reason for further research activities in this area, which will help reveal the reasons for such unfavourable interest. The concept of lifelong learning should also be present among the employed persons, because swift changes in society do not allow for lifelong employment.

We have described some possibilities for linking such programmes with tertiary education through the knowledge updating programme, and have shown the openness of the latter. Programme participants who received the certificate will be able to continue their tertiary education at our institution. A further step can be seen in assigning credits to the programme of knowledge updating. This would establish an 'accumulation system' in obtaining knowledge, which will then become training for obtaining education.

NOTES

1. The term is often used also in the case of information technology (IT), when we frequently speak about e-learning and not about e-education, despite the fact that education comprises both teaching and learning.
2. Part-time studies skyrocketed in the academic year 1998/1999, when 25% more students enrolled in part-time studies than in the previous year (SURS 2002, 128). This is, of course, due to the national en-

- rolment policy and limitations in the number of full-time students enrolled.
3. E. g. education of students at various higher institutions and faculties where students gain pedagogical and andragogical education (the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and Pedagogical Faculty in Maribor).
 4. E. g. upgrading within CISEF – Centre for upgrading and Counselling at the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana.
 5. Phare 2000 – Savinjska region: Upgrading knowledge and skills towards employment and self-employment in the field of tourism and business services: Development and first implementation of a higher education programme entitled Educational Programme – Management, Administration and Tourism (EP-MAT) SL 0004(02) .01.01.0015
 6. Reducing unemployment is the consequence of an active employment policy (ZRSZ).
 7. The registered unemployment rate in Savinjska region was 15.6% in 2002; at the same time, 13.8% of the active population was unemployed in Slovenia. The situation is worse only in Podravska region (20.0%), Pomurska region (19.3%), Zasavska region (16.3%) and Spodnjeposavska region (16.1%) (SURS 2002).
 8. Faculty of Economics and Business in Maribor, Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana and the School of Management in Koper.
 9. A five-grade scale was used.
 10. Participants ($M = 3.8$) and teachers ($M = 4.0$) rated satisfaction on a five-grade scale.

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