A brief history of lifelong education and learning in Slovenia

The development of lifelong education and learning in Slovenia began before World War II. Pedagogical theorists who developed the concept understood education as part of a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout adult life (see, for instance, Karel Ozvald’s ‘Kulturna pedagogika’ from 1927). They argued that initial education should develop the capacity for the subsequent autodidactic learning, and that mutual learning between an individual and the community takes place throughout one's life.

In the former Yugoslavia the concept of permanent education sprung to life in two political documents adopted in the 1970s: the Resolution on education of expert staff (1970) and the Resolution on development of education based on the concept of self-management (1974). In practice, the concept of permanent education applied especially to technical, medical and educational occupations.

The Directed Education Act (1980) promoted the notion of education as an integral part of one's life and work. This legislative act regulated the entire education system from upper secondary to doctoral studies, and it foresaw education and work to be interconnected in a permanent process. This should provide the individual with a holistic and permanent personal development and a creative and innovative work and life.

The Directed Education Act required every programme to provide the learner with an opportunity to obtain a professional qualification or to progress to a higher level of education. In addition, the Directed Education Act specified:

- connection between formal education and informal supplements, such as training programmes, skill-updating programmes and specialisations
- education in schools and in the field of practice
- advisory and direction for learners in their choice of programmes, advancement and job seeking in accordance with the permanence principle
- compulsory intertwining of general and vocational subjects in every programme, and
- recognition of prior knowledge, work and life experience.

The above-mentioned programmes of informal education were provided primarily by the so called Workers' Universities (delavske univerze), which were included in a uniform system. They operated as adult education centres and provided training and skill-updating programmes and assistance to self-learning adults. Following the declaration of independence of Slovenia, Workers' Universities were transformed into adult education organisations (ljudske univerze) (see Main Providers of Adult Education [1]).

The first comprehensive policy document on education in independent Slovenia, the 1995 White
Paper on Education, recognised the need to improve the quality and the diversity of adult education as well as access to relevant programmes. The document also pointed to educational priorities for special groups of adults, such as the unskilled, unemployed, illiterate, migrants, those with other nationalities, women and persons with special needs. It was foreseen that adult education should not only have a compensational role but should also serve as a generator of innovation and development. Overall, adult education and learning was defined as an integral part of a lifelong (permanent) learning strategy.

**Life-long learning strategy**

Lifelong learning is the *guiding principle* of contemporary education and learning in Slovenia. It is the subject of a strategic document adopted in 2007 by the Minister of Education and Sport who had appointed a special expert group in 2005. This expert group prepared the Lifelong Learning Strategy (.pdf, sl [2]), which was one of the outcomes of the implementation of the EU programme Education and Training 2010.

The Lifelong Learning Strategy incorporates all European definitions and objectives and connects them to the specific conditions in Slovenia.

The document defines lifelong learning as "an activity and process which involves all forms of learning, either formal or non-formal and aformal as well as incidental and informal learning". Additionally, the Lifelong Learning Strategy points out that such learning "takes place in different learning circumstances, from birth to early childhood to adulthood and to the end of life, aiming at improving individual's knowledge and skills." Furthermore, lifelong learning "also results in acquiring interests, character features, values, attitude to oneself and to others as well as other personal characteristics."

The **objectives** of the lifelong learning strategy are to:

1. Make sure that all people have access to learning and education in all periods of life, in all areas of life and in all environments. Special attention has to be paid to ensuring educational opportunities for disadvantaged categories of people.
2. Enhance the awareness that learning results in increased self-confidence, development of creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and knowledge, skills and qualifications, required for active participation in economic and social life and an improved quality of life.
3. Make all people aware that they are entitled to learning and education as well as enhance their co-responsibility for their learning and education.
4. Make sure that everybody has access to tailor-made learning, which means that education and training must adapt to the learner's needs and requirements.
5. Develop a positive attitude to learning and understanding the meaning of lifelong learning in all periods of life; such an attitude has to be integrated into curricula at all levels of education.
6. Increase the literacy level of the inhabitants of Slovenia and use of literacy for different purposes and in different connections.
7. In the national policy and in the theory and practice of education in Slovenia, reach the integration of all areas of education in a coherent system, which will ensure equivalent and equal opportunities for the development and implementation of different types, forms, contents and purposes of education.
8. Develop quality and flexible opportunities and circumstances for continuous learning, education and training as well as opportunities to choose among various efficient learning and teaching methods.
9. Encourage and facilitate learning in all areas of life and activities. A comprehensive policy should make this possible through suitable instruments and by linking economic interests with
social and cultural objectives.
10. Ensure an appropriate balance between investing into education and learning in order to improve human capital (increased productivity, competitiveness and individual employability) and investing into education and learning aimed at personal growth and active democratic citizenship.
11. Facilitate the implementation and use of knowledge, skills and learning as the fundamental source and driving force for the development of local and regional areas as well as the development of social networks within them.
12. Promote lifelong learning as a fundamental value with all public resources and media for communication and advertising.
13. Promote the development of the ‘learning society’ and the ‘knowledge-based society’ as well as ‘thinking society’ as their evolutionary upgrade.

As a key social and development strategy, lifelong learning has been included in a range of strategic documents and programmes, such as the National strategic reference framework (2007-2013) and operative programmes for the strengthening of regional development potentials and for the development of human resources.

As of 2016, national political and strategic documents that reflect the European lifelong learning policies include, but are not limited to:

- Resolution on the National Higher Education Programme 2011–2020 (sl [3])
- Resolution on the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for 2013–2020 (sl [4])
- Roma Education Strategy (.doc, sl [5])
- Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 (.pdf, sl [6])
- Resolution on the National Social Welfare Programme for the period 2013–2020 (sl [7])
- Development strategy for information society in the Republic of Slovenia until 2020 (.pdf, sl [8]).

Distribution of responsibilities for life-long learning

At the central government level, main responsibilities related to lifelong learning policies and programmes rest with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS [9]) performs expert technical and administrative tasks related to the implementation of EU education and training and study mobility. In 2007, CMEPIUS was accredited by the European Commission to perform as the national agency for the EU action programme Lifelong Learning, which ended in 2013. Since then, CMEPIUS has been overseeing the Erasmus+ programme, which continues some of the activities encompassed by the Lifelong Learning programme.

Implementation of life-long learning policies

The development of projects, programmes and activities that are important for the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy has been ongoing. Some examples include:

- study groups
- independent learning centres
- project learning for young people
- knowledge exchanges
Legislation allows for the provision of informal education programmes, skill-updating programmes and for training to increase a person's employability. Such programmes are taken into consideration in the procedures for the recognition of informally acquired knowledge and for obtaining national vocational qualifications.

As regards formal education, several relevant updates to vocational education programmes were implemented in the period between 2006 and 2009. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour developed those updates in cooperation with the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, schools and other social partners. Vocational standards served as the basis for the updates. These standards stipulate the required knowledge, skills and competences and are weighed by credit points. The modular structure of vocational education programmes provides students with increased choices regarding the level of education and vocational qualifications.

Short-cycle vocational study programmes are devised in accordance with common European principles applicable to short higher education programmes. They are developed in cooperation with social partners, weighed by credit points and based on study outcomes. Higher vocational colleges provide learners with the choice of content, they assess prior knowledge and issue certificate supplements. The legislation allows for the provision of informal programmes, in the scope equivalent to a maximum of 35 CPT.

Schools may use personal education plans for adults. This means that the methods of working with adults are adjusted to a learner's prior formal and informal experience and knowledge levels.

Additionally, the research project Networking for Lifelong Learning had an impact on the management and the provision of lifelong learning programmes. The project was a part of the outcome-oriented research programme Slovenia's Competitiveness 2006-2013. The Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Research and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Technology co-funded the programme. The findings of this research project helped tertiary institutions identify the target groups for lifelong learning and their interests. They also assisted in the development of the appropriate study and training programmes. In addition, they helped identify potential partners in programme implementation, such as business networks, location-based networks, excellence centres and technological parks.

Efforts to improve the implementation of lifelong learning are also evident in the development and implementation of tertiary education institutions’ strategic documents.

Furthermore, the organisational groundwork has been laid for the development of lifelong learning centres, distance education units, career centres and shared technological tools, such as distance education software, e-learning and web classrooms. High quality teaching aids have been developed and criteria specified for the recognition of knowledge acquired by various methods.

From the contents point of view, formal lifelong learning projects include accredited training programmes. They are especially numerous in the teacher training field. There are also modular study programmes that lead to formal education and qualifications for specific occupations or for performing concrete tasks in specific occupations (such as management or health care).
Target groups are students at individual universities or independent tertiary institutions. In addition to their selected study course, educational institutions offer them complementary programmes, for instance foreign languages and programmes aimed at the development of information, communication, technological, social and similar competences. Another large target group are the alumni. They are able to take various refreshment courses, especially in relation to new technologies and methods, such as building energy efficient buildings, the application of new materials and modern project management.