

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN FINANCING INFORMAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper discusses the role and importance of local self-governments in financing adult education system, from the perspective of informal education. Starting from deliberation of the new European education strategy, and taking a stand that education and skill development represent the foundation for 21st century society development, as well as the necessity of stimulating open and flexible learning, by organizing various forms of informal adult education, one perceives the importance of local self-governments in realizing the objectives of life-long education and professional development. Contemporary understanding of informal education starts from the viewpoint that it is a part of the modern education concept, and that it is a necessary part of the formal education, regardless whether it serves as a “second chance for gaining education” or as a complement to the formal education based on personal or society requirements. From these stems the whole complexity of organizing and financing such way of education. The peculiarity of informal education is reflected on the fact that it pervades various requirements and parts of society, therefore the sole financial planning, in the part for which the state has been lawfully obligated, is uneven when compared to formal education, which is regulated and even at the state-level. The paper considers this problem within the perspective of the 2013 City of Novi Sad (Serbia) budget, in which the informal education at various budgetary positions (education, culture, environment protection, social welfare, etc.) participates with 2.637 % of the entire budget. The unevenness in financing is not reflected on the various positions of a single budget, but also on the development level of local self-governments. The question this paper submits is

how to organize management of such system, in order to function as optimally as possible, i.e. how to emphasize the requirements for establishing systemic mechanisms which would ensure the minimum of financing of this highly important part of educational system.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional role of education in the process of one's acquisition of knowledge and skill development is gaining new features, conditioning the readiness of the whole educational system for quick transformation and adjustment to the requirements and changes. Simultaneously, requirements put forward by the society are more diverse. In numerous European Union strategic documents within the last two decades, the emphasis is on a society development based on knowledge, evenness of educational processes, as well as realization of life-long education objectives and professional development, not only by means of formal adult education, but by organizing various means of informal education, regardless whether it serves as a "second chance for gaining education" or as a complement to the formal education based on personal or society requirements. Europe is facing huge challenges of the modern age, which mainly consist of change of the economic concept, but also of changes within the society, which is often multiethnic in many European countries. An unavoidable consequence of these changes is the change of the educational concept, which becomes the modern educational concept of "life-long learning". Europe expresses its belief that formal education is no longer capable of meeting these challenges by using exclusively its own strength and values, and that it requires "strengthening by means of informal educational praxis" (Marković 2006:23). Contemporary understanding of informal education starts from the opinion that it is a part of the modern educational concept, as well as a necessary complement to formal education. Along with this attitude, the attitude of the Council of Europe is, following the principles of equal opportunities, that informal education should have an important role in offering additional knowledge for threatened minorities who are unable to attend formal education.

2. INFORMAL EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL AREA

European educational area, organized at national and regional level, is highly diversified for cultural, educational, social, economic and political properties, but also because for heterogeneous organization, management, employment conditions, etc. Equalization, and therefore the setting up of European educational area, has opened a large number of questions, and every answer generates even newer questions regarding the setup of educational system. The fact that the educational system requires good arrangement does not solely come from the fact the needs of society have increased, but also from the international binding documents. According to the Hamburg Adult Education Declaration (UNSECO international conference on adult education, Hamburg 1997, Article 2), education of adults becomes more than a right; it becomes the key for the 21st century. It is also the consequence of the active civil rights, and a state of complete participation in the society. It is a powerful concept for nurturing an important environment concept, for improvement of democracy, justice, gender equality, as well as for scientific, social and economic development, for creating the world in which violent confrontations will be replaced with dialogues and peaceful cultures, founded on justice. Education of adults can shape the identity of life and give it meaning. Learning throughout the entire life means reconsideration of contents dealing with age, gender equality, incapability, language, culture and economic inequality. This highly important document for the adult education system development emphasizes the meaning of informal education within the process of life-long education. Memorandum of the Life-long Europe of Learning (2000) points out that education of active civil society and development of professional civil development are of equal importance, and that for development of basic competence within adults it is necessary to strengthen the adult education system by changing the structure and modernizing the educational system, with the emphasis on importance and possibilities of informal education. The Lisbon process awards the importance to the adult education, and all forms of learning (formal, informal and unformal) become important for realization of primary strategic objectives:

- increase of quality and efficiency of the educational system and training in accordance with new requirements of the society based on knowledge and changes of forms of teaching and learning;

- accessibility of education and training in accordance with the principles of life-long learning, more expedient employment, career development, equal opportunities and social cohesion;
- making education more open and professional training towards the broadest population strata, with respect to better connection of labor and society, and responses to challenges arising in the process of globalization.

The importance of adult education system development and, within it, the informal education, is reflected in the recommendations of the Council of EU Copenhagen Process (2002), and is related to acknowledging non-institutional and informal learning, as a part of the life-long learning system and professional development (Babić-Kekez 2013:84). One of the primary tasks stemming from the Lisbon Strategy objectives (2002:8), and which represents the basic development objective in changes of the area of education, economy, and society in the EU countries, is the *Increase of the education quality and professional development in accordance with the requirements of a society based on knowledge, modernization of the teaching process, as well as the process of learning*. Realization of this objective requires modernization and improvement of quality of the entire educational system, starting with equalization of the quality standard system.

These developmental processes are characterized by, among other things, expansion of the learning area from formal education to the area of informal and unformal education, although still with a prevailing understanding of other learning forms as complements and compensations to the vocational adult education. It is particularly with the advent of Lisbon process that education appears from the margin into the focus as one of the key instruments for the EU development, and all this within the concept of life-long learning having a particularly important role (Vrcelj et al, 2009:58). Recommendation about the policy of life-long learning (2002) is the result of a series of adopted conventions, declarations and recommendations of the Council of Europe on the educational policy. Within it, life-long learning is defined as a continuous process of learning which enables all individuals, from early childhood till the old age, to accept and renew their knowledge, skills and competencies in the various stages of their lives, as well as in multitudes of learning environments, both formal and informal, in order to improve and increase their personal development, employment opportunities, and encouraging active participation in democratic societies.

For the adult educational system renaissance, of great importance is the Bologna process document 2020 (Leuven, 2009). Life-long learning presumes that qualifications can be obtained by flexible means of learning, which consist of part-time studying or studying-while-working. Successful policies of for life-long learning contain fundamental principles and procedures for recognizing earlier learning results on the basis of previous learning achievements, regardless of whether the knowledge, skills or competencies were achieved by the means of formal or informal learning (Babić-Kekez, 2013:85).

The above mentioned documents represent the starting point for adopting the Serbia Adult Education Strategy (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia no. 1/2007) which calls upon to create the culture of learning, social and economic organization based on knowledge, as well as skill and achievement improvement of adults. Adult education is the basic tool for socio-economic transformation and development. It should provide for the following:

1. to meet the labor market and individuals requirements for knowledge and skills;
2. to increase the values of human capital and to create basic support for a sustainable socio-economic development of the country and its integration into the global, particularly European economy;
3. to enable individuals a full social participation and offer a possibility of more successful employment, as well as the ability to be more active and competitive at the labor market;
4. to increase professional mobility and flexibility of the actively working population (the mobility through the world of labor, profession and qualification);
5. to prevent social exclusion and marginalization, to strengthen social cohesion and the feeling of belonging and of identity;
6. to encourage individual development as well as self-fulfillment

The Strategy (Ibid, 9) emphasizes the necessity of institutional and program diversity in educational opportunities, and within the means of adult education, i.e. creating a network of institutions and organizations for adult education in order to expand real possibilities for adult learning and education; to create a well-organized market of educational programs and trainings under same circumstances and con-

ditions, as well as adopted standards; to satisfy the needs of labor markets and individuals for skills and knowledge. The adult education system in Serbia, for the last several decades, has been unobserved and untouched by the professional public or general public interest, although its proper setup is of vital importance, not only for the system of life-long learning, but for development of the society in general. If the primary cause of life-long learning is a happy individual within the society, and by that a happy society in whole, there is no doubt that the mission of the adult education, in all its forms of formal, informal and unformal education, is of utmost importance. By no means can we discuss efficient means of education unless one its part, in this case the adult education part, is not incorporated within the whole.

3. INFORMAL EDUCATION FINANCING – A LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT EXAMPLE

Starting from the elementary premises, voluntariness, flexibility, and accessibility, informal education adheres to social, as well as to personal requirements. Differentiated goals and contents of the adult education need not necessarily be set so they stem from only current or “promising” needs of the socio-economic conditions and development, even in case when offering numerous models of diverse education. Goals and contents must start from the motives and requirements of individuals or groups through which their creative potentials can be set free (Klapan, A; 2001:85). It is precisely where a new role of local self-governments lies – to assist the employees to adapt to new requirements and challenges, and gain new competencies. The question is in which way to arrange this system, primarily within the domain of finances, in order for its management be as simple as possible and in order to have the results as optimal as possible.

Various forms of informal education imply various ways of financing. The paper only discusses financing based on the budget of local self-government, more particularly, the resources allocated from the City of Novi Sad budget (Serbia) in 2013. Planned budgetary amounts for the current year equal to 16 000 000 000,00 RSD.

Table 1. An excerpt from the program of informal education budgetary assets on the City of Novi Sad territory as per 2013

Position Name	Amount	%
Traffic Education Improvement	28.755.000,00	0,180
Education Services and Professional Training – Services by Signed Contracts	21.989.226,00	0,137
Subsidies and Grants to the NGOs, Financing and Co-Financing of Projects in Culture, as well as Artistic, Professional and Scientific Projects of the City of Novi Sad Culture	134.250.000,00	0,839
Professional Training of the Employees – Funds for Realization of Cultural Institutions' Program Activities	108.652.140,00	0,679
Specialized Education Services, of Culture, and Sports, Services of Environment Protection	134.097.000,00	0,838
In Total	427.743.366,00	2,673

Source: City of Novi Sad Financial Plan for 2013, % calculated by the author

Informal education financing is projected on various positions: allocations for education, culture, social welfare, NGO program activities, professional training of the employees. Most of the funds is projected for financing programs of the NGO (0.839%). Isolatedness of the funds within the system points out to the fact that a more functional planning is required, founded on strategic documents and well-ahead planned certain secretariats' program activities. In relation to the entire budget, the total allocation of funds predicted at the level of 2.673%, which indicates an insufficient utilization of informal education as an important resource of local self-government development.

4. CONCLUSION

Modern understanding of informal education starts from the point of view that it is a part of the contemporary education concept, and that it is a necessary complement to the formal education. with the objective of realizing goals aimed at, above all, gaining necessary skills, which, in turn, is one of the tasks of the European educational area. In these processes, the role of local self-government is highly important in creating the scenery for 21st century skills and knowledge improvement,

in securing the necessary conditions for life-long education, professional training, transfer of knowledge, and, in general, strengthening of science, economy, culture, civil values, their more qualitative interaction, realization of common goals, not only by means of formal education within the adult education system, but by means of informal education, as a means of still insufficiently utilized development resource. The questions that remain to be answered relate to the criteria and standards for informal education financing, within the larger framework of adult education system, in order to establish an unobstructed and optimal functioning.

5. REFERENCES

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