

LIFELONG LEARNING IN CROATIA: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

In the time of rapid economic, social and political changes, the lifelong learning (LLL) is becoming a necessity and an essential element of any strategy striving for both the survival and profitability of business, industry as well as the entire nation in the challenging time of the twenty-first century. The concept of lifelong learning clearly implies that, while education may formally start during a period of activity in a compulsory school setting, it will clearly extend far beyond that, continued, extended and developed by experience and activity in a variety of settings, in a range of other institutions, and following a multiplicity of pathways.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the challenges and perspectives of the lifelong learning in Croatia. Being an candidate country for the European union membership, Croatia is looking up to the lifelong learning programs of the European Union in order to set such a lifelong learning (educational) policy that will enable people to enter the educational system at different points as well as to motivate people to consider education and learning a process that continuously takes place throughout the lifetime.

JEL classification: D83, I21, I28

Key words: Lifelong Learning, Declaration on Knowledge, European Union, Croatia

1. INTRODUCTION

Given that Croatia is approaching the end of its negotiation process with the European Union (EU) which should result in full membership, it is necessary to acknowledge the political, social and economic advantages, but also recognize the

disadvantages, in order to fully use the opportunities that arise with the Croatia's acceptance in the EU.

The foundation of *Strategic framework for development 2006-2013* of the Government of the Republic of Croatia is based on growth, development, employment, social involvement and justice which can only be achieved with simultaneous and coherent action on an array of strategic areas. Those areas are people, knowledge and education, infrastructure, information distribution and social cohesion, macroeconomic stability and an efficient financial market, sustainable development and a balanced regional development. This also includes the country to be able to convert the efficient services of its citizens and entrepreneurs (Dalić; 2006, 3). In order to accomplish the here-by given goals, it is necessary to have people who are willing to learn, people who are ambitious, innovative and creative, people who know how to use information technology in order to increase the number of quality positions which would further the competitiveness of the Croatian economy, which in term would increase the overall life standard of Croatian citizens. The safest path towards these outlined goals is lifelong learning because creativity, innovation and economic development can only be achieved with people who are willing to learn throughout the course of their life. That means learning and perfecting oneself in order to remain competitive on the market of work and, thus, increase the chances of employment. In the process of lifelong learning should be involved all categories of the population, especially the highly educated entrepreneurs, managers and other.

It is necessary to point out that lifelong learning is the area where Croatia falls behind extensively relative to the European average. Most of the population, after it finishes its formal education, never attends any further professional education and training. Furthermore, in terms of quality of the workforce Croatia is below the European average. The share of highly educated population is very small, if compared to the entire work active population. It is known that education and unemployment are tightly connected, where higher education means higher chances of employment. With that in mind, if Croatia is going towards a decrease in unemployment and achieving competitiveness on the labor market, it will have to substantially increase the investments in the process of lifelong learning.

2. LIFELONG LEARNING: DEFINITION AND TYPES

Lifelong learning includes the acquisition and modernization of all types of knowledge from pre-school age to retirement, and even later. Knowledge that is acquired through lifelong learning allows the population competitiveness and flexibility on the labor market and allows for permanent employment. Besides the economic component of the importance of lifelong learning, the social importance must not be neglected, which allows for a more active inclusion of individuals in social life. However, the term lifelong education should be distinguished from the term lifelong learning. Lifelong education encompasses only the organized forms of learning, while lifelong learning encompasses all the knowledge we gain through life. The importance of lifelong learning can be observed from the fact that many international institutions have adopted a series of action plans, declarations, documents, etc. (UNESCO, European Commission, many national educational systems). There are three forms of learning or education:

- Formal education - takes place in schools, polytechnics, colleges and universities, where after completing a certain level of education, a student acquires a diploma or qualification. This type of education generally takes place from 6 to 25 years.
- Non-formal education - usually lasts from several hours to 3 months, takes place independently of the formal education system. Can be organized at the workplace itself (training and development through work), through the activities of government, unions, political parties, foreign language schools. Completing this type of education, the enroller does not receive a diploma.
- Informal education - includes the knowledge that one learns or acquires through the course of his life, often not perceived as such consciously. Usually achieved through interaction with parents, friends, internet and last a lifetime.

“Scientia potestas est!” (Knowledge is power!), says a wise Latin proverb, while the Greek philosopher Socrates believed that knowledge is a virtue which is learned and there is no man who knows everything. Socrates interpreted knowledge as a virtue which is gained through education. This means that one gains knowledge throughout the course of his life by constant learning, in contrast to being given the knowledge upon birth.

3. LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

One of the goals of the European Union is to become the “society which learns” or the society of knowledge which testifies about the importance of knowledge today. In March of 2000, the European Council meeting in Lisbon conceived the “Lisbon strategy” by which the countries of the European Union should base their economy on knowledge, thus making the economy capable of a stable growth. Also, this would result in an increase of better job positions.

At the meeting in Lisbon, it was concluded that the European educational systems should adapt to the requirements of the society of knowledge. Among other things, it was concluded that it is necessary to improve and adapt the system of lifelong learning, which should cover all areas of life (environmental protection, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship, etc.). Lifelong learning should allow all citizens of Europe to adapt to social and economic changes, as well as active participation in creating and designing the future of Europe.

The main objective of the Lisbon strategy is the creation of an economy that could respond to the growing competitiveness of the United States and Asian countries (China, India, Japan), economy which would be based on knowledge that would increase the standard of living and a sustainable economic growth with increased employment. European Commission defines the main problems with the introduction of lifelong learning within the first chapter of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. In the second chapter it propagates that the advancement of the active citizenship and the advancement of active employment are equally important and mutually linked objectives in the process of lifelong learning.

The European Union failed to address all the objectives of the Lisbon strategy. As a result, the Copenhagen Declaration has been devised in 2002 in an attempt to develop a way to connect educational politics, education itself and the education based on the concepts of lifelong learning. In the European parliament and Council in 2004 a new action program in the area of lifelong learning has begun which should encompass general educational programs for high schools, higher education, vocational education and education of adults, all within the confines of lifelong learning.¹

¹ Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of The Council establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning, Brussels, 14.7.2004

Although the member countries of the EU have different politics on the topic of lifelong learning, all agreed that this is a priority. In the process of lifelong learning in the United Kingdom, individuals with their demands have a major role, while in the Nordic countries there is a model of social partnership. In Greece and Portugal a greater influence has the government itself (Žiljak; 2007, 75). European Council, OECD and EU have different opinions on educational politics. From the beginning, EU has insisted on different educational systems, but mutual goals. Strategic goals of EU: (i) availability of education for everyone on the principals of lifelong learning; (ii) improvement on the quality of education for the society of knowledge and (iii) improvement of educational systems to the wider surroundings.

It can be said that EU has mutual goals, but different national politics of lifelong learning. According to the available information (Eurostat, 2006.), the expenditure for education in the period from 2002 to 2004 are not the same for all member countries. The biggest investments in education have Denmark, Sweden and Norway with over 8% of the GDP. Newer members like Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Lithuania invest only 4%.

By the decision of the European Parliament and the Council of EU (num. 1720/2006/EC) from 2006, the Program of lifelong learning has been initiated. With this program, all that came before were merged into a unified program of lifelong learning. The goal of the program is encouragement of education and professional training during one's life. It also encourages cooperation of educational institutions, companies, associations in Europe, mobility of all participants of the educational process (pupils, students, teachers, professors) and the preparation of all involved parties in participating on the ever more demanding European labor market. All 27 member countries of the European Union are involved in the program of lifelong learning. Besides the member countries, Island, Lichtenstein, Norway and Turkey also take part in the program. The program is scheduled for the period from 2006 to 2013 and the budget is set to 6,9 billion Euros.

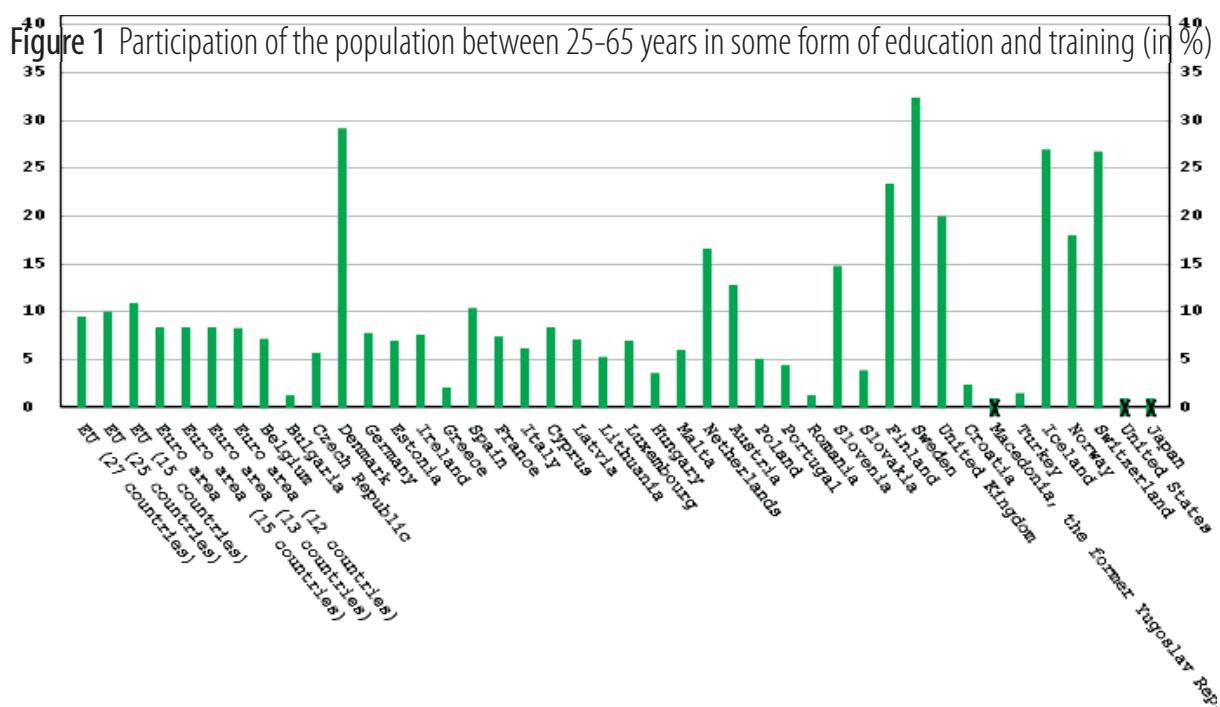
Lifelong Learning Programme consists of four subprograms. Comenious (pre-school and school education), Erasmus (Higher Education), Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education and training), Grundvig (education of adults) and the Transversal program (study of languages, development of information-communication

technology, e-learning) and Jean Manne program (support to institutions and activities of European integrations).²

Projects related to LLP are encompassed all the factors relevant to the development of lifelong learning. The European Union, with the Lifelong Learning Programme, is trying to balance the development of lifelong learning. New member countries (BU/RO/LI) are investing significantly less in the development of lifelong learning and are falling behind Nordic countries which have a developed system of lifelong learning.

A European qualification framework has been founded as a tool of translation and international comparison of qualification of individuals on the international labor market. Qualification framework also includes *instrumental competencies* such as organization and planning, basic and general knowledge, verbal and written communication on native tongue, knowledge and use of a foreign languages, etc., *interpersonal competencies* such as team work, self-criticism, interdisciplinary cooperation, social skills, etc. and *systematic competencies* such as application of knowledge in practice, researching skills, leadership, project management, etc. (Vedriš & Jurišić; 2007).

² Source of data: <http://www.mobilnost.hr/?lang=hr&content=56> (20.01.2010.)



Source: EUROSTAT, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/graphToolClosed.do>

The percentage of individuals (age between 25-64) who stated that they have educated or trained themselves four weeks before the given research is shown on the chart of Eurostat for 2007. Croatia, together with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, has the smallest percentage of adult individuals (age 25-64) who participated in any form of education and training. Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Switzerland have from 26% to 33% individuals who were in some way included in education of active working population.

4. LIFELONG LEARNING IN CROATIA

Population's education is one of the key conditions for economic growth, and is tightly connected with competitiveness on the labor market. Higher degree of education means a higher chance of employment. Of course, besides the knowledge which are gained through regular education, additional knowledge and skills are also important (IT literacy, knowledge of foreign languages, communication and organization skills and other). Table 1 shows the educational structure of Croatia's population older than 15 years from the census of 2001.

Table 1 Educational structure of Croatian population older than 15 years old according to schooling

EDUCATION	Population	Percentage (%)
No school	105332	2,86
Unfinished elementary school	580379	15,76
Elementary school	801168	21,75
High school	1733198	47,06
Higher education	150167	4,08
Faculty	287867	7,82
Unknown	24715	0,67

Source of data: Državni zavod za statistiku Zagreb

From the Census of 2001, Croatia has somewhere around 22% of individuals who finished elementary school, and almost 16% of individuals who haven't finished elementary school. High school has finished around 47% of individuals. Only 12% of citizens of the Republic of Croatia can boast about having high or higher professional qualification. A high number of these highly educated young experts leave for "temporary" work in other countries. Because of the economic situation in Croatia, most of them stay permanently in the countries which offer better living conditions for work and life alike. Instead of being the flywheel of the Croatian economy, these young experts spend the best years of their life in foreign countries. If there's a chance that some of them come back, they are usually quickly disappointed.

Table 2 Unemployed in respect to professional qualification in 2007

Professional qualification	Unemployed	Percentage of unemployed
Unfinished elementary school or lower	18550	7,01 %
Elementary school	65641	24,82 %
High School	161103	60,92 %
Higher education	8452	3,20 %
Faculty	10702	4,05 %

Source: Državni zavod za statistiku Zagreb (2007)

Nearly 61% of the unemployed citizens in 2007 have finished high school, however, in order to increase their chances of employment it is necessary to educate them further. Initially, it is necessary to perform an analysis which would reveal professions that our economy lacks and then create programs based on that data to educate the unemployed. Naturally, as technology quickly develops, this generates the necessity to keep the educational programs up to date. Also, if the unemployed

want to become competitive on the labor market, they need to be educated constantly to adapt to the new technologies.

According to the Eurostat data, in the period from 2002 to 2007 in the Republic of Croatia, the percentage of the active working population included in some form of education moves from a discouraging 1.8% in 2003. to 2.4% u 2007.

Nowadays, in developed European countries, when almost a third of the adult population is included in some form of lifelong learning in order to increase the chances of employment, they are increasing investments in education and technology to sustain the competitiveness of economy. Croatia, on the other hand, is far below those standards with little investments in education or encouraging the concepts of lifelong learning.

Croatia has a long tradition of educating adults, most of which are night schools (elementary and above) which have been attended by a large amount of students. Croatian Association For the Education of Adults (CAEA) was founded in 1954 and was accepted into the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) as a full member in 1996.³

Education of adults in the second half of the 20th century was conducted according to a German model which is still one of the best educational models in Europe today. The fact stands that the Croatian community college modeled their programs after German model, education of adults in Croatia does not fall behind the European standards. Because the quality of the educational system is a key factor in forming a competitive economy, along with the quality of human resources, it is necessary to develop a concept of lifelong learning.

The goal of Croatia, as of the European Union is to become the society of knowledge. For that to happen, a reform of the whole education system has begun. As Croatia strives to join the European Union, that makes the goals of the European Union Croatia's goals. Becoming the society of knowledge is no exception.

A new Croatian teaching education program was introduced, along with a reform of the elementary and high school education and a Pedagogical standard. A country-wide final examination as an equivalent of American SAT's was implemented and universities have adapted the Bologna process. The Government of

³ Source of data: Croatian Association For the Education of Adults, <http://www.hzpou.hr> (22.01.2010.)

Croatia has brought the Strategy of development and education in 2002., then the Strategy and proposal of an action plan for the education of adults (2004). CASA has published the Declaration on knowledge from 2004. and the Agency for mobility and programs of EU was founded in 2007.

CASA, with its Declaration of knowledge from 2002 and Croatia based on knowledge and application of knowledge from 2004 tries to draw attention to the Croatia's economic backwardness in respect to the developed west. Furthermore, it necessitates an increase in quality of our education system, especially in secondary and higher education. Declaration on knowledge of 2002 (HAZU; 2004, 8) has highlighted several main themes: (i) Knowledge has become a major manufacturing force in human society and the main condition for success; (ii) Croatia needs to improve technological development with knowledge and stop the current technological backwardness; (iii) in the development of education it is necessary to set focus on improving the quality of teaching and more adequate content; (iv) in scientific work, the first task is to improve the quality and application of international criteria for evaluation; (v) the emphasis should be placed on the application of knowledge. In further text, these highlights are greatly elaborated, where the main subject is how to setup a connection between education and science with economy through which could the learned knowledge be practically applied. With this declaration comes the foundation for lifelong learning. Also, declaration gives detailed recommendations for higher and secondary education while on the subject of lifelong learning there are no specific recommendations.

The Strategy from 2002 has no specific or distinguishable follow-up in the documents which relate or mention lifelong learning besides the Declaration on knowledge (CASA, 2004.). New documents are more focused on the education of adults. It is not defined which institutions and organizations should conduct the program of lifelong learning. With the Strategy and proposal of the action plan for the education of adults from 2004 the concept of lifelong learning is accepted as one of the primary principles of acquiring knowledge in Croatia. Because of its importance it is marked as the right and obligation of every citizen of the Republic of Croatia.

With the Strategy from 2004, lifelong learning is accepted as the foundation of the whole education system. Some of the objectives of the Strategy and action plan for the education of adults from the 2004 are (Strategy and Action Plan for Adult Education; 2004, 6): (i) to develop measures, organizational and financial

conditions for the achieving of lifelong learning as a right and obligation of every citizen of the Republic of Croatia; (ii) a system for the education of adults that will give everyone the same conditions for quality learning throughout the whole life; (iii) adopt measures for the joint and concerted action by the relevant ministries, social partners and educational institutions; (iv) encourage the use of information technology in lifelong learning and education.

Government of Croatia has brought the Regulation on the founding of the Agency for the education of adults, 2006, a year later after the law on the education of adults has been devised. After that, Croatia has started with the preparation of the Croatian qualification frame (CQF/HKO) which was supposed to insure international recognition of high school and higher education diplomas.

To make the adoption to the Program for lifelong learning of the European Union as easy as possible, Government of Croatia founded the Agency for mobility and the programs of the EU at the end of 2007. The agency implements the following programs: (i) Lifelong Learning Programme; (ii) Youth in Action; (iii) ERA MORE (Mobility of researchers in Europe); (iv) Europass (a collection of documents with the purpose of transparent qualifications); (v) Erasmus Mundus (the establishment of international joint graduate studies). In late January of 2009, Agency for mobility and the programs of the EU has signed a Contract with the European Commission relating to the trial implementation of the Program for lifelong learning. With the signing of this Contract, the Republic of Croatia has been granted participation in the Program for lifelong learning. Although, in order to fully access this Program, it must participate in a Special tender for the Republic of Croatia.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Croatian economy has found itself in difficulties after the Croatian War for Independence when the one's successful and powerful socialist economic giants had to deal with the fall in production and export. There are two basic reasons for that; the Croatian War of Independence in which some companies have suffered heavy losses because of the war damage and the second one being the failed attempt of privatization.

While a war was waged in Croatia, the rest of the world developed at a high rate, especially in the field of information technology and entrepreneurship. Basically, Croatia was falling behind technologically. In order for the backwardness to

be reduced, it is necessary to increase investments in the education system and the quality of education because investment in human resources is one of the basic conditions for development and competitiveness of economy. Knowledge we acquired during our education (elementary, secondary school and higher education) don't last for long and require refreshing. Because of that it is necessary to imprint into the consciousness of every individual that leaving from high school or a university, the need for new knowledge does not stop. Quite the contrary, it is necessary to expand the knowledge continuously in order to remain competitive on the labor market.

The basic problem of lifelong learning and the education of adults in Croatia, and the European Union, is the issue of fitting in different age groups into a single process. How to fit in children which leave secondary education with 16, 17 or 18 years and workers who lose their jobs after 30 or more years of service and can hardly adapt to new skills which are required for their reinstatement on the labor market (computer skills, knowledge of foreign languages, technical knowledge, quick adaptation to changes and other).

OECD's projections show that by 2010 of all the newly opened working positions only 15% will be reserved for the low qualified work force, 35% for vocational professions, and 50% for those with higher education.

It is not necessary to stress the fact that the individuals with a high level of education are required to be IT literate, able to speak foreign languages and can adapt to new technologies quickly. For that to work, every individual needs to be ready to accept lifelong learning and adaptation to the needs of the labor market. The state's job is to make sure that readiness is supported by well-defined by a legislative and institutional framework.

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