

Anita Klapan,
Ph. D.

Sofija Vrcelj,
Ph. D.

Siniša Kušić,
Ph. D.

Faculty of
Humanities and
Social Sciences
University of Rijeka

STANDARDIZATION OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

ABSTRACT

In this study standardization of adult education in the Republic of Croatia has been analyzed. Although adult education has an adequate legal basis and support in this country, and there is a developed network of institutions which are intended exclusively for adult education and/or provide adult education, various difficulties appear. The most common assumption made in the process of adult education policy creation is that adults are a homogenous group, which is false. The category refers to the people aged from 15+ (unless involved in regular secondary education) to those of the so-called "third age". The adults also differ by gender, which is not negligible when considering the needs of the unemployed, especially women. Gender validation is often neglected in the standardization of adult education. Education at all levels is not unaffected by the complex relations in globalization. This is clearly visible in the attempts to implement certain documents (declarations) in transition countries, which are trying to meet the standards of traditionally stable countries. The process of standardization, however, contains the danger of losing sight of the culture and social context of a particular country. Sensibility and the context a central question in (adult) education and require creating new strategies to bridge the differences between global policies and everyday practices.

Keywords: standardization, adult education, the unemployed, women, gender validation

STANDARDIZACIJA IZOBRAŽEVANJA ODRASLIH V REPUBLIKI HRVAŠKI – POVZETEK

V raziskavi smo analizirali izobraževanje odraslih v Republiki Hrvaški. Čeprav se izobraževanje odraslih na Hrvaškem dokaj dobro pravno urejeno in podprto in imamo razvito mrežo ustanov, ki se ukvarjajo izključno z izobraževanjem odraslih in/ali izvajajo izobraževanje odraslih, se kažejo različne težave. Pri snovanju usmeritev v izobraževanju odraslih najpogosteje srečamo domnevo, da so odrasli homogena skupina, kar pa ne drži.

Kategorija obsega tako mladostnike, stare nad 15 let (če niso vključeni v srednješolsko izobraževanje), kakor tudi osebe v tretjem življenjskem obdobju. Odrasli se razlikujejo tudi po spolu, kar ni zanemarljivo, kadar govorimo o potrebah nezaposlenih, predvsem žensk. Pri standardizaciji izobraževanja odraslih je validacija po spolu pogosto zanemarljena.

Na izobraževanje na vseh ravneh vplivajo tudi kompleksni odnosi v globalizaciji. To postane očitno pri poskusih udejanjanja listin (deklaracij) v tranzicijskih deželah, ki skušajo doseči standarde, kakršni so v veljavi v deželah s trdno tradicijo.

V standardizaciji pa se skriva tudi nevarnost, da prezremo kulturo in družbene okoliščine neke dežele. Občutljivost in upoštevanje okoliščin so v osrčju izobraževanja (odraslih); potrebno je ustvariti nove strategije, da bomo premostili razlike med globalnimi usmeritvami in vsakodnevno prakso.

Ključne besede: standardizacija, izobraževanje odraslih, ženske, validacija po spolu

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The history of mankind is marked by changes; they can occur at a uniform pace, but can also be sudden and landmarking. These sudden turning points and changes were referred to by Virginia Woolf when she said that "one

moment does not lead to another" and that "the door opens and the tiger leaps" (Woolf, 1951: 111, in Marginson and Mollis, 2001: 594).

Modern globalization is an example of a historical landmarking moment, of “a tiger which leaps”. When discussing it at the global and individual levels, we are talking about a new modernity, which Zygmunt Bauman refers to as fluid modernity, emancipating the individual and providing complete freedom for men and women. However, in fluid societies, where individuality is important, uncertainty is a common phenomenon. There is no firm support; the burden of forming a life and the responsibility for the failure fall first and foremost on the shoulders of the individual (Bauman, 2009). Fluid life (in a fluid society) can be valued in the context of individual mobility, which requires possession of knowledge (of different kinds), and this brings us back to (standardized) education.

Globalization has had a significant influence on all phenomena in the sphere of social sciences, especially those which have sprung up in the modern era, with creation of nation-states. It affects also those who have “chosen” research into international relations. Even though globalization is primarily an economic transformation, the world economy cannot be studied outside the social and cultural contexts, which makes the research into the effects of globalization even more complex. However, it makes it possible to recognize and see global changes in the transformations within economic, technological, social, cultural and political domains.

Education at all levels is not excluded from the complex relations of globalization. This is clearly visible in the attempts to implement various documents (declarations) in the countries of transition, which are trying to meet the standards of the traditionally stable countries. Globalization processes have altered the content of the question, what, how and when to learn; and in this connection it should be

pointed out that adult education represents a significant part of the activities in the educational politics of individual countries. The Republic of Croatia has recognized the importance and potentials of adult education and, therefore, passed a number of legal acts to support its development under the conditions of transition, which, by the way, have existed long enough. The new conditions, the “unstable rules” of the game (Hodžić, 2010: 169), impose on the adults, especially the employed adults, the need to (re)adapt; they also require “questioning the working experience acquired earlier in order to understand the situation which has arisen and in which realistic chances for collective action and support and for estimation of own abilities for social and spatial mobility are lost” (Hodžić, 2010: 167).

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2000) is a significant document for the European Union as well as Croatia. The European context sees lifelong learning as a driving force which will create a “Knowledge Society”. The creation of the knowledge society (and belonging to such a society) presumes considerable commitment of the society and the state on the one hand, and readiness of individuals to engage in lifelong (daily) learning on the other. The significance of lifelong learning is defined in similar terms in the Republic of Croatia, and documented in the Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia, called “Croatia in 21st century” (Povjerenstvo Ministarstva znanosti, obrazovanja i športa, 2003). Endeavouring to join the European family of the “societies built on knowledge”, Croatia accepts lifelong learning as the foundation

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of its entire educational system, with the aim to obtain and improve permanent employment and active citizenship. In this connection, the Strategy for Adult Education (Povjerenstvo za obrazovanje odraslih Vlade Republike Hrvatske, 2004) defines the following priorities:

- to develop measures, organisational, personnel and financial conditions for realization of lifelong learning as a right and an obligation of all the citizens of the Republic of Croatia: women, men, youth, senior citizens, retired people, the employed, the unemployed, housewives, employers, homeland war veterans, the poor, the illiterate; to include the imagination and abilities of all Croatian citizens as well as their active participation in all aspects of life with a view to “get Croatia moving”;
- to develop a system of adult education/learning that will offer equal opportunities for quality learning throughout the whole life to all people, and in which education is based on and results from the demands and needs for learning;
- to develop and adopt measures for common and coordinated activities of the authorized ministries, social partners and educational institutions;
- to create legal and expert prerequisites for establishing comprehensive adult education as an integral part of the Croatian education system;
- to adjust educational planning and programming, the strategies and forms of teaching and learning, so that people’s knowledge and skills match the possibilities and needs of individuals as well as the demands of jobs and occupations, work and the social environment;
- to encourage and equip citizens to participate in all spheres of modern life, especially in social and political life at all levels, including European level;
- to encourage the use of new information and communication technology in lifelong learning and adult education, as it, among other things, enables individualized approach to learning that is more suitable for adults (the choice of the most convenient time for learning and other favourable conditions);
- to speed up the integration of labour and learning – in line with the OECD economies – as new trends support a continuous link between education and labour, instead of the traditional separation between studying and lifelong labour.

In the Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia “Croatia in the 21st century” it is also stated that the development of science and scientific work is of crucial importance for implementation of lifelong learning/education, which will enable participants to get integrated into the future educational system of the European Union. In line with this, one of the fundamental goals of the Development Strategy is “...transformation of Croatia into the society of knowledge which implies a more rapid growth in the number of scientists and university- educated population and also the increase in social influence of scientific work” (Povjerenstvo Ministarstva znanosti, obrazovanja i športa, 2003: 26).

Knowledge and scientific research form the basis for adult education development in the Strategy and Action Plan for Adult Education, issued by the Commission for Adult Education. The Commission has designed a vision for the future system of adult education, pointing to “critical spots” in this, not yet regulated, area of education. Realizing the significance of work (employment), the action plan envisages immigrations and competition on the European market.

The goal to be achieved is development and employment in the competitive market economy of the socially oriented Europe of 21st century. In order to accomplish this goal, there cannot be any prioritized entities; each single project and contractor creating new value is relevant. The involvement of all Croatian citizens and of the whole Croatian state, which must strengthen its institutional capacities for lifelong learning, is needed to achieve this goal. This area requires from all social partners, especially the employers, assumption of a more active role. The employers must, through the interest groups (Croatian Chamber of Economy, Croatian Employers' Association, Croatian Banking Association, and so on) and the bodies in which they act (Economic and Social Council, National Competitiveness Council), define and affirm their active role in the promotion of lifelong learning and foster, in general, development of a modern educational system.

It follows from the above that adult education¹ in the Republic of Croatia is seen as a foundation for the development of the country, and that the aim is modernize it. However, in the Strategic Development Framework 2006-2013 (Središnji državni ured za razvojnu strategiju i koordinaciju fondova EU, 2006) adult education (and education in general) is considered exclusively as a modifier of the role of the individual in the labour market. In other words, despite opposing public views, expressed in the phase of preparation of the document, education is not presented as a prerequisite for the development of the individual, but as a tool for generation of more effective, competent and flexible "task performers" in the labour market. The reasons for this are most probably to be found in the "production" of competing citizens in the EU and/or Croatia, who will be able to meet the challenges of the European demands. Compliance with adult education

politics includes also acceptance of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and creation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF). If we accept the European conditions and the need for standardization of education, a logical question arises: Which competencies are necessary to make us able to compete (in performance of a job)?

Identifying core (or necessary) competencies of adults is a great challenge in view of the complexities of modern jobs and constantly changing working conditions. An additional difficulty is that competencies need to be in accordance with the European standards. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the term competency has different meanings in different contexts and, probably because of that, there is no comprehensive, generally accepted definition. Regardless of the field of work, competencies can be defined as knowledge, skills, abilities, characteristics, traits, properties, quality, qualifications, particularities, differences. Competencies refer to the sum of knowledge, skills, abilities and beliefs which enable us to realize ourselves or to accomplish our individual goals, springing from our personal interests and aspirations, as well as to get integrated in the society by being able to find work in it. Waters and Sroufe (1983: 80) define a competent individual as the individual "who is able to make use of environmental and personal resources to achieve a good developmental outcome".

The usage of the term competency has been intensified after the Bologna reform, and since the context is always a relevant factor, differences between authors and definition criteria are understandable. To identify and define competencies, numerous authors list types of knowledge, skills and abilities, necessary for successful completion of a specific job and/or needed for successful performance of an

activity within a community. In accordance with this approach we can list communication skills, planning skills, managerial abilities, organizational abilities, abilities to use new technologies and abilities to accept new roles.

Even though there are dangers in standardization of competencies, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) should be seen as important tools in building a lifelong learning system as the foundation of a society based on knowledge. It should be emphasized that the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF)² is based on the Croatian educational tradition, its current state and society development, the needs of the economy, individual and society as a whole, as well as on the European Qualifications Framework guidelines and international regulations, accepted by the Republic of Croatia.

Development of a competitive European (and Croatian) economic environment requires mobility competency and clear recognition and use of all competencies for the benefit of the employed, employers and the whole community. The Croatian Qualifications Framework is an instrument which will enhance employment possibilities and personal development of an individual. It is especially important for the societies in which the ageing population and the economic and technological changes make lifelong learning a necessity which needs to be taken into account in the educational and economic policies.

Competencies are sometimes interpreted in a very narrow sense, relating only to higher levels of education. This approach has been criticized as insufficient. At the symposium of the Council of Europe, held in 1996, Coolahan (2002) suggested that the competencies should be defined as general abilities

to act, based on knowledge, experiences, values and dispositions which an individual has developed and integrated into practice. The author also emphasizes that competencies and lifelong learning are a *sine qua non* for various professions and life in general.

In 1997, OECD has launched the project Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (DeSeCo Project)³ with the aim to provide a conceptual framework for identification of key competencies for young and adults in a dynamic world. This project is connected with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), led by Switzerland. DeSeCo (in close cooperation with other OECD projects and programmes) strives towards implementing an interdisciplinary and international scientific approach to:

- theoretical analysis of key competencies,
- analysis and recognition of development indicators and interpretation of practical results,
- stimulation of processes in theoretical and empirical work and (possibly) use of the results to influence educational politics.

Day (1999: 54) warns that the concept of “competencies” has its origins in Taylorism and in the “cult” of (industrial) effectiveness and that its application in the field of education has resulted from the pressures emerging from comparisons of economic effectiveness and the endeavours to reach standards. Despite that, the author stresses that lifelong learning is necessary in view of the creation of a “post-technocratic model” of professional education.

Even though it has often been pointed out that there is an implicit danger in standardization of activities which should retain both the local and national character,

many countries are still trying to reach the proposed standards to be able to compete legally and institutionally. Apart from legal support, the Republic of Croatia also provides relatively strong institutional support for adult education. A very significant institution in adult education development is the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVE-TAE), which, together with the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, puts the policy of lifelong learning into practice. The main responsibility of the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE)⁴ is to carry out planning, developing, organizing, implementing, evaluating and improving the system of vocational education and training and adult education. Moreover, the Croatian Employment Service is considered to be a significant (institutional) factor in the system of adult education due to its various programmes for lifelong professional orientation/ vocational guidance, individual counselling, education in accordance with the labour market needs, vocational rehabilitation and active employment policy measures. The Croatian Chamber of Economy, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts and the Croatian Employers' Association have directed a substantial part of their activities to creation and realization of a number of programmes of technical training, certification for the needs of business community and promotion of investment in human resources.

Nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that standardization is being carried out on the basis of categorizations which are often risky and “slippery”, as they have failed to take into account a range of differences. In the same manner, the world of work (labour market) has imposed its standards on the world of

education, where they are applied to measure very diverse potentials of (adult) individuals. It also needs to be stressed that adults are not a homogeneous group, even though they are treated as such despite the “flutteriness” of the strategic and other documents dealing with adult education. They are not homogeneous with regard to any criterium upon which identification (of adults) can be made.

They are also not homogeneous in terms of age, a commonly used criterion, because in the Republic of Croatia, according to the Adult Education Act (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2012) the term adult applies to persons aged 15+ who do not engage in secondary education as well as people of “third age”. The development of strategies, educational programmes and models for working with adults should, therefore, take into consideration the age of the (sub)group which is, or will be, involved in the (adult) education process. At the first sight the groups of the young who have abandoned regular secondary education and belong to the category of adults seem to be homogeneous, but they come from different backgrounds and have various experiences and a different understanding of the value of education. All this and a number of other personal differences need to be taken into consideration when deciding on education policies in adult education.

Moreover, adults are not homogeneous in relation to gender either, and, therefore many activities in adult education should introduce gender validation. Gender validation is justified because of the discriminatory practices of the labour market, imposing different

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“rules of game” for women than for men (the range of jobs open to women, average salaries, number of unemployed women⁵).

Coordination of a country’s education with the European standards poses a realistic threat of neglecting the aspects of culture and social context. Sensitivity for social, cultural, economic and political contexts should remain in the core of education at all levels, especially in adult education. Acknowledgment of the context requires creation of new strategies, which will overcome the discrepancies between global education policies and everyday practice, which is powerfully coloured by personal experiences.

Adult education (in the Republic of Croatia) faces challenges, since the standards of the modern world pose a threat for cultural variety, which, although neglected, remains a by-product of globalization and its attempts to universalization.

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- Adult Education Act in the Republic of Croatia defines adult education in the following way; Adult education comprises the entity of adult learning processes assigned to:
 - exercising the rights for free personal development,
 - training for employability (obtaining qualifications for the first employment, professional retraining, acquiring and expanding vocational knowledge, skills and abilities),
 - training for active citizenship (Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih, 2012).
 - see more at <http://www.aso.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Polazne%20osnove%20HKO-hr.pdf> and <http://public.mzos.hr/lgs.axd?t=16&id=17399>.
 - see more at <http://www.deseco.admin.ch/> and <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf>.

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4. Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education is founded in 2010 and has taken over the responsibilities of Agency for adult education. More about the Agency see at <http://www.aoo.hr/> .
 5. In the Republic of Croatia 41.6% of employed are women, in relation to 53.9% of men.