



## Adult Education System in Croatia

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Adult education system in Croatia consists of different forms of formal and non-formal adult education. After examining the brief historical overview of adult education, it can be said that adult education in Croatia was marked and influenced by changes in the regional geopolitical and cultural processes that preceded the Croatian independence in 1991. The ups and downs in adult education, which can still be traced, were present also in previous social systems. However, the preparation of experts in the field of adult education (or andragogy) who planned, organized and carried out by adult education was organized from 1958. through the School for Adult Education of Qualified Teachers<sup>2</sup>. Since the independence of the Republic of Croatia, the education and training of adult education professionals is completely absent. The consequences are visible and present in today's adult education system which will be discussed further in this review.

While formal education is governed by the legal framework and regulations, non-formal education is rich in diverse range of programs, seminars, training courses, workshops, etc., covering topics and areas outside the framework of formal education. This enables the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies that may not be formalized, but that certainly can contribute to a higher level of emancipation, development of awareness, employability, self-employment and active participation in social, political and economic aspects of a society and community. For this reason, this review presents a critical view of the aspects of formal and non-formal adult education in the Republic of Croatia as the state of the art in 2016.

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<sup>2</sup> Lavrnja I., Pongrac S. (2002) Erwachsenenbildung in Kroatien von 1941-1990 (Adult education in Croatia from 1941-1990), in Von Zeitenwende zu Zeitenwende, Erwachsenenbildung von 1939-1989, Ed. Filla W., Gruber E., Jug J., VÖV Publikationen 17, Verband Österreichischer Volksschulen, Pädagogische Arbeits- und Forschungsstelle (PAF), StudienVerlag, Innsbruck-Wien, p.93-101.



## Formal adult education

Essential prerequisites of the institutional and legal regulation of formal adult education were created with the Adult Education Act in 2007<sup>3</sup>, as well as other relevant legal acts that followed the adoption of the act itself<sup>4</sup>. Statistical monitoring of formal adult education began in 2009, when it was implemented by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE)<sup>5</sup> through the means of Andragogic Common Data Register<sup>6</sup> (hereinafter: Register), which enables the systematic monitoring of the number and types of educational programs, the number of employees in adult education institutions, the number of adults participating in training, as well as a number of institutions that organize and implement formal adult education. Although the number of adult education institutions increased from 433 (2010) to 569 (beginning of 2016), it appears that the number of adult learners does not follow a linear increase. Although adult education institutions are bound by the existing legislation to regularly report the number of participants of formal adult education programs in the Register, this has not been done regularly. This means that the number of participants registered by AVETAE is incomplete. More specifically in 2013, 48.147 adult learners participated in the programs of formal adult education, while in 2014 this figure was 34.454<sup>7</sup>. If one takes into account that the population in Croatia within the age group 25-64 years (estimate mid 2013<sup>8</sup>) was 2348.818 adults, then it can be said that in 2013, 2.04% and in 2014, 1.46% of adults participated in formal adult education programs. Since the Register of statistical data is incomplete in terms of the number of participants, it can not be said with certainty what percentage of adults is participating in formal education.

<sup>3</sup> Adult Education Act (National Gazette 17/07), <http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/297104.html>

<sup>4</sup> The overview of the legal framework is available on the AVETAE web-site: <http://www.asoo.hr/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.asoo.hr/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.asoo.hr/default.aspx?id=868>

<sup>7</sup> AVETAE data

<sup>8</sup> Men and Women in Croatia (2015), Croatian Statistics Bureau, author's calculations, [http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv\\_Eng/menandwomen/men\\_and\\_women\\_2015.pdf](http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/menandwomen/men_and_women_2015.pdf)



For the development of future policy and the system of adult education, it would be extremely important to have comprehensive data that would contribute to creating a system based on the evidence. Precisely for this reason, and after nearly ten years of practice, within the system of formal education of adults shortcomings can be identified, as well as areas within the system that need to be corrected, adapted and better defined within the legislative framework. Therefore, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports filed a motion in 2016 to change the Adult Education Act<sup>9</sup>, stating and describing the changes that have occurred in the education sector, which have inevitably influenced the formal adult education. Namely, in the meantime the Vocational Education and Training Act<sup>10</sup> and the Croatian Qualifications Framework Act<sup>11</sup> were adopted with which it is necessary to harmonize the system of adult education. The formal adult education mainly includes various programs of vocational education (secondary education, such as programs leading to gaining lower qualifications, secondary level qualifications, retraining and training programs), in addition to primary adult education and programs of learning foreign languages. This means that changes in vocational education significantly affect the organization, implementation and evaluation of formal programs that belong to the field of adult education.

Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) has introduced many changes in the system of education in Croatia, as well as in adult education. Although the components of the framework are still in the process of formation (eg. Sectoral councils), it is important to note the fact that formal adult education programs need to be positioned within the CROQF and thus enable transparent presentation of partial or complete qualification one can obtain as participant of formal educational programs. Although this will raise to some extent the quality assurance of educational programs, it is clear that the formal education certainly lacks stronger and stricter control mechanisms in practice. It is also important to note that

<sup>9</sup> <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?art=14514>

<sup>10</sup> National Gazette 30/2009, [http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2009\\_03\\_30\\_652.html](http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2009_03_30_652.html)

<sup>11</sup> National Gazette 22/2013, [http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2013\\_02\\_22\\_359.html](http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2013_02_22_359.html)



even after 20 years there is still no higher education study programme for obtaining the title of Adult Education Teacher and/or Professional. By that, the adult education was neglected on the system level, as well as the preparation of a critical mass of people who practice adult education which has greatly influenced the quality of the implementation of formal adult education programs.

Although adult education, in general, has a power of corrective measures, and in particular, rapid action and responsiveness to the needs of a society, Republic of Croatia has still not sufficiently recognized that because the financial allocation for formal adult education is mostly based on personal expenditures of individuals, which are limiting employability opportunities of individuals, as well as active participation in social, political and economic processes within the society and the community in which one lives, acts and makes decisions. According to data available to the AVETAЕ, 61% of participants have self-financed their education, 18% were financed by employers, 9% by the Croatian Employment Service, 4% by counties and cities, and 2% by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport. Such figures raise the question of availability of adult education, and thus the potential of higher employability levels of individuals. Above all, the consensus at national level would be necessary about the amount of investment in adult education, both in the development of the system, and to enable a higher level of participation in educational programs, which would in turn allow higher level of employability, and also a higher level of consciousness of a nation.

Partial consensus was reached by the adoption of the Education, Science and Technology Strategy<sup>12</sup> (hereinafter: Strategy) in which the adult education is positioned in the context of lifelong learning and to which a separate chapter is devoted. The strategy identifies and lists four main objectives that should be guidelines for the development of the adult education system. These objectives are: to provide conditions for increasing the involvement of adult citizens in the process of lifelong learning and education; enhance and expand learning,

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<sup>12</sup> National Gazette 124/2014,  
<http://www.asoo.hr/UserDocImages/Strategija%20obrazovanja,%20znanosti%20i%20tehnologije.pdf>



education, training in the course of working life; establish a system of quality assurance; improve the organization, financing and management processes of adult education. Although the Strategy recognized adult education as an important part of the education system, by stating a number of measures by which above mentioned objectives should be reached, the fact that the Croatian Employment Service in reported March 2016 just over 262.000 unemployed persons (corresponding to the rate of registered unemployment of 17%) indicates that the unemployed can not wait for changes that will be brought by the Strategy, but only can try, within the existing framework, to participate in formal or non-formal adult education, if this will help them in exercising their right to employment.

### **Non-formal adult education**

While formal education is regulated by the legal framework, non-formal adult education can be described as a colorful area of offers of various forms of acquiring knowledge and skills, characterized by internal and external impulses of individuals to expand their own knowledge. Such forms of learning are not regulated by the legal framework and are left to personal and subjective assessment of each individual. Currently, in Croatia there is no data on the type and number of offers, much less on the number of participants of non-formal learning because the supply and forms of learning are not anymore only related to NGOs, different associations, schools, libraries, but have already shifted to the hotels or basement rooms, rented apartments and classrooms, all the way to the offers of online distance learning. It could be said that the offer for non-formal adult education sometimes enables acquisition of knowledge and skills that an individual can apply right after the training can in order to achieve socio-economic benefits. Thus, although described as non-formal forms of education, there are educational programs that lead to the acquisition of international diplomas and licenses, which do not belong to the area of formal adult education within the national legislative framework, but contribute to a higher level of employability of individuals. Examples of such international diplomas and licenses that may be acquired in



the Republic of Croatia are CISCO and Microsoft certifications in the ICT sector, yoga teachers who are certified by an international organization Yoga Alliance, NLP coaches<sup>13</sup> certified by the Association of International Association for NLP, etc.

At the national level there are adult education programs, which have been approved and legally prescribed by the competent ministries or professional umbrella organizations, which allow licensing of acquired knowledge and skills required to perform certain types of work. That ensures a level of quality of educational programs and the credibility of acquired licenses, approvals, etc. Although such forms of education are also non-formal, they by their nature allow the execution of certain types of jobs and are therefore a prerequisite for their performance. In this overview, only a few examples will be mentioned in order to demonstrate the diversity of needs of different sectors. For example, Croatian Chamber of Economy organizes trainings and executes examinations for real estate agents<sup>14</sup>; foreign language schools organize trainings and conducted exams in foreign languages for the purpose of appointing a court interpreter, while professional associations of court interpreters carry out trainings and exams for court interpreters under the conditions prescribed by the Ministry of Justice<sup>15</sup>; Ministry of Economy, as part of the specialist training program in the field of public procurement, carries out certification tests in the field of public procurement<sup>16</sup>, etc.

Also, the numerous professional chambers (Croatian Chamber of Civil Engineers, the Croatian Chamber of Physiotherapists, Croatian Medical Chamber, Croatian Chamber of Nurses, Croatian Chamber of Architects, the Croatian Chamber of Dental Medicine, etc.) are responsible for organizing and conducting non-formal forms of adult education for its members in the areas relevant to the profession. Some of the chambers, through non-formal forms of education, allow their members the acquisition of “points” needed for maintaining

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<sup>13</sup> Neurolinguistic Programming

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.hgk.hr/udruzenja/udruzenje-poslovanja-nekretninama/strucni-ispit-za-agenta-posredovanja-u-prometu-nekretnina>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sudacka-mreza.hr/tumaci.aspx?G1=&G2=&G3=tumaci>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.javnabava.hr/default.aspx?id=3732>



a license to legally regulated areas of different professions. Practice shows that the funding of non-formal adult education is mostly left to the individual, but in a very small percentage, the participation of the employer is possible. This option is present only in companies that are aware of the importance of education and training of employees and who are willing to invest some financial, material and human resources in further education and training of employees. In that case, one talk about corporate education where employees are trained for the purpose of work and in the Republic of Croatia mostly comprises the forms of non-formal education. By adopting the already mentioned Croatian Qualifications Framework Act, a system will be built which will enable the recognition of non-formal and previously acquired knowledge and skills which will significantly contribute to the affirmation of non-formal adult education. The existing Adult Education Act contains provisions that stipulate that adults have the opportunity by taking exams to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities, regardless of the manner in which they were acquired. In current practice, theoretical exams as a means of confirming the previous level of knowledge, skills and competencies have not been practiced in adult education institutions. However the evaluation of practical training for the purpose of verifying the knowledge, skills and competencies for crafts, as specified in the Act on Trades and Crafts<sup>17</sup> is already in practice and is in the jurisdiction of the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts.

## Conclusion

Although adult education in the Republic of Croatia is on the low level of interest of educational policies, it is indeed developing with its offers, especially in the field of non-formal education which tracks changes at the global level and brings new new educational offer leads to the national territory. It is precisely this flexibility and rapid changeability of non-formal adult education offer that allows most adults to find something for themselves,

<sup>17</sup> National Gazette 143/2013, [http://www.hok.hr/o\\_hok\\_u/propisi/zakon\\_o\\_obrtu](http://www.hok.hr/o_hok_u/propisi/zakon_o_obrtu)

