

Adult Education in Macedonia as an important factor for cultural rethinking: how to encourage people to practice democracy and tolerance

by Bettina Strewe

Since the collapse of Yugoslavia, adult education in the successor states has been facing reorientation. Interactive and self-directed approaches to education have replaced the previous centrally controlled educational structure, which was organized hierarchically and emphasized teacher-centered instruction. This means that both students and teachers need to adapt. The material being taught and teaching methods have changed as well. Approaches to autonomous and independent thinking and acting in the classroom are creating the foundation for a self-determined life and for active participation in a democratic polity.

When the socialist regimes in Eastern Central Europe, Eastern Europe and South Eastern Europe collapsed, so did the educational structures for young people and adults, for example in former Yugoslavia.(1) In a process analogous to the economic, political and societal transformations, the entire educational sector has been going through drastic change, which has been painful at times.(2) Rebuilding and building anew is occurring everywhere, and continuing education for adults is also subject to profound change. These alterations have progressed to different degrees in the various different states, and in some places have only just begun.(3, 4)

Adult education denotes a form of education which aims to achieve maturity, liberty and responsibility, self-reliance, independence and self-organization in addition to vocational qualification. (5,6,7,8) Adult education takes place outside of school, and if it is realized creatively, based on individual initiative, can attain the goal of encouraging self-reliance, contributing to the students' responsibility for increasing their level of knowledge, and developing their personalities further.

Adult education in South Eastern Europe

Adult education has long been considered important in South Eastern Europe, and in the past, central governments and national associations for adult education were largely responsible for planning and implementation. The collapse of the socialist system brought the national associations for adult education, as well as adult education itself, tumbling down with it. Since then, it has been necessary to establish new structures for adult education. Both the structures of education providers and educational opportunities tailored to the existing demand as well as the needs of the target groups must be thoroughly revamped. Reductions in staff, as well as in the quantity and quality of education are typical phenomena for the countries in transition. This can be observed across Eastern Central Europe and applies to South Eastern Europe as well (9), with the exception of Slovenia. (10)

The transformation from socialist to Western-oriented systems caused a destabilization of adult education, too. The previous education providers no longer had any financial means at all, their directives were outdated, and they now had to operate as independent organizations in financial terms. However, most of the formerly state-owned and state-operated adult education providers had large multifunctional buildings (houses of culture) located in the city centers with numerous classrooms, and sometimes even stages for theater productions, movie theaters, cafés etc. These buildings were now threatened by decay. Numerous state education providers had well-trained staff, albeit in subjects such as Marxism/Leninism, civil defense, and Russian, which were no longer in demand. In the early 1990s, however, it was not certain which new subjects would be needed. The legal situation was unclear, previous laws on education were no longer in effect, and new ones had not yet been created. (11) How were the previously state-supported and state-run institutions of adult education and continuing education to remain in existence, which subjects should they offer, how were they to continue to employ their teaching staff, keep up their buildings, and finally convince citizens and government decision-makers alike of the necessity of adult education?

Education always operates within a political and cultural framework. (12) Key elements of transition to a new system of education include political repositioning of adult education and enabling teachers and students, multipliers, politicians, in other words, everyone involved in education to change their attitudes toward adult education. Based on the premise that the goal of education is to promote the forming and further development of mature individuals who contribute to rebuilding by actively participating in society, self-management and self-determination are essential components of the philosophy of pedagogic-andragogic work, and interactive and participatory methods and techniques are imperative.

A multitude of adult education activities, e.g. in Yugoslavia's successor states, have shown that political learning in the sense of self-reliance and participation can be introduced and encouraged. In doing so, adult education can draw upon a rich heritage in this region.

Historical roots of adult education in Yugoslavia (13, 14)

The beginnings of adult education in Yugoslavia date back to the 18th century. In the early 19th century, liberation movements and approaches influenced by the Enlightenment began to have an impact in the Yugoslav region, in particular the so-called *Illyrian movement*, while in Macedonia this took the form of the *rebirth of Macedonia*. Subsequently, reading rooms, libraries and educational societies were founded in the 19th century, the first in Serbia in 1826; in the area of Macedonia the Workers' Education Society was set up in Veles in 1894. (15) The late 19th century saw the emergence of increasing educational activities because of the labor movement, and so-called people's universities were founded in the early 20th century, the first in Zagreb in 1907. This movement must be viewed within the pan-European context of the Enlightenment concept of education, which emphasized the introduction of educational institutions for the people.

With the foundation of the first Yugoslav state, the proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, adult education was institutionalized, standardized and centralized to a greater degree. The people's universities and the (workers') educational societies were established, drawing on the Danish and German models and providing liberal and informal education for adults. The first people's university in Macedonia was founded in Skopje in 1920, and it developed into a prestigious and large educational

society. (16) These institutions aimed to popularize knowledge mostly in the natural and social sciences, but also in the realms of culture and publishing. At the same time, a large segment of the population had to be taught how to read and write, as 60 to 90 percent were illiterate (17).

During this time, scientific and comparative interest in adult education and its societal and social significance unfolded.(18) The necessary terminology was developed, for example, terms like "andragogy" and "adult pedagogy" in the Serbian language. (19)

A new era in adult education commenced with the founding of the second Yugoslav state, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia under Tito in 1945, and the establishment of a model of socialism independent of the Soviet Union. Transformation of society following certain ideals and the enlightenment of the people were paramount.(20) After World War II, many adults had no education, and some were illiterate, among them refugees and migrants. (21) After 1941, more than two million people in Yugoslavia were taught to read and write, half of them in Macedonia alone. Public libraries, people's universities and night schools were founded for this purpose. (22)

The new establishment of the state and the economic efforts induced considerable migration from the villages to the cities.(23) According to socialist ideology, which aspired to unify all the Yugoslav nations, the people were to be lifted to a higher educational level. To this end, a (state) system comprising adult *education* as well as adult *teaching programs for basic skills* was created, within which different institutions were to take on various educational responsibilities.(24) The most important institutions were workers' universities and people's universities, educational departments and educational centers in factories, evening schools and distance-learning centers.

The most important motivation for creating these institutions was the so-called *self-governing system*: from the smallest work unit to complex societal organizations, the vital importance of the common man in the new Yugoslav state and his right to act and decide were to be emphasized. (25) Adult education became the tool for strengthening the citizens' societal commitment. This policy is documented in the 1970 "Resolution of the Federal Assembly on the Development of Elementary, Primary and Secondary Education on the Basis of Self-Government."(26) The state pressed ahead with expanding educational institutions across the country, intensifying andragogic research and supporting scientific exchange with other countries about education systems and education policy.

Beginning in the 1950s, workers' and people's universities, which still exist in Yugoslavia's successor states to this day, were responsible for imparting the principle of workers' self-government to the workers and providing them with general and vocational education. These institutions were considered open-minded concerning methods. In terms of didactics, the work was oriented towards group sessions, communication and active participation on the part of the students. (27) A variety of institutions and forms of education, which can only be mentioned briefly here, were established with the goal of reaching different target groups in Yugoslavia: people's universities, general and specialized vocational schools for adults, schools for self-government and societal education, reading rooms, libraries, theaters, houses of culture, galleries and museums as well as branches of universities which organized public lectures in smaller Yugoslav cities. The most important of these institutions were affiliated in umbrella organizations and associations in the 1970s. While educating the masses was the main focus directly after World War II, from the 1960s on a more individual approach, placing greater emphasis on

students' talents and affinities was emphasized.(28) Financing of adult education was shared between municipalities, republics and ministries, which meant that the participants paid nothing or only a nominal amount.(29)

To sum up, adult education was valued highly in Yugoslavia and reached the peak of its development in the 1970s and 1980s, which affected the poorer republics as well. For example, the andragogic school Ochrid was founded in 1969.(30) Adult education served to provide the workforce with the *qualifications* necessary for economic acceleration in the 1970s. At the same time, it was to train workers in the *self-governing system*. In the *societal realm*, adult education was to explain and support Yugoslavia's political system, its societal and social structures as well as the role of the individual. Topics including education in the field of family life, hygiene, cultural and media education were also covered by adult education.

Adult education in the period of transformation

In Yugoslavia, government control of educational goals and procedures was centralized. This encompassed curricula and subjects which were taught in a uniform manner in the countries of South Eastern Europe, as well as the selection of education providers and teaching staff. Participants had limited scope to select their courses, if at all. They were usually delegated to continuing education courses as employees of a business or as students of a particular academic year. The education providers and teaching staff were implementers with inflexible tasks and little responsibility of their own. The target groups were rigidly predetermined for the most part, individual choice and registering for courses on one's own accord were unusual. This inflexibility prevented ideas from the outside.(31)

Learning was focused on a particular goal: *moving up* in the form of attaining a better position or pay scale classification. Self-realization by means of knowledge, self-development through insights or individual striving for knowledge were more common in the northern republics formerly influenced by Austria than in the southern republics, if such notions were present at all.

Today's high unemployment rate in the region is, however, partly caused by the fact that in many states of Eastern Central Europe and South Eastern Europe, continuing education for adults was more a penalty than an advantage under the socialist system. Jobs were allocated by the state, and as a rule, there were no layoffs or individual applications for employment. For this reason, continuing individual education was not only not necessary, but often not desirable, since information was a carefully guarded and not freely accessible good. This characteristic of the formerly largely centralized and top-down system of continuing education can be called a closed, channeled *information policy* which excluded any kind of transparency. Genuinely new insights, studies, analyses and publications were available only to a select elite which did not circulate them: "knowledge is power." For many citizens, the shock is all the greater today. The new societal circumstances require individual initiative when seeking work, which is no longer allocated in a top-down fashion, and at the same time people are called on to adapt by gaining the necessary skills, retraining and continuing education in order to find a suitable job. At first, this characteristic of the period of transformation overwhelmed and paralyzed many people.(32) If education is to become accessible for all, then it must be rethought. (33)

While education and adult education were politically controlled top-down instruments in Eastern Central Europe and South Eastern Europe before 1990, today this process needs

to be turned around, so that education can emerge as a societal realm which indeed may be protected and supported via a state framework, but is otherwise primarily a self-directed process within the responsibility of the individual who uses it to gain the knowledge vital to earning a living.

The political, economic and societal transformation needs to have people educated to be self-reliant individuals who can take care of their own lives and goals, so that they are able to participate in shaping and transforming their state and their society.(34)

Democratic procedures and autonomous thinking can be introduced and promoted via adult education. As systematic analyses on this issue for Eastern Central Europe and South Eastern Europe are practically nonexistent, the conclusions and results are based on observation and exchange with professionals. The examples selected refer to methods experienced and described by German and other Western European project managers in Eastern and South Eastern Europe.

Diversified structure of education providers

The structure of adult education providers has changed decisively since the transformation in the 1990s. The diversification of education providers influences the development of autonomous thinking and participatory involvement. Macedonia can serve as an example. Here, state-run institutions of adult education such as those connected to schools or universities exist on the one hand, side by side with further non-state non-profit institutions, whose final status is unclear, however, as they were formerly linked to the state or the party and offer very different teaching content. (35) Finally, new private educational institutions came into being in the 1990s. In terms of content, they are for the most part schools for foreign languages and computer skills. (36) These new forms of organization involve new content, teaching materials, instructional formats, methods and didactics. Since they were founded, these private institutions have been in competition with each other and also with the older adult education providers. They are also more likely to invest in further training for their teaching staff and grant them scholarships. As a rule, their directors and staff are young, creative, innovative people with the courage to reflect, discuss and criticize, they often have international experience, and many grew up in the already independent state of Macedonia.

The state or quasi-state organizations, on the other hand, accustomed to subsidies and instructions in a top-down system, had substantial difficulties in adapting to operating in a self-reliant manner in the private sector. Mostly, they feared competition from the private sector, which often offered better quality, and fought it by monopolizing responsibilities or attempting to influence the relevant laws. If, however, they want to survive, these formerly state-run organizations will also have to rethink their approach and offer high-quality, modern adult education geared to their target groups, and to accept the new institutions. But they did not realize the need for action for a long time, some even until today, and are running the risk of putting themselves out of business.

Classroom setting

Classroom setting and *classroom management* exemplify democratic teaching. In most of the workers' universities in Macedonia, the style of teaching was teacher-centered, and it was organized centrally and hierarchically. Adults, too, were instructed, the material was to

be learned by heart and repeated, and was not to be questioned. The classroom discussion was vertical from teacher to student, cooperation and discussion among the students was largely unheard of. The classroom furnishings accommodated this setting. Often, adults and children attended the same classes. In smaller towns, small child-size desks and chairs are still used by adults in class. The furniture was arranged in rows facing the front, and in some cases even screwed to the floor, so it could not be moved. This made sense against the background of the instructional formats and teaching methods mentioned above.

When classrooms are furnished today, one usually takes into account that the furniture should be flexible and movable so that students can sit and work in rows, in a circle or in small groups. Arranging the furniture in a circle integrates the teacher in the circle of students. This prevents the teacher from pontificating from the front of the classroom, or from a superior position, and other forms of communication can develop. When the furniture is configured for small groups, the teacher will move from one table to the next in order to communicate with the students. In addition, this enables students to communicate with one another in a horizontal fashion, independently of the teacher, strengthening their individual initiative and practicing mutual support and development in the learning process without a teacher.

Teachers unaccustomed to a moderation-oriented style of teaching and interactive communication with students, and who stick to their familiar manner of teacher-centered instruction, often find the new arrangement of the furniture impractical. New, flexible seating arrangements can seem unsettling at first. The objection voiced by these teachers, "the students can't see me properly," often implies, "I can't control the students any more."

The students, too, are often vexed by the new seating arrangements. Being seated in a circle makes them insecure, the lack of boundaries created by the first and last rows breaks up the order they are accustomed to. The students often continue to communicate only with the teacher, even when the desks are arranged for small groups. Even when the teacher encourages them to engage in individually initiated interaction with one another by assigning them a task that would require it, this usually does not occur in the first few sessions. But if this setting remains, and if teachers are trained in interaction and a moderation-oriented teaching style, then in the course of a longer period of time, a form of participatory interaction on equal terms develops between teachers and students as well as among the students.

New subjects

The introduction of new content such as working with a personal computer, word processing, graphics and internet use has changed the direction of adult education decisively. State and private organizations have hired young teachers and specialists to introduce new material on information technology. IT is one of the most profitable areas for adult education institutions, as many people working in offices, ministries, companies, public agencies and also businesspeople and private individuals need and want to learn how to use personal computers and the internet. This strengthens the young teaching staff's position. They introduce new ideas to the partly fossilized structures, including schedules geared towards the target groups' needs, small study groups, new teaching materials or demand-oriented course offerings. Frequently, they find their ideas on the internet. At first, their suggestions were usually met by considerable resistance on the part of older teachers and directors. However, since the computer skills teachers use the

internet and necessarily have good English skills, they tend to be well-informed not just about their own field, but also about general political and economic developments, and can easily find other jobs. The young teachers' know-how is an important profit-making factor for institutions of adult education. They have introduced a fundamentally new way of thinking in numerous institutions, often under considerable pressure and through discussions and debates. Many were even promoted in the hierarchy from their former status of freelance teachers to employees and to more senior positions. The workers' university Strumica in southeast Macedonia is a case in point. A young computer skills teacher was hired here in 1998, and in 2002 he became director of the institution. The workers' university Strumica is now considered one of the best in the country.

The students are inspired by the new form of IT instruction. They are highly motivated to learn, and the new methods also help them to develop a feeling for interactive methods in other subjects. They begin to demand such methods, or they enroll in classes which use new methods and teaching materials. In addition, electronic networking strengthens informal horizontal communication between students and teachers as well as between adult education institutions. At its best, all this can raise the level of adult education as a whole and transform it into a high-quality, demand-oriented form of education appropriate for its target groups. However, this demands flexible thinking adapted to modern needs on the part of everyone involved, and accordingly, proactive behavior.

New teaching materials

Especially in teaching of Western foreign languages, such as English and German, a shift towards interactive and participatory teaching methods and instructional formats by introducing new teaching materials can be observed. In Eastern Central Europe and South Eastern Europe, foreign language instruction was based on the so-called grammar-based method: the goal was to teach the structure of a language and a large vocabulary. Students were often familiar with a foreign language as a system as well as its grammar. They could translate highly complicated texts, but could hardly communicate, since communicating in the foreign language in everyday life was not the goal of instruction. This was the case above all for Western foreign languages, because individual contact to Western countries was not desired.

When societies were transformed, borders were opened and new opportunities to travel became available, there was a need to focus on oral communication in the foreign language. New methods and teaching materials were required for this purpose. Many specialized international education providers have invested in new teaching materials and in appropriate further training for those teaching foreign languages, because the large variety of teaching materials, workbooks and teacher's manuals, audiovisual material, worksheets, card games and their revision in terms of didactics and methods are more complicated than previous textbooks with grammar exercises and texts for translation. In most countries of South Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, teachers were not accustomed to working with teaching materials with a communicative concept, as these required them to be knowledgeable in terms of the methods and didactics used. Another prerequisite was a moderation-oriented style of teaching in place of hierarchical attitudes to teaching. In the meantime, the newly founded German teachers' associations in South Eastern Europe regularly conduct continuing education sessions, and are well-versed in interactive and communicative teaching methods as well as modern didactic means, and the majority teaches according to these concepts. Where German is taught as a foreign language in Macedonia, adult students are no longer shy about communicating or working on their own

in the classroom. Classroom design, too, has been adapted to the new way of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Adult education can strengthen the participants' individual initiative, and foster their creativity and their thinking and acting for themselves and the community, a further benefit in addition to acquisition of vocational skills and qualifications. Accordingly, the Bulgarian journal for adult education "Fakt" uses the slogan "Learn, in order to be free and independent." (37)

As young teachers have replaced older ones in the areas of languages and information technology and private institutions have opened up, new attitudes based on initiative, creativity and autonomy have gained ground; this offers vital input for a state moving towards democracy, as citizens can critically monitor and actively participate in societal transformations.

Endnotes

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Bettina Strewe (1957), Dr. phil., professor for university and continuing education, project manager and consultant, Potsdam, Germany. From 1992 to 2002 Head of Department for Eastern Europe and Project Director in Macedonia for DVV International, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (IIZ/DVV) e.V., Bonn; <<http://bettina.strewe.de>>.