

The challenges of training and education for providing gerontology services

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Abstract

Oldness in Slovenia is still a taboo. Changes in the environment we live in happen with a dynamics which is much faster than the dynamics of responses with which we try to follow the opportunities and avoid the dangers the turbulent, ageing environment brings. In recognizing the unconditional and mutual interdependence between generations, the environment is met with a gap between the actual change and its perception, as well as with an obvious gap between its wants and capabilities. A critical limitation can be seen in the process of learning new things and through education; that is in the process characteristic of every single individual or living being, of every single living condition and even of the entire ecosystem on Earth. The process of change is directed from inward to outward, where as the essential limiting or catalytic variable operates the proactive knowledge, awareness and realization of oneself and the environment. This many-layered proactivity is essential to the process of change – which has its roots in the environment – if we want to carry out the change efficiently and successfully and with the goal of improvement in our services, processes, systems and consequentially also the quality of the lives of the old people. The dilemma of ageing which is an intimate, personal issue, demands professional, scientific and pedagogical answers, since the need for education for this largest population is already being recognized as an inherent need of society.

With the project »*Training for providing gerontology services*«, promoted by Leonardo da Vinci programme - Mobility, we achieved the mobility of experts in the gerontology field, having their professional and technical training at the partner institutions in Finland and in the United Kingdom.

Key words: ageing, gerontology services, education

THE ARGUMENT OF PARADIGMATIC BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY STUDIES IMPLEMENTATION

Longevity and the exceptional large percentage of old population dictates the need for conditions of qualitative ageing, coexistence of generations (Ramovš, 2003) and education for working with the elderly. The issue of oldness and ageing is one of a very current and problematic topics today, considering the fact that there are four times more old people in Europe than there were the oldest Europeans in the times of childhood. In the next fifteen years the percentage of old people above the age of 65 will double.

The international plan of measures dealing with ageing (The conference in Madrid, 2002) has defined the area of ageing in its documents (The international plan of measures dealing with ageing) and in the same year, the Ministry Conference of European countries has published a declaration and the regional strategy for the implementation of those documents (The conference in Berlin, 2002). Both conferences have acknowledged the views of European social document (2000) and European Charter on Rights and Privileges of Elderly Persons in Nursing Homes (Maastrich, 2003).

Slovenia has also responded to the issue of ageing by following important documents approval in the field of ageing:

- Resolution on the National Programme of Social Care 2006-2010 (Official Gazette RS no. 39/2006);
- The Strategy of Care for the Elderly till 2010, approved by the Slovenian government in 2006;
- Social Security Act (Official Gazette RS no. 3/2007-UPB2) and
- Pension and Disability Insurance Act (Official Gazette RS no. 109/2006-UPB4).

Many other important documents in the area of oldness and ageing have also been approved but merely for the use of institutions working with the elderly.

In the years 2010 – 2030 the percentage of old population will increase for more than one third and in the next 10 years it will rise more than twice. Considering the fact that the number of one-member households in past years in Europe has increased by 50 % (meaning that the family social networks are almost not an option), the search for ways to help the elderly seems more than necessary (The Strategy of Care for the Elderly till 2010).

The globalisation has marked our history. The changes that it has made, are changing our demographic structure. The statistics shows the fall of fertility rate in Europe (except in Albania). In the year 2050 there will be 8,8 billion people living on our planet (100 million less Europeans than in the year 2000), more than half women before the age of 32, do not intend to have children because they prioritize their careers. The extinction of white race will have the consequences similar to the 14th century plague, which has cut the European population by one third. Already in 2025, Europe will need groups of intellectuals – e.g. it will get 1,5 million experts of information technology from other continents.

Although oldness in Slovenia is still a taboo (Trstenjak, 1998), the ageing is an intimate, personal issue that also has to be dealt with also on pedagogical, professional and scientific levels. There is also a lack of research in working with the old people and for the elderly as well as pedagogical and andragogical education and training in Slovenia. The need for education for this largest group of population can be seen as an immanent need of every society.

It is interesting (Hlebec, 2004) that in Slovenia, among the old people, only a small percentage of population has distinctly weak networks which might represent the risk of social exclusion. However, the elderly (and also the old people) are not integrated much in the field of education, furthermore, the participation of the elderly in education decreases (Kump, Jelenc Krašovec, 2010). The population in Slovenia is among the oldest in Europe and thus this question has to be dealt with on an appropriate pedagogical, scientific, professional and regulative level.

That was the main imperative for starting and integrating into the project *Training for providing gerontology services* under Leonardo da Vinci programme – Mobility. The programme should answer the question of ageing with raising the awareness of the importance of oldness, with methods and techniques that would offer the participants the knowledge of understanding this issue. That would innovatively influence and enable highly qualitative work and as such answer the question of this issue. We have to be aware that findings in the field of gerontology (gerontology: *geron* – means old, old man in Greek; *logos* – means study), i.e. in the science of biological, sociological and economic occurrences and processes (Veliki slovar tujk, 2002, p. 394), are important and they demand an appropriate response. In their beginning, the gerontologists have mainly emphasized the so called medical model, but the general understanding of oldness shows that it is too narrow because the authors substantiate that the social factors are also very important for working with the elderly (Accetto, 1987 in Hojnik Zupanc, 1997). The fact is, that the number of professional workers and their professional qualification in the institutions that work with the old people, is still very low (Mali, 2007). It is mainly about merely sociological state description and critical state analysis and about the moralisation of how it should have been. New era demands new approaches which will merge gerontology, gerontagogic, methodology and working practice with the elderly in a way that would contribute to the social arrangement of acute, chronic problems connected with ageing and coexistence of generations (Pečjak, 1998). The main fields of social integration regarding the framework of the social quality concept are: civil rights, labour market, services (medical, cultural, financial, socially-protective, educational ...) and social networks (ENIQ, 2004).

The adjustment to changes in the environment is a proactive and dynamic process, where the existence and the consideration of feedback is essential for achieving and exceeding a personal, mutual and systematic mission. If we consider two recognisable natures of changes that consequently demand fundamentally different approaches – but they are both based on a feedback of learning and sensibility – and consequently adequate activities, we can simplify our view to the changing process. We can generalise the division of changes to transactional, gradual changes that mean a constant response to evolutionary changes in the environment and therefore constant improvement of inducted approaches, and to transformational, radical changes that mean an immediate response to revolutionary changes in the environment – they actually signify

a thorough transformation of inducted approaches. They demand a huge attention and a dramatic mission change. Constant improvements usually divert attention from drastic changes and claim a determination in performance (Ovsenik, Ambrož, 2010).

The mastery of changes must follow the changes of a demographic logic and social humanity. The occurrence of transformational changes generally follows a longer period of transactional transformations, which is over a longer period of time followed by a paradigmatic breakthrough. This paradigmatic movement also demands the systematic changes of values and behaviour, i.e. the changes of organisational culture, which is difficult to carry out with only a moderate trend of constant improvement, as we are becoming restricted by the system of planning and incapability of implementing the changes. Without a critical attitude towards past and also current theories and approaches, we can hardly expect an improved approach towards necessary changes. Senge (2002, p. 23) claims that a new era is not an informational era but the era of new metaphors (paradigms) and new essential assumptions (cornerstones).

The concept of scientific paradigm (Germ. *Weltanschauung*, Eng. *worldview*) and its movement has been brought into a theory of science by Thomas E. Kuhn who sees it as a complex of leading theories, research methods, philosophical arguments and sample application theories (Kuhn, 1989). It covers a research as well as explanation of reality, a choice of relevant cases, a description of facts and the process of learning inside the scientific community. Kuhn believes that the development of science goes through revolutionary problems which demolish a former paradigm and establish a new one. He has recognised a cyclicity of scientific improvement transformations and he claims that the phases of transactional changes are followed by transformational changes or paradigmatic movements.

Capra (1996, p. 5) establishes that it is time to move away from mechanistic Descartes' view and Newton towards holistic, organisational, ecological view. According to Kuhn (ib. 1989), Capra defines a social paradigm as a network of concepts, values, perceptions and generally accepted practices that form a specific view of reality and represent a fundamental basis for organising a specific community. He calls a new paradigm *the deep ecology* that gets its strength from viewing the world not as a sum of isolated objects, but as a network of mutual connections and dependence. This paradigm acknowledges the values of living creatures and sees a human being as one of the strings of this life network. According to Capra, the old paradigm was based on values, focussed on a human being, the new one is based on values, focused on the Earth. The deep ecology will become a part of our everyday consciousness and it will encourage a new ethics. In the centre of this appearing paradigm, there is life.

Life itself calls for changes. The changes of working with the elderly will be possible only if the professionals get the appropriate knowledge and competences for work and development in the field they would be educated and trained for (Svetlik, 1996). We are talking about a new type of the target attitude, systemic application and team work, which bring a new empowerment for a potential service.

The changes in the environment, applying to a fast growing population of old people, represent the challenge and the opportunity, which can be achieved by a well established program, environmental encouragements and services-oriented learning.

THE ARGUMENT OF TRAINING PROGRAM FOR PROVIDING GERONTOLOGY SERVICES

New programs of knowledge in the field of social gerontology will direct their activeness into regional as well as national social environment. With its implementation into yet unexploited opportunities of dealing with the issue of old people (niches), social gerontology wants to establish a qualitative cooperation with similar institutions on regional, state and international level. The ambition of programs of social gerontology issues includes the focus on the following aims:

a) On the regional level: gaining new experience and competence of professionals or mentors, needed for innovative introduction of practice in the field of professional and functional education and the transfer of European practice in the programmes for providing gerontology services. It is about the positioning of knowledge into regional environment and thus a contribution to the development of socio – gerontological services and a contribution to the regional labour market. Familiarity, on one side plays an important role with the population's special features, and with the possibilities of working with the elderly, on the other. The factor of lacking a critical mass of flexible and competent labour force working as a braking factor for the development of urgently needed activities for old population, is also important. The competitiveness and innovation enter the field of social gerontology slowly and although the contingent of old population constantly increases, in the structure of knowledge covering the education for this population it represents a negligible percentage. It is about the need for knowledge and understanding of processes in the field of services for the third age appreciating the social interactions among the cooperative actors in the process. With this, the knowledge becomes a process and not just a codified information.

b) On the national level:

- the enlargement of mobility and the improvement of quality, and the access to permanent professional training of 'humane-oriented' professions into a new profession of gerontological sphere, meant for a higher quality of personnel qualification for working with the elderly or with this growing population, with the purpose of enlarging and developing their professional and technical adaptability at organisational and gerontological-didactical work changes, functional training and teaching in new educational programmes;
- the improvement of transparency and the recognition of qualifications and skills of workers, professionals and mentors in gerontology field, achieved by informal education and learning and by casual learning;
- the promotion of learning living languages and languages for specific purposes by the work with the elderly and by education, that will be performed for the needs of different institutions that include the old population in their services;
- the development of gerontological science and services, connected with ageing and oldness in Slovenia as a contribution to increase the quality of old people's lives in Slovenia.

On the national level the strategy of older people protection declaratory emphasizes and encourages the effort for new ways of education that would include all available sources and fill the niches. Old people used to be the source of skills and knowledge for every day work and life but today many of them have been excluded from the communication network by information communication technology (ICT). The third millennium should overcome deep-rooted patriarchal patterns of thinking and behaviour attacking self-esteem of the elderly. The education for social gerontology on all levels (in the field of training and in the field of education) gives the answer to this issue. With new knowledge it would be easier to respond to the needs of old people and the environment and the certified new knowledge would keep the youth in the environment.

The training programme for providing gerontology services is designed in a way that it directly connects both general orientation as well as concrete emphasis on the most current long-term strategic EU and Slovenian documents. In the national context, the most important emphasis is put on:

- Slovenia's Development Strategy 2013,
- The Strategy of Care for the Elderly till 2010,
- The Framework of Economic and Social Reforms for Increasing the Welfare in Slovenia 2005 (Adopted by Slovenia's Government 2005).

It follows mainly two priorities: 'effective creativity, two-way flow of knowledge use for social development society and quality work placements. The emphasis put on the concrete level is due to the fact that the programme in its organisational structure offers high quality of adaption to the key challenges of modern research work as well as in the framework of training in secondary educational forms. It will especially emphasise interdisciplinarity and applicability in terms of the needs of the elderly and institutions dealing with the old population in any way. It will strive for the highest quality of studies possible including concrete learning matter and approaches adding greatly to 'ethical society awareness and knowledge'; with its training offer, it will applicatively follow 'the labour market needs and the productive sphere'; with its national implementation it will add to the 'decentralisation of training for providing gerontology services and its connection with the needs of regional social development' (Slovenia's Development Strategy 2013, pp. 29-30).

c) On the international level:

- setting up and strengthening the international knowledge, skills, experience, methods and practice exchange and the use of ICT in the field of professional/vocational training and functional education for providing gerontology services which is on one hand imperative due to EU's and Slovenian ageing trends of the population and the development of the European labour market for these vocations on the other hand. Thus we will achieve the increase of the interest in vocational education and the systems of training;
- quality improvement and the increase of the international cooperation between institutions included in education for providing gerontology services. Thus the cooperation with various gerontology targeted educational institutions, companies and social partners will be empowered.

Due to inter- and transnational social sciences the project contributes to European and global development trends dealing with socio – gerontological issues.

The programme will be, with its interdisciplinary approach and tendency for active inclusion into international sphere and orientation into (re)production of applicative knowledge, successfully accepted by key international trends.

Services in global trends are becoming an international value; the projects with its tendencies follow this directive.

The programme follows the consistent enforcement of philosophical creativity, quality and excellence, according to which the results are a consequence of qualitative processes or organisational system quality. After many years of research done on international projects, international conferences and mainly on international mobility based implementation of curricula, it is possible to expect the centralisation of knowledge and creativity in modern organisation in this programme.

THE PROJECT RESULTS

With its interactive activity, the module is oriented into solving problems and into effort for a higher quality of life for the elderly. Common gerontological research merely focuses on negative views as a decline and lack of capabilities in old age, on individuals who have difficulties to cope with every day life, influences the biased social image and stigmatises them as weak and vulnerable people. The aim of the project was to contribute to solving the topical issues, recognising the environmental and educational challenges, and to empower teachers for transferring the knowledge for the appropriate approach (coaching) toward the issue of an old man.

For this purpose, as a result of the project, we have defined 10 modules for forming different ways of transmitting the knowledge (case studies, transmission of stories, workshops) as an aid to empower the experts from practice (as we have seen in the most developed partner's institutions abroad that work with the elderly and for them).

MODULE 1: Basic professional model

In this module, students will gain the knowledge of fundamental cornerstones of basic services in social gerontology, the complexity of the phenomenon and the procedural aspect of ageing. This module will also cover the content of social psychiatry, demography and anthropology fields. The module's base will be the basic postulates for working approach with the old population.

The aim of the basic professional module is to appropriately classify the issue of social gerontology and to develop competences for recognising this issue. Each content will contribute to the empowerment of professional workers in the field of identifying the issue of working with the elderly and on border areas.

MODULE 2: Management module

Management module highly influences the performance management of organisational changes and thus the ability to identify the nature of the problem changes and possible innovative forms of searching for solutions. Personal integrity of a social gerontologist, his/her human capital as a condition, the system of internal communication and

motivation for creativity as a tool for creativeness, and innovation as the aim, is put in the centre.

The aim of management module is to recognise and develop those competences that socialize and organisationally support a social gerontologist. The module will contribute to the transformation of a quality paradigm for working with the elderly and services on a personal level as well as on the level of orientation to achieve greater organisational excellence in the field of social gerontology.

MODULE 3: Business module

In this module a special attention is paid to the social marketing, macro and micro economics of stuff and health economics.

Because the content of unprofitable organisations is integrated in this module, we deal with this issue also on the economic level, empower the trainees for the field of health economics and medical help for the elderly, and on the other hand monitor the economic aspects of oldness from middle age onward. The module complements the knowledge of accounting and finance and legal aspects and finally the content for making a business plan.

The aim of this module is to identify and develop those competences that empower a future employee in the field of social gerontology for the recognition and appropriate identification of economic aspects of individual processes.

MODULE 4: Health and rehabilitation module

The module presents and provides the participant the basic knowledge about health, illness, ageing, physiotherapy, therapy and rehabilitation after the accident and illness in the process of ageing.

Because there is a particular focus on health, illness and rehabilitation, the trainee gains the basic competences in the field of working with the elderly.

The aim of the module is to recognise disease, therapeutic and age indicators and the ability to control the reactions of these processes. The module also enables the trainee for preventive functioning in the field of health and for the consultancy for more qualitative and healthier life in old age.

MODULE 5: Job-animation module

The job-animation module is also vital for trainees of social gerontology because it brings the chapters of motivation, extracurricular activities and organisation of free time. This module also covers the knowledge for motivating the elderly, for choosing the appropriate free time activities for them, and the knowledge about the appropriate rehabilitation approaches after an illness, accident and in the process of ageing.

The aim of this module is to recognise and develop those competences that influence socialization and more qualitative life of the elderly.

MODULE 6: Spirituality in old age

The module brings the basics of philosophy and ethics, upgraded by the knowledge of basic religions and respect of diversity. Special attention is paid to personal spirituality and the way of realizing it.

In multicultural world there are people with different pasts and different beliefs. It is right that the graduate of this programme understands and identifies the specifics of individual religious terms and manifestation of intolerance that are usually caused by religious differentiations. Spirituality often 'meets' appearance of unethical responses. Thus the knowledge of ethics is also important for solving the conflicts and understanding the issues caused by the collision of different beliefs.

The aim of the module is the understanding and competent reaction by the emergence of diversity – philosophical, religious, ethical and spiritual.

MODULE 7: Palliative care

The palliative care module explains and prepares the trainees for appropriate reaction in case of death and the preparation for it. It also enables the trainee to respond competently and sensibly in case of death and dying to spiritual, emotional and other forms of needs of people in care and their relatives.

The aim is to offer skills training to the trainee to competently react in processes of accepting dying of people in care and provide complimentary advice.

It offers competences on professional and relational level to the trainee. It demonstrates various approaches, standards and expectations of the elderly.

MODULE 8: ICT and the elderly

The module covers general information technology knowledge. It aims to equip the trainee with basic e-communication skills. Consequently it empowers the trainee to recognise the difficulties the elderly might have with e-communication learning and prepare him/her for appropriate approaches (e.g. red button...).

MODULE 9: Foreign language in gerontological sphere

The aim is to teach the trainee to communicate in a foreign language in the field of business communication as well as in the foreign language for specific purposes in gerontology.

MODULE 10: Recognition and enforcement of new forms of working with the elderly

The practical module follows the idea that working with the elderly is the greatest global social activity and reflects the achievement of civilization in modern times. Its focus is on basic needs and values of modern man, which are globally predictable, but locally extremely unpredictable. This fact demands proactive activity of each and every person in every organisation.

The population ageing trends demand excellence services and more competent professionals. Thus the module offers an inside into concrete work in the field of caring for the elderly and identifies the needs for new forms of working with the elderly. The module demands appropriate reflection and self-critical constructive evaluation seen in practice.

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