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A Lifetime as a Lesson

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Abstract

Lifelong learning is a process which has lately been occupying the whole world society. Libraries, especially public libraries, can be a focal point for the local community, stimulating learning within the community at all levels. Because of the widening of their openness and accessibility libraries respond quickly to the needs of the changing society – in this case of the learning society.

Seven points about lifelong learning in the libraries are accepted in the Slovene librarianship and are carried out by most Slovene public libraries: 1. Following and analysing the educational needs; 2. Motivation; 3. Informing on the educational possibilities; 4. Library education; 5. Providing with study material; 6. Counselling; 7. Organizing of educational and learning activities.

With this last point we stepped into the field where the main qualities of the modern library can be seen: flexibility; openness; collaboration with others; quick respond to demands of changing environment, society, technology, learning; and being always a user-friendly space.

The library activities can be divided into: 1. Activities which are traditional in the domain of libraries and are connected with their basic mission – to promote reading and to mediate information; 2. Activities that are the result of development of the society, culture and technology and are run in cooperation with other institutions and organizations. These activities are the objects of this paper.

A Lifetime as a Lesson

Mr. Norman Longworth starts his excellent book “Making Lifelong Learning Work” with some essential questions about lifelong learning and fortunately gives us also adequate answers. I would like to repeat some of them.

“Lifelong learning huh – what’s that?”

How on earth can one convey the richness and diversity of whole philosophy of education, the urgency of whole world’s need to embrace a new approach to learning and the fundamental psychological approach to the development of one’s human potential in one short sentence?”

And Mr. Longworth continues overleaf:

“To some it is adult leisure education – rows of eager wannabe cooks understanding the basics of Chinese cookery or macho dog-owners learning rottweiler-handling techniques or throwing pots, or languages for holidays in Spain. To others it is University-Industry partnership and Continuing Education for employment and employability. To yet others it is the practical application of Open and Distance Education and Training with sophisticated feedback system to stimulate discussion and follow-up.

For me, it is certainly all of those things, but much, much more. In the first place it has to be “lifelong” – from cradle to grave, from maternity to eternity, from hatch to dispatch, 0 – 90 (and why stop there?). Secondly, it has to be “learning” – not teaching, not course provision, not training, but out and out focus on the needs and demands of the learner, however strange they may be. Thirdly, it has to marry all of this into a seamless infrastructure which makes available all the resources of the community, including the human resources, for the development of the full potential of the human beings in the community.”

Is there anything more to be said?

Lifelong learning is a process which has lately been occupying the whole world society. It was put in many Memorandums, Statements, Manifestos etc. Each of these papers stresses the importance of lifelong learning:

- From the EBLIDA statements on lifelong learning: During the 20th century, education for all has become recognised as an individual right. Education and learning are seen as providing opportunities for personal fulfilment and development, as well as being essential elements in a socially inclusive and democratic society. Education is also a building block for economic growth and employment. Lifelong learning involves many forms of education and training, formal and informal. These include the school system from primary to tertiary level, adult education, informal training and recognition of non-formal learning. Lifelong learning can be individual with individual learning accounts, in a group setting or within the context of social movements.

- The European Council held in Lisbon in March 2000 marks a decisive moment for the direction of policy and action in the European Union. The conclusion confirms that the move towards lifelong learning must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. In the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning they stressed six key messages: 1. New basic skills for all, 2. More investment in human resources, 3. Innovation in teaching and learning, 4. Valuing learning, 5. Rethinking guidance and counselling, and 6. Bringing learning closer to home.

- From IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto: The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of individual and social groups.

And here we come to the libraries. Have the libraries had their own place in the history of lifelong learning? When did lifelong learning appear in the libraries? For the librarians and for the library users the answer is obvious: from the very beginning.

Libraries, especially public libraries, can be a focal point for the local community, stimulating learning within the community at all levels. Because of the widening of their openness and accessibility libraries respond quickly to the needs of the changing society – in this case of the learning society. Libraries play an inclusive, not an exclusive role. They can assure much more than a traditional system of formal education by offering a broad choice of different media, free access to information sources and professional guidance and with these they connect individuals and the global world of knowledge.

Libraries all over the world take place in establishing a new learning society. This includes study support and homework clubs, open learning services, reading development and literacy programmes, services for distance learners and etc. All these activities and services include one magic word – PARTNERSHIP. Public libraries need to work together with different educational institutions and organisations, local trade and industry, health and environmental authorities, cultural institutions – governmental and non-governmental.

To describe the meaning and importance of the relationship between lifelong learning and public libraries in these new circumstances we will consult two current documents: PULMAN's guidelines and The Oeiras Manifesto – The PULMAN Agenda for e-Europe.

PULMAN (Public Libraries Mobilising Advanced Networks) Network of Excellence has been launched under European Commission's research programme for User-Friendly Information Society and includes public libraries from 26 countries. One of its tasks is to publish digital guidelines from different fields of library activity, among them Public library services supporting Education in Adult Life. It is necessary to underline some very exact statements:

- Public libraries are not always accepted as part of teaching and learning process.
- Decision makers often need to be convinced that public libraries are fact key players in this context.
- Public libraries are major learning resource centres. They should be the local learning place and champion of the independent learner. They can have an important focus for the community as a whole in providing facilities for informal and self-directed learning.
- The development of these new services requires the establishment and maintenance of strong partnership with local, regional, national, educational or cultural authorities and organisations.

A minimum agenda of such services for public libraries to consider includes:

- Providing public access to the Internet
- Matching opening hours to the needs of learners
- Provision of IST-based study facilities and learning environments

- Resources (technologies, curriculum oriented collections)
- Establishing training centres
- Providing e-learning environments
- Virtual Reference Desks

Librarians now have to combine technologies with administrative and management work, handling a wide variety of resources. Recruitment and training policies which enable public libraries to offer appropriate skills are vital. Training needs to be:

- Accessible to all staff who need it
- Flexible enough to respond to involving training needs
- Designed and delivered according to defined quality standards
- Tailored and selected for the specialised needs of staff

The guidelines are supplemented by examples of good practice from public libraries all across Europe.

The Oeiras Manifesto was accepted in March 2003 in Oeiras – Portugal by ministers, high-level policy makers and practitioners from 36 European countries. They agreed on the four priorities for public libraries: Democracy and citizenship, Economic and social development, Cultural diversity and Lifelong learning. In this field they stressed three key roles in the future:

- Focus on the needs of children, and those who care for them, by providing a fun, safe and stimulating environment for schoolwork and leisure, incorporating games and new technologies and by creating partnership with schools and other educational bodies.
- Develop their role as centres for de-institutionalised and informal learning, offering content, training and support to citizens at all stages of their lives, taking full advantage of the potential of e-learning.
- Contribute to the development of a functionally literate information society by continuing to promote reading, using all means, including the Word Wide Web.

These concise references are acceptable and useful for every library regardless of from which country it is or how it is developed and they are a very good start for the future.

But where are we now?

During its turbulent history Slovenia was a part of several different states with various educational systems. From its independence in 1991 Slovenia started to build its own educational system for the first time based on real needs of Slovene society. It is established on formal and informal level by governmental and non-governmental institutions and organisations.

In planning a new educational system we can also lean on our own tradition. The founder of the pedagogical chair on Ljubljana's University Mr. Karl Ozvald described in his work "Cultural pedagogics" of 1927 some very modern concepts:

- School training is just a preparation for further learning
- Beside an education of mind, an education of spirit is also essential

- Beside the training of individual also an education of community.

Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (founded in 1993) is the national institution for development, research and counselling in the field of adult education. The Institute's basic mission is to support the culture of lifelong learning and education in Slovenia. Some of the Institute's current projects are:

- Adult literacy and participation in education
- Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship
- Family literacy programme "Let's read and write together". The programme has been designed for parents of children attending lower grades of primary school who would like to renew their reading, writing and arithmetic skills in order to help their children with learning and literacy.
 - Study circles as a non-formal way of learning, which gather people who wish to learn something new on certain topics, to keep each other company and to do something useful for their living environment or for other people.
 - Project "Learning for young adults" is a preventive education programme for young adults aged from 15 to 25 years who failed in school, have no vocation, and are unemployed.
 - The Slovenian Lifelong Learning Week was introduced in 1996 as to contribute to the development and dissemination of lifelong learning in our society. One of the primary aims of this seven-days event, traditionally held in the third week of October, is the raising of public awareness concerning the importance of learning. This event brings together numerous organisations, interest groups, communities and individuals. Two years ago also a library (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) won recognition for its participation in LLW.

Almost every year the Institute publishes a huge catalogue (1000 pages) with a list of Slovene organisations and institutions which organize adult education and training. Programmes are run on University, secondary schools, on institutions established by local communities like Folk Universities, on profit organisations like Educational Centers and on non-profit ones like Third Age University. And among these bidders there are also Slovene public libraries.

Our Slovene library colleague Mrs. Silva Novljan puts in her article "Library is more than a text-book" seven points which are accepted in the Slovene librarianship and are carried out by most Slovene public libraries:

1. Following and analysing the educational needs of the individual and of the local community
2. Motivation: library helps to discover interests, stimulates curiosity, helps to develop independent learning, includes people in different activities etc.
3. Informing on the educational possibilities: library has to collect all informational material related to educational institutions and organizations from its local community.
4. Library education and use of library information resources.

5. Providing with study material (appropriate basic reference collection, multimedia collection, free access to information) and assuring study facilities (space, technical equipment, interlibrary loan).

6. Counselling: librarian's help is based upon surmounting user's obstacles on the way to independent learning and reaching educational aims.

7. Organizing of educational and learning activities.

With this last point we stepped into the field where the main qualities of the modern library can be seen: flexibility; openness; collaboration with others; quick respond to demands of changing environment, society, technology, learning; and being always a user-friendly space.

Educational and learning activities in the library directly support the basic idea of lifelong learning – lifelong meaning literally from cradle to grave.

The library activities can be divided into:

- Activities which are traditional in the domain of libraries and are connected with their basic mission – to promote reading and to mediate information. Libraries mostly run these activities by themselves, sometimes they invite authors, artists or experts. Some of these activities are: guided visits; presentations of new books; meetings with writers; play-hours with book, story-hours, creative hours and workshops for children; library education for pupils and students; discussions with experts about interesting and current topics; lectures on travels; exhibitions of books and works of art; etc.

- Activities that are the result of development of the society, culture and technology and are run in cooperation with other institutions and organizations. These activities are the objects of our interest.

The widest palette of library activities is intended to children. Four of them have brought something new in Slovene library space:

- I would like to start this journey with unusual meetings. Twice every month a group of young mothers prepare a meeting in the playing room of the library (the Public Library Jože Mazovec, Ljubljana). They mediate information and experiences, arrange their own home page, help each other. For the babies it is an introduction into the library life really from the cradle.

- The Slovene Book Quiz is a modern form of library-information literacy programme appropriate for elementary schoolchildren. The quiz is organized by all the 60 main public libraries in collaboration with elementary schools and school libraries and up to 15% of elementary pupils participate in it. Several actors from the field of reading collaborate in the Book Quiz: beside libraries (the holder is the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) which make professional preparation and organization among children, a very important partner is also The Reading Badge of Slovenia, the Slovene movement that encourages children to read, which prepares the concluding performance. We shouldn't forget other actors in the local communities as local media, local firms, etc. The Book Quiz is financed from different sources: libraries, The Reading Badge of Slovenia, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, The Slovene section of IBBY, The reading Association of Slovenia and some publishing houses. The goals of the Book Quiz are to make elementary school children use libraries and to teach them how to look for information sources (books, periodicals, audio-visual material, internet pages); the themes of the

Quiz are basic for learning about Slovene regions (geography, history, ethnology, etc) and they motivate children to read works of our classic authors. The Quiz is also put on the Internet. This is very important for several reasons: the quiz contributes to modern information and computer literacy; it may persuade some “computer children” to read printed literature; Internet may be an easier way to take part in the quiz for the children of the Slovene minorities and the Slovene emigrants in Europe; etc.

- Book’s tea parties are monthly activities which connect libraries (the holder is the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) and bookshops. They are run by librarians and booksellers and are intended mostly for parents and grandparents who can get many good ideas for joining with their children through reading books.

- In the fourth example the library (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) shares premises with The Association of Non-governmental Organizations. The premises are located in a new dormitory area so the library started with a project “Playing hour with a book” that involves volunteers – young mothers with children. Under the guidance of a librarian they prepare weekly meetings with reading books, workshops and performances. For the library it is very important to include also voluntary work in its activities and projects. Volunteers bring needs and demands of the local community into the library and this gives the library an opportunity for quick respond.

On the way between children’s and adults’ library departments our young users were getting lost. Why? We know that the young are a very special group of library users and they need special care and attention. In the past libraries didn’t prepare special activities for young people between 15 and 25 years of age but nowadays many resources intended only to projects, programmes and activities for the young can be found. Most of these young people are pupils and students and are included in the regular educational system. So the librarians have to animate them with free time activities and at the same time give them a chance to learn something interesting and new.

In these past ten years a few libraries have designed special services for young users – youth centers. In such centers the young are able to:

- Study, write papers, do research work
- Search for the largest variety of information via bulletin boards and internet
- Some of the libraries put on their web pages a special Youth Page which usually contains information on Education, Help and Free time.
- Obtain free study help. Free study help is an activity organized with the assistance of young volunteers. By making help available to those who are unable to afford expensive tutors the library also plays a social role.
- The young are a group of library users who don’t read a lot. Promotion of reading but with a fresh approach and themes interesting for the young is necessary. Establishing a collection of literary works by young Slovene authors in order to show the young readers what and how they coevals write has also proven to be very useful.
- To give young people a chance to show their talents in preparing exhibitions, in reading their literary works, a chance to present their own travelling experiences, etc.

For working with young people in the libraries free time activities are very important. Students are occupied with a huge number of school activities, so in the library they need, want and expect something different.

Some examples of good practice:

- School of film narration and aesthetics – a cycle of meetings, discussions and lectures that help the young to watch and understand films (the Public Library of Kamnik, Kamnik).

- A course of intellectual self-defence is intended for the young occupied with the influence of media and hyperconsumption on their life (the Public Library of Kamnik, Kamnik).

- When working with young people you have to put interesting issues in the surrounding where they live or stay. In 2000 at Ljubljana's Central Railway Station a branch KOLODVOR (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) was opened for a special group of young people – the commuters. The new info-point is primarily intended for young users who come to school to Ljubljana by train and have to wait for their transport back home. KOLODVOR with its technical equipment (PCs, communication channels), material (CD-roms), access to the Internet and OPAC is really a unique space. Exhibitions mounted there bring the Ljubljana's cultural institutions closer to young commuters. During summer holidays the target group of users are young tourists. Without classical library material, the KOLODVOR is a kind of digital library settled in material space.

- The easiest way to attract the young is through culture which is close to them. The comics art is certainly a good starting point. The development of work with young people through comics activities (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana): 1. First stage: establishing the comics collection called STRIPOTEKA which is a part of the Youth Center in the library. From the start the library's intention was to involve young people from outside into the library life. 2. Second stage: workshops on drawing comics. Twice a year via schools, infopoints, libraries and media the young are invited to participate at the workshop. After each workshop there is an exhibition in the library's gallery and at the end of the year the library publishes a comics anthology. 3. Third stage: monthly meetings with Slovene comics authors. All comics activities like selection of comics, running workshops, preparing meetings are made by young experts from the circle of the editorial board of Stripburger – the only Slovene comics magazine. 4. Fourth stage: making the new brochure of the Youth Center. The library invited 4 boys and 2 girls of 18 years who had taken part in the former comics workshops and are regular participants of the comics events. They were asked to tell the story of the Youth Center: the main heroes are Janko and Metka from the Grimm's fairy tale "Babes in the Wood". Under the guidance of two young mentors the young authors worked six days and made at the same time informational material and a work of art. 5. Fifth stage: in order to encourage their coevals to be active in the STRIPOTEKA some young comics fans decided to open in the comics collection premises a creative gallery with comics which need to be finished or just painted. With this programme of comics activities library also participates in international projects: In February 2003 in Chemnitz (Germany) in the frame of the European project Youth for Europe a workshop of animation "Let's animate in Europe" took place. 18 young authors under the guidance of 6 tutors from 4 European countries participated at the conference. In May 2003 the comics activities (exhibition, workshops, lecture) were presented in Sweden as a part of wider presentation of Slovenia. For two years the comics activities had been financed by the Open Society Institute in the project "Library as Community Centre".

Inquiries among young people show that they live in the period of boredom's culture. So in the libraries we decided to chase it away with many interesting activities. But preliminarily the libraries have to assure:

- For working with the young the inclusion of youth centers in the local community is very important. In two Slovene biggest cities Ljubljana and Maribor the libraries' youth centers are a part of networks connecting different institutions which work with the young. With such cooperation fresh air comes into the library and on the other side the library becomes more visible in the local community. Because libraries don't have many experts among the staff it is necessary to cooperate with a wide palette of partners, especially in the field of culture.

- Libraries have to follow the development of IT.

- All free time activities for the young library visitors have to be free of charge.

In the libraries most of the theoretical starting points and practical projects, programmes and activities in the field of lifelong learning are intended for adults.

Adults don't participate in learning for different reasons: for lack of information, for fear of participation, because of the social or economic appurtenance to a particular group, a reduction of ability in planning the future, bad experiences from past education and training, and inefficient system of informing and presentation of new learning programmes. The public library as a provider of basic condition for lifelong learning can take care to eliminate all these problems.

In establishing such services it is necessary to cooperate with external partners and to find financial sources because most of these services need additional premises, equipment and staff.

Slovene public libraries have developed many different programmes and activities for adult users, in this place only few of them can be mentioned:

- Learning Exchange (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) is a non-profit information center which collects learning requests and offers and establishes link between offer and request. It is also a mediation point, advertiser and link to the media. It has its own web address: www.borzaznanja.mss.edus.si. Milestones: 1980's first service was settled in Chicago, 1992 Adult Education Centre of Slovenia started a pilot project and in the same year the first implementation was made in the library in Ljubljana. Now there are 6 such services across Slovenia included in a national network. They are funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and by local communities. Staff of Learning Exchanges have to ensure to their users democracy, cultural environment, lifelong learning, unique criteria for all users, life quality and impact to international network. In practice the staff maintain contacts (network, users, media) and data arrangements. The users can expect in Learning Exchange personal development, help for their learning requests, teaching offers and growth of the creativity. The service is free of charge, the users are just asked for feedback at the end. Some of the requests: how to eat fire, work with a spinning wheel, ride a monocycle, speak Gaelic, practice African dances, make a thatch, play sitar, make a sundial, etc. In 2002 Slovene Learning Exchanges recorded 9218 users, 888 new ones. Their motto is very significant: Change your knowledge, not your dreams!

- Employment Information Centre (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) – in the period between 1991 and 1997 the level of unemployment in Slovenia raised from 4% to 13%. At the same time public libraries became local centres so it was logical to respond to the needs with adequate service. The Employment Information Centre was founded by the national Employment

Office and is financed by this Office and the Ministry of Culture. Available information: information on the activities of the National Employment Office; information on all the other licensed institutions which deal with (un)employment; information on job-search clubs; information on the duties and rights of the unemployed; names and addresses of people and institutions which can be of any help to the unemployed (trade unions, trade chambers etc.); information on the library material that can be interesting for the unemployed; information on adult continuing education and learning opportunities. The sources are: leaflets, brochures; the internet (users can browse by themselves or with assistance provided by the staff); the IUS INFO database, The Official Gazette and other governmental publications.

- Center for Independent Learning (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana) – the Slovene network includes 33 centres with 22.000 users. The network is a result of implementation of project whose holder and financer is the Adult Education Centre of Slovenia. Some of these centres are set also in public libraries. First of all Center for Independent Learning is a learning space with work stations that are equipped with learning technology. Participants choose their own time, rhythm and way of learning adapted to their interests and abilities. Advantages of independent learning in the centers are: accessibility, flexibility, privacy, gratis use and individual tutor's and mentor's help.

- Center for Informing and Vocational Counselling (the Public Library Miran Jarc, Novo mesto) is established and financed by the National Employment Office. It provides a wide range of information: about educational and training programmes, about institutions and organizations which run such programmes, about studying abroad. The second complex is the information about vocations in printed version and on video tapes. But of the biggest interest is the computer programme "Where and How?" The user makes a test and on the base of his or her answers the programme suggests adequate vocations. Both partners see the benefit in cooperation: the Office expands the functions also outside its headquarters, the library increases the offer for its users and the centre's material supplements the library's collection.

The population of aged library users increases with the growing number of elderly people and prolonged life period after retirement.

- Study circles (the Public Library of Celje, Celje; the Maribor Public Library, Maribor) are a very disseminated form of working with library users in the third period of life. This model follows the orientation of the Third Age University of Slovenia. The University is a voluntary educational movement, meant for 50+, mostly retired people. The University includes 27 universities in cities all over Slovenia. Each of them organizes study circles, lectures, summer universities, educational trips, etc. Libraries started these circles early and they have become very popular among third age library users. They can attend lectures, trainings, workshops, visits of cultural monuments and institutions, meetings with experts. The issues of the study circles are very wide: learning foreign languages, computer training, handicraft, local heritage, art history, etc. The study circles are the best examples of informal education in Slovene lifelong learning practice.

- In the period of IT development the elderly people have to use computers in their everyday life as well. Public library is a perfect space for organizing training for them (the Oton Župančič Public Library, Ljubljana). The courses are intended to people over 40, so the library cooperates very closely with the Third Age University and for the participants the courses are free of charge. The project has been supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport,

the Ministry of the Information Society and the City of Ljubljana. The librarians work with the participants individually 4 hours, the library published a special guide “From computer to library material”.

Slovene public libraries will be able to implement the new projects, programmes and activities only with better and appropriately educated staff. Besides formal education, Slovene librarians have to participate in professional trainings and, above all, to become with their own example one of the columns of Slovene lifelong learning movement.

Let’s finish this presentation as we started – with the words of Mr. Norman Longworth about the future.

“A Learning Community is a community in which business and industry, schools, colleges, universities, professional organizations and local government co-operate closely into making it a physically, economically, culturally and mentally pleasant place to live:

- From which no-one is excluded from learning and in which learning is an enjoyable and rewarding thing to do;
- Which makes all its resources, especially its human resources, talents, skills and knowledge, available to all;
- Which looks outwards to the rest of the world and encourages its citizens to do likewise;
- Which uses modern communications technology to link people internally and externally;
- Which encourages its citizens to develop personal learning plans and to use guides and mentors to develop their knowledge and skills;
- Which mobilizes special interest groups;
- Which celebrates learning frequently and encourages whole families to participate.”

“So lifelong learning is here to stay?

You can say that again, and again, and again. The alternative doesn’t bear thinking about.”

And public libraries?

Can you imagine something big and new without them?

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