



The Slovenian Lifelong Learning Week (LLW) and voluntary involvement

This material was prepared for the Workshop on Adult Learning and Volunteering within the Sowing the Learning Seeds (SLS) project meeting in Dublin, 19-22 February 2011.

The Slovenian Lifelong Learning Week (LLW) has been held since 1996 annually, first in autumn and since 2008, in the third week of May (extended LLW period: the months of May and June). It started as a project of and was coordinated by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) and has grown immensely in the past 15 years.

At first, SIAE cooperated directly with providers of LLW events – adult education centres (folk high schools), secondary schools, private enterprises, NGOs etc. – who at the same time constitute the network of adult education providers in the country. Gradually but definitely since 2001, larger educational institutions took over the role of so called **regional LLW coordinators**, meaning that they stimulated several other, not necessarily educational organisations, interest groups and individuals to take part in the festival. Thereby, kindergartens, music schools, museums, libraries, various clubs and associations and several others got involved in large numbers. LLW coordinators have carried out certain services on behalf of these local networks, such as:

- Informing, animating and registering providers of LLW events,
- Joint planning, guidance and harmonisation of the network of LLW providers,
- Acquiring financial support for the implementation of LLW,
- Assuring joint media promotion,
- Assuring joint LLW promotional material.

Thereby, the network of providers of LLW events has increased in number and diversity. In addition, so called **thematic LLW coordinators**, like the National Employment Office, the Scout Association of Slovenia, the Trade Union and others made possible the participation of their networks in the learning festival.

Annually, the network of LLW coordinators consists of 25-30 institutions which for their work receive some financial support from the Ministry of Education and Sport via a public tender. On the other hand, SIAE's LLW team is financed by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs.

In spite of relatively sound state financial support, a major part of the endeavours invested in the implementation of LLW are on voluntary basis and above all, it is the people working for this cause who are the major driving force of the LLW at local level. Through this, ever more people have got involved, ever more forms of learning and creativity have been presented within the festival, and ever more long-lasting partnerships have been established.

Since 2006, LLW coordinators have taken an additional role: in cooperation with SIAE, they alternate in organising the national LLW opening. Beside the presentation of SIAE awards which is the major part of the opening and the responsibility of SIAE, there are local contents (the cultural programme,

accompanying events, entertainment, etc.) provided by the LLW coordinators and their local networks. Here a lot of voluntary work is usually involved.

LLW coordinators meet annually once or twice but throughout the Annual LLW lifecycle they are entitled to professional support by SIAE.

The **participation of a fair number of LLW coordinators in the SLS** project is above all a valuable opportunity for them to learn from their counterparts in partner countries, to exchange experiences and discuss relevant topics in order to even enhance their work. At the same time, it is an opportunity to reward them for their successful cooperation in LLW so far.

Below there are essays of LLW coordinators on the topic of voluntary involvement. Their authors will be members of the Slovenian team visiting the SLS meeting in Dublin, 19-22 February 2011. Soon, you will meet them personally, but here is a group photo of all of us. Ma colleague Mateja (in the middle of the front row) and myself (first from the right, back row), we are employees of SIAE; Mateja works in the field of promotion, I'm head of the LLW project. Enjoy the reflections of our colleagues!

By Zvonka Pangerc Pahernik

Group photo of the Slovenian delegation to the Dublin meeting, 9 February 2011:



Voluntary involvement and the adult education centre, UPI – Ijudska univerza Žalec

By Franja Centrih (first from the left)

UPI – Ijudska univerza Žalec is a non-profitable, public institution. We have always shown respect for human values like solidarity and volunteerism. Since we are an educational institution, we have mostly encouraged volunteering for educational purposes, especially in the field of informal and lifelong learning. We have been organizing various short term educational programmes and courses for adults or different target groups for a long time, and in this field we often cooperate with experts and lecturers, who are willing to share their knowledge and experience with others on a voluntary basis. Such programmes are offered to the participants free of charge, and are as follows: active citizenship workshops, study circles with a wide variety of topics (hop growing, healthy way of life, Slovene folk songs heritage, recreation and leisure time, computing skills etc.). Volunteers also always take part in events or performances that we deliver during the Lifelong Learning Week, especially in conferences, lectures, round table discussions, and workshops aimed at providing hands-on experience in different fields of life. We believe that this kind of cooperation and volunteer work fulfils and supports the concept of lifelong learning that we, as a public educational institution, promote.

Some examples of our cooperation with volunteers during the Lifelong Learning Weeks:

Round table discussion “How to increase social inclusion”: a volunteer presented her life story to the participants of the programme *Bridge to education*: She was a trained sewer, attended training courses abroad, taught sewing, then she lost her job. After she had stayed at home, she attended a course for a masseuse and got a national qualification for the job. She started working as a volunteer in social field, visited people at home and helped them. After that she decided to complete training and get a national qualification as a social caretaker at home. She encouraged the participants of the roundtable to work hard, to learn, and to follow their dreams, and especially not to be afraid of changes in their lives.

Round table discussion “Creative fashion tips with Maja Štamol”: Maja Štamol is a well recognised local fashion designer who actively participated in the discussion and gave free presentation and also some advice to the participants.

Round table discussion “Entrepreneurship – YES or NO”: experts from the Local Development Agency, and some local entrepreneurs shared their knowledge and experience with the people who were interested in starting their own businesses.

Job presentations: people from different fields of work presented their educational paths and their everyday job routines to the children from the final primary school classes and their parents: a journalist, a photographer, a veterinarian, a psychiatrist, a forensic expert.

Workshops: “Five rhythm dancing” – exercising and dancing therapy, “Jewellery making workshop” – creative workshop, “A flower is growing for each disease” – a workshop on growing and using medicinal herbs, and many more.

Courses: calligraphy

Volunteers who participated in these workshops and events were mostly local people, experts in their fields of work, who were happy to share their knowledge and experience with the participants, and in this way helped promoting the importance of knowledge and lifelong learning.



Participation of volunteers within the activities of VITRA

By Tatjana Gostiša (second from the left, back row)

VITRA is a non-profitable environmental organisation. Since its establishment in 1994, it has actively carried out development and educational activities for sustainable rural development and volunteers have contributed significantly to the development and visibility of VITRA. Our website www.vitra.si is designed and maintained with their help. Our practice shows that volunteering is one of the first steps in intensive cooperation between VITRA and individuals.

Volunteering is a consequence of the activities which were a part of in an important national project – the Lifelong Learning Week. During the first year of participation we organised only our events, but for the past 10 years we have been involved in this project as a performer as well as a major regional coordinator for the southern part of Slovenia. We are aware of the fact that only the informed and enlightened individuals can impact on sustainable development. In cooperation with our organisation, volunteers create and realize a variety of projects. They prepare and carry out workshops, courses, international exchanges, lectures, seminars.

In 1995 we started the implementation of international volunteer work camps. Each of them lasted 14 days. With the help of 300 volunteers from around the world we organized 27 working camps within nine years.

Study circles are an interesting form of voluntary non-formal learning in rural areas. In 15 years of operation we carried out 33 study circles with 400 participants.

In 1998 we began to work actively with young people. We organized an international meeting based on young volunteers – study visit and seminar for 30 youth workers from 9 European countries. This was followed by 11 youth exchanges, which involved around 80 young volunteers from all over Slovenia. 10 young people also practised as volunteers. The result was that the heads of the various project activities acquired practical experience in project work, group management and preparation of programs for different target groups. The result is a Youth info point VITRA operating since 2005.

One of our recent and successful projects is the National Energy Path (NEP) Slovenia which included about 330 volunteers. With the agreement of the owners from all over Slovenia in 2008, 10 professionals enrolled in 330 buildings with energy efficient solutions. The owners acted as volunteers, and can therefore take the credit for this success. They are willing to share their experience, decisions and solutions of all stakeholders with visitors (households, schools, study circles, various projects). Access to the portal <http://nep.vitra.si> is free of charge and without registration. Each year, the volunteers are asked to participate in the LLW, and so far they have always responded and we have not experienced any rejection.

All our activities are included in the LLW, which includes mainly volunteers. Since 2005 we have an average of 40 to 50 subcontractors in LLW. The quality and number of events have been increasing from year to year. The important issue is that they come from all generations and with very different skills. That is why our calendar of events is very "dynamic" as it includes a variety of organizations and their members - from kindergartens, primary schools, businesses, eco and rural tourism, student and youth organizations, specific institutions and individuals, such as volunteers in the online portals NEP Slovenia. We are very proud of this cooperation, which also results in various media attention as well as in gaining certain quality certificates.



LLW – connecting people and learning

By Meta Gašperšič (third from the left, back row)

The Development and Education Centre Novo mesto (RIC Novo mesto) has been participating in the Slovenian Lifelong Learning Week since the very beginning. Together with numerous education providers or partners offering a diverse range of activities we make sure that the project comes to life and becomes a companion for people of all generations.

Over the last 15 years, RIC Novo mesto has together with the national coordinator, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, paved the way of LLW by first of all taking the role of the education provider, and later of the initiator and coordinator of LLW at the regional level. One of the greatest achievements of LLW in our region is the cooperation between different institutions, the local politics and economy with one common goal: better quality of life both for individuals and the community.

Each year, RIC Novo mesto invites the following entities to participate in the LLW:

- Public and private education institutions,
- Other institutions, organisations and associations which raise public awareness and promote greater responsibility for personal development,
- Individuals spreading the knowledge and examples of good practice,
- Various sports and other clubs encouraging one's physical activity,
- Individuals and institutions which can organise an open day to present the range of their activities and different ways of spending one's leisure time, etc.

In this way we have been able to involve many creative partners that create a rich offer of events for people of all ages and generations. Since 2000, we have yearly been able to attract around 70 providers of events, and altogether carry out 200-500 events in the course of the extended LLW period. Only a few LLW partners receive funds to implement an event. The great majority of providers enriching the LLW with their activities participate on a voluntary basis as RIC Novo mesto cannot provide financial help to them.

There are many reasons why providers' decide to participate in the LLW: mostly they want to promote their own education programmes, inform the public about free and payable education possibilities, and above all more and more providers only want to share their knowledge and experience with the others. Further, even providers that include the LLW event in their annual plans of work mostly depend on the voluntary work to ensure successful implementation of an event. The institutes and the volunteers are both driven by the same wish to enable people without financial resources for education to take part in the LLW events.

RIC Novo mesto is the regional coordinator of LLW and among other responsibilities we ensure that all events are included in the national calendar of LLW events, take care of the promotion in media and address target groups for individual events. The LLW events aim at different target groups, ranging from the youngest to the retired learners, and they take place over a period of at least one and a half month. The events vary by content and type of implementation, as do our efforts to inform about and arouse public interest in the project and its activities. What is more, the media help us to promote the project by reporting on the LLW events free of charge.

In the last decade, the Slovenian LLW has grown into a unique project getting even more extensive every year; however, it can only be carried out with the help of cooperating partners and providers, which much to our pleasure are yearly increasing in number. The LLW is becoming a true regional



festival of events which encourage people to learn, develop their knowledge and competences, reflect opportunities for personal growth, provide information, inspire and invite ...

The providers of LLW events and the participants give great feedback and confirmation that the LLW has an important role in raising participation in the lifelong learning process, since it encourages people to take part in various education programmes. And this is of course one of the main project goals.

Volunteering as a powerful source of learning

By Tadej Poglej (fourth from the left, back row)

Exploring the role of voluntary work, or better engagement of volunteers organising adult learners' festivals need some background explanation. Since we have volunteering and learning in the title, we have to answer two basic questions: firstly, why do we learn, and what kind of needs do we fulfil with learning, and secondly, why we are volunteers; what the reasons for voluntary engagement are.

In order to answer about fulfilling different needs through learning, I will use Houle's theory (Houle 1988) about learning orientations which are:

- Goal Oriented learners use education as a means of achieving some other goal.
- Learning Oriented learners seek knowledge for its own sake.
- Activity Oriented learners participate for the sake of the activity itself and the social interaction it provides.

An answer to the second question about the reason of volunteering, offers us various reasons, from achievements and personal growth to social recognition, bonding with friends and a feeling of belonging. Volunteering is working with others to make a meaningful contribution to a better community.

The binding element of both learning and volunteering is a social interaction and learning through active participation. Learning in groups is more meaningful and people gain more from interactions. Volunteers work for others and with others and both learn from work and relation. They acquire a sense of purpose and make meaning of experience (Freedman 1994).

Placing this consideration in the context of adult education offers a good explanation why adult learners' weeks and festivals are important. They provide the place and space for celebrating achievements of volunteering and learning together. They offer solid milestones when learners can sum up all experiences transfer them to learning outcomes and get personal and social recognition. By highlighting the fact that in Slovenia more than one third of activities within the Lifelong Learning Week is organised by non-governmental organisations (and there are also many volunteers from others), the role of volunteers is more than obvious.

So from my point of view, emphasising "the aspect of celebration" could increase participation and importance of the festivals (as it is very natural to celebrate sport victories or business success). At the nowadays speed of life this is even more important. There's no time for reflection and recognition of our learning but only demands for more. There's no time to stop and say "Now I know! On the contrary, lifelong learning pressure is constantly perceived. Instead of "Beating the drums for attention!" I would rather say "Giving the time for reflection!"



Some thoughts on volunteering

By Marija Imperl (first from the left, front row)

In today's world, with all of us rushing from one obligation and appointment to another, wondering where to find the energy, time and will to do what we need to do, volunteering has a greater importance than at any time before. We are social beings who feel deep inside ourselves a need for company, connection, cooperation and creation; and our need to contribute a share to the planning and realisation of certain common goals is also of great importance. It gives us a belief that we are worthwhile, useful and needed, and that we have given a small part of ourselves to others. To devote some of our energies to achieving goals without expectation of payment enriches and strengthens us. In rural areas, this way of thinking is still alive. Once upon a time it was the initial force that drove us to 'volunteer', to help those that needed help. And despite the fact that they didn't expect to be paid for it, volunteers were richly rewarded nevertheless – with the respect of others – and were richer for the links that grew up among them. The feeling that someone will spring to their assistance as well, if they need it, gives people hope, gives them trust themselves and others. We can regard volunteering as one of those important values that give life its meaning; and it always goes hand in hand with other values such as honesty, diligence, solidarity and empathy. Volunteering is frequently also a bridge between isolation and active involvement in human society, and contacts among volunteers often become those of friendship, driving the progress and development of the individual and of society as a whole.

Study circles expanding the circle of development

By Jože Prah, third from the left, front row

Study circles have become a constant form of non-formal education in Slovenia. It is interesting to recall the times when the study circles started to grow, for example in Zasavje, in the valley of Sopota, in Svibno near Radeče. At first a lot of time was spent on explaining what study circles are, what non-formal education is and what it is intended for. There were many discussions on why different people gather, why we are together, what we want.

Breaking the ice of the initial interest is not difficult. As a result, we launched the study circle in Svibno. Since the beginning, we set a clear vision of our operations. We are an interesting group with an enormous range of desires and thoughts. However, one could easily connect all this on the basis of quality integration within the local community and in the surroundings as well as on the basis of the strong energy for volunteering that the participants shared. The local community of Svibno, with a strong touch of history, was somehow self-sufficient. On one hand, the activities that took place so far were somehow intended for themselves, but on the other hand, we wanted more.

And first of all, when we wanted more, we wanted to recognize our strength, which was coming from the village Svibno that lives under the ruins of an old castle. We were motivated by the power of our place, and we spread this energy to other locals. The idea was to invite not only neighbours, but also our friends and others. We had a vision of quality socializing with a clear objective to enter into the environment. Therefore, days of work have rendered results. The study circle in the valley of Sopota was set up by a mentor who was also a secretary in the first study circle in Svibno. That is great. It is something new in the valley, which is divided into several municipalities, several clubs. It is a place where people can socialize and they are not just neighbours.

This energy creates high-quality gathering momentum for thinking that it is nice when we are together and as such we are able to realise our ideas. Let's show what we can do! And so the valley of Sopota has become the centre of many events and even more stories.



Municipalities are not limits. Why not connect. How? By hiking, naturally. On a rainy Sunday more than 100 locals gathered for the march with the sole aim of getting together and socializing. This energy has given us ideas for work, a quality way of communication that is the key for success in study circles. A completely new way, a comprehensive and broad way of thinking and attitudes appeared. A country of charcoal was born. It was time to introduce it to the whole country. The presentation took place at the main event in Slovenia, the week of forests, in Dole near Litija, where people know something special, they know how to cook charcoal.

We are surrounded by unique forests. They are our keepers. We love them and their power enriches us. It is no wonder that these study circles are in the domain of the Adult Education Centre of Slovenia, as well as in the domain of the Slovenian Forestry Service.

Are we now losing energy?

Of course, it is not renewed unless we are constantly looking for new challenges in ourselves and in the environment. We organized a study circle named 'What I give is what I get'. Its mentor was a person who was present from the very start. She set its vision and the way of thinking.

This study circle has given a new dimension to this field which operates under the protection of the Slovenia Forest Service. It has also encouraged the idea that the Slovenian Forest Service acts as a connecting institution of study circles that operate in rural areas.

Forest, forest owners, farmers, country-folk ... designers of development! Do we know enough to appreciate the function and the role of the forest? Do we know them? Do we know how to wrap them up in the 'cellophane' and sell? Are we appreciated by those who come to us? These thoughts influenced the creation of a study circle 'From emersion to the EURO, and the Radeče Centre for Culture, Tourism and recreation, which brought a new input of energy.

We rotate in a circle, we give as well as accept. There are still many villagers, who know a lot and want to show it. Let's return to the main thoughts: to connect, to show and to sing. All this is reflected in pamphlets, books, a CD that speaks through us. To be wide, it means to be small. And this smallness itself gives us the largeness, which is a commodity with very high added value. It is within us and passes from us to all.

