

Professionalisation of Adult Education in Slovenia from a Multi-level Perspective

Borut Mikulec, Mateja Kovšca

Abstract:

The adult education (AE) research community emphasise the importance of well-qualified personnel working in the field of AE. However, the field is facing with challenges achieving this aim. This chapter research professionalisation of AE from a multi-level perspective in one European Union member state – Slovenia. Based on empirical data from Slovenia, the chapter argues that coordination at three levels is important: at the national level, professionalisation is strengthened by state policies and regulations; at the organisational level, the professional development of adult educators is supported by organisations; and at the individual level, the focus is on professional knowledge and strengthening the professional identity of adult educators.

Keywords: Adult Educators; Professionalisation of Adult Education; Slovenia

1. Introduction

The adult education (AE) research community (e.g. Jarvis and Chadwick 1991; Nuissl and Lattke 2008; Egetenmeyer et al. 2019) and international organisations active in the field of AE (e.g. Council of the European Union 2011; DVV International 2013) emphasise the importance of well-qualified personnel working in the field. However, the question of whether AE should professionalise has been discussed since the 1920s. One camp is in favour of professionalisation, because it may help improve AE's marginal status in society and quality; the other has been raising concerns that professionalisation may lead to the marginalisation or exclusion of different voices and approaches to AE (Merriam and Brockett 2007; Grotlüschen et al. 2020). Furthermore, the range of professionals working in this field is wide and diverse, as AE is linked to a country's social structure, its socio-economic, cultural, and political traditions and the low regulation of the AE system (Jütte et al. 2011). Moreover, the field is characterised by fragmented training opportunities and precarious job status, with many adult educators working in the field lacking formal prepara-

Borut Mikulec, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, borut.mikulec@ff.uni-lj.si, 0000-0002-4500-3091
Mateja Kovšca, Independent Scholar, Slovenia, m.kovsca@gmail.com

Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)

FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Borut Mikulec, Mateja Kovšca, *Professionalisation of Adult Education in Slovenia from a Multi-level Perspective*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0151-3.15, in Vanna Boffo, Regina Egetenmeyer (edited by), *Re-thinking Adult Education Research. Beyond the Pandemic*, pp. 175-193, 2023, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0151-3, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0151-3

tion for teaching, counselling, programme planning, and so on before entering the profession (Andersson et al. 2013).

In recent years, especially in the European educational space, studies of professionalisation focused mainly on competences that adult educators should have (see Mikulec 2019; Zagir and Mandel 2020), but less attention has been given to the important role organisations play in the professionalisation of adult educators (see Breitschwerdt et al. 2019; Schwarz and Mikulec 2020), as well as to career paths, professional identity and professional development of adult educators (see Bron and Jarvis 2008; Evans 2008; Bierema 2011). From a multi-level perspective on professionalisation, the general importance of interdependencies between the state-society (macro), organisations (meso) and staff-personnel (micro) levels of professionalisation is emphasised (Egetenmeyer et al. 2019). Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to analyse and discuss professionalisation from a multi-level perspective in one European Union (EU) member state – Slovenia –, and to gain insights into professional development of adult educators in Slovenia. The primary research focus is on staff-personnel (micro) level, but the state-society (macro level) and organisations (meso level) contexts are also analysed. This chapter explores the following research question: How is professionalism in AE ensured from a multi-level perspective in Slovenia?

In the following, we first briefly introduce the theoretical insights on professionalisation of AE. Next, we discuss professionalisation of AE in Slovenia, outline our methodological approach and present results on state-society, organisations and staff-personnel levels. In the final section, we argue that coordinated action at all three levels is crucial for the quality professionalisation of AE in Slovenia: at the national level, professionalisation is strengthened by state policies and systemic regulation of the field; at the organisational level, the professional development of staff-personnel is supported by AE organisations; and at the individual level, attention is focused on professional knowledge and strengthening the professional identity of adult educators.

2. Theoretical Insights on Professionalisation of Adult Education

2.1 Between 'Traditional' and 'New' Professionalism

Professionalization is a concept that is not uniformly defined and remains the subject of discussion in the field of AE. Egetenmeyer, Breitschwerdt and Lechner (2019) argue that professionalism in the modern world is perceived as a sign of quality. Only well-trained and professional personnel can cope with complex learning situations and can reduce the number of mistakes in their work (Käpplinger 2017). Authors distinguish between 'traditional' and 'new' professionalism or between a harder and softer approaches to the professionalization of AE; the first being understood as a process of development of an (academic) profession, and the second as a process of achieving professionalism (Egetenmeyer and Käpplinger 2011; Egetenmeyer et al. 2019).

Professionalism in the 'traditional' sense is characterised by following characteristics: (a) research and theoretical corpus of knowledge; (b) formal education system (usually at university level) that ensures minimum quality and serves as a mandatory basis for entry into a profession; (c) (legally) determined entry conditions, which have a selection and control function; (d) code of ethics; (e) formally organised social group which represents the interests of the professional group and strengthens its social power and visibility; and (f) professional autonomy as a result of social recognition of the profession (Egetenmeyer and K pplinger 2011, 23; J tte et al. 2011, 18; Sava 2011, 12-13). However, following understanding of professionalism in this traditional sense, we can emphasise that AE is not a profession, as it does not meet all of the above characteristics: AE study programmes are not a condition for entering the profession, AE is mostly not regulated, AE does not have its own professional association which would represent interests of all adult educators, and there is no common code of ethics (Lattke and Nuissl 2008).

Nevertheless, contemporary discussions point out that the understanding of professionalism in traditional sense is too narrowly designed and outdated. Nowadays, we cannot talk about a single process of professionalisation, but about many patterns that lead to the development of professionalism. We are faced with precarious working conditions, variable work tasks and career paths that are nonlinear and fluid. Accordingly, professions are losing their power, while professionalism is strengthening in organisations and non-formal networks and professional associations. Consequently, 'new' professionalism shifts the focus from social mechanisms that regulate the sphere of work towards organisations, individuals and their continuous professional development. Such understanding of professionalism deviates from normative regulations, individual and attributive aspects of professionalisation, and encourages consideration of the social and institutional contexts in which the process of professionalisation is placed. It can be applied to a wide range of 'professions', while its focus is on professional conduct in practice, which is a reflection of an individual's professional development. Therefore, professionalism is understood as the ability to comprehensively understand professional situations and to use a wide range of knowledge in concrete situations (Evetts 2006; Evans 2008; Egetenmeyer and K pplinger 2011; Breitschwerdt et al. 2019; Egetenmeyer et al. 2019; Schwarz and Mikulec 2020).

2.2 Challenges in Professionalisation of Adult Education

The field of AE is facing several challenges towards greater professionalisation of which we will highlight the following three ones.

First challenge is related to the complexity of the field. Treatment of AE as a single field is extremely difficult due to its diversity, different philosophies and practices and decentralisation structures (e.g. Merriam and Brockett 2007; Knox and Fleming 2010). Furthermore, some authors pointed out that the field of AE is still systematically unregulated and marginalised, despite being the main com-

ponent of lifelong learning (e.g. Bierema 2011; Jütte and Latke 2014), while responsibility for the AE governance is often divided between different ministries, other bodies and different stakeholders (Sava 2011; Desjardins 2017). Overall, the field of AE is extremely diverse in terms of target groups, learning content, providers, institutional arrangements, funding structures and legislation, meaning that this diversity of the field makes it difficult to establish a common vision and causes difficulties in the efforts to professionalise the field (Knox and Fleming 2010; Jütte and Lattke 2014).

Second challenge is related to diversity of organisations (providers), as organised form of learning takes place in AE institutions (folk schools), companies, museums, libraries, various non-governmental organisations, health care institutions, trade unions, schools, colleges and universities, etc. (Jütte et al. 2011). These are being classified in four mayor types of organisations: (a) *independent adult education organisations* which main role is to provide learning opportunities for adults; (b) *educational institutions* which main role is to serve youth, but can serve adults as well (e.g. community colleges), (c) *quasieducational organisations* that see education as corollary function of their primary mission (libraries, museums), and (d) *noneducational organisations* that see education as a means to some other ends (e.g. business, unions, correctional institutions) (Merriam and Brockett 2007, 106-7). Organisations significantly shape the practice of AE according to the role and purpose attributed to it, meaning that when AE in an organisation is of secondary importance, identification with the field of AE is much lower or non-existent. As emphasised by Nuissl (2010), the care for the professionalism and professional development of employees is focused primarily on the minority of adult educators, those who work exclusively in organisations established solely for the purpose of education of adults.

Finally, a third challenge is related to the diversity of roles adult educators perform in their work. Overall, adult educators can be described as a large group of experts who deal with AE and performs varied tasks that enable learning and education of adults. However, the roles of adult educators can be also more closely defined. Nuissl (2010, 130-32) identified six main activities adult educators perform and which can be found in European countries: (a) *teaching*, that represents classical activity of adult educators; (b) *management*, that deals with quality management, staff development, educational marketing, fundraising, project management and other issues; (c) *counselling and guidance*, that support learners in searching of appropriate offers, analysing their learning needs and recognition of prior learning; (d) *media use*, that is related with production and the use of learning software for adults, learning opportunities with interactive media and internet; (e) *programme planning*, that includes planning of an offer of an educational institution, companies or local authorities; and (f) *support*, that includes technical, administrative or organisational support of AE. Furthermore, different studies show (Merriam and Brockett 2007; Bron and Jarvis 2008; Nuissl 2010; Bierema 2011) that many adult educators do not recognise themselves as adult educators, but define themselves according to their social or work context. Thus, they can identify with the content they perform (e.g. li-

brarian, health worker, human resources, etc.), with the organisation in which they work (e.g. teacher in basic school, upper-secondary school or folk university, counsellor in the company, etc.) or according to the educational approach they use (distance learning teacher, coach, mediator, counsellor, mentor, etc.). This also implies that career paths of adult educators are very diverse¹ and rarely conscious and planned, sometimes even completely random, while their working conditions are also insecure and precarious ones (ALPINE 2008; Anderson et al. 2013). As a result, a large number of adult educators is not related with the scientific discipline of AE, does not have basic disciplinary knowledge, does not read (professional) literature from the field, does not attend conferences and does not join associations that could strengthen their professional development (Merriam and Brockett 2007, 146; Bron and Jarvis 2008, 40).

2.3 Multi-level Perspective of Professionalisation in Adult Education

In accordance with the knowledge that ‘new’ professionalism brings in the field of AE, Egetenmeyer et al. (2019, 12-13) propose the use of a multi-level model of professionalisation that should be understood as a mutually conditioned relationship between staff-personnel, organisations and society contexts. To conduct research on professionalism in AE within multi-level perspective, we should address three different but interrelated levels: (1) *State, society and institutions*, i.e. the state defining laws and policies of AE, lifelong learning (LLL), labour market, as well as umbrella organisations or associations in the field; (2) *Organisations in AE* that are responsible for quality management, programme planning, learning cultures and professional development (skills training of staff) through initial or continuing formal and non-formal education programmes; (3) *Professional staff and adult learners* that includes professionals and learners, where teaching-learning process forms the centre of professionalism.

Having said that, we will now turn to discussion and research on professionalism in AE in Slovenia by addressing all three identified levels.

3. Professionalisation of Adult Education in Slovenia

From the historical perspective, professional development of adult educators in Slovenia can be traced back to the late 1950s, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia². The training of the non-qualified adult population, mainly to meet the needs of the economy, and the growth of institutional structures of AE created a need for trained adult educators (organisers of adult education, managers, instructors, foremen, andragogues). Consequently, the systematic training

¹ Entry conditions in the field of AE are usually not regulated (Jütte and Lattke 2014) and entry is usually the result of one’s own interests and experience, but rarely the result of previous study in the AE field (Knox and Fleming 2010).

² Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia until 25 June 1991 when declared its independence.

of adult educators was first established at the People's and Worker's Universities (1957-59), which organised professional conferences, lectures, workshops and summer and winter schools, with the aim of training adult educators. In the 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslavian universities opened the door to systematic theoretical and empirical research in the field of AE and introduced study programmes on 'andragogy' at the Faculties of Arts. Because of the helpful social climate, a new profession called 'andragogue' emerged. In Slovenia, andragogy was introduced as a subject in higher education in 1972. From 1976 on, andragogy was one of the three possible fields of study in the study programme 'Pedagogy'; in 1993, an independent study university programme 'Andragogy' was established. Yugoslav (and thus Slovene) experience therefore pointed out the interdependence between andragogy as a science and the andragogue as a professional, the main outcome of this process being the awareness that people working in AE needed to acquire a certain amount of andragogical knowledge (see Mikulec 2019, 33-34).

However, nowadays there is lack of systematic research about adult educators in Slovenia and their professional development, although concerns have been raised about the need to systematically investigate who are the people working in adult education, what is their professional identity, what tasks and activities they perform, and how their professional development is organised.

Therefore, to address this gap we have researched professionalisation of AE at national, organisational and individual levels.

3.1 Method and Sources

Our qualitative research is based on document analysis and interviews. Research on the professionalization of AE at the *national* and *organisational* levels is based on the method of document analysis (Bowen 2009). At national level we analysed relevant legislation and policies, while at organisational level we analysed organisation's statutes and webpages. Furthermore, the analysis of the organisational level is also supplemented by three semi-structured interviews conducted with directors of three selected professional organisations: the Association of Folk Universities of Slovenia (D-ZLUS), the Association of Educational and Counselling Centres of Slovenia (D-ZiSS), and the Andragogical Society of Slovenia (D-ADS). To avoid any harm to the respondents, prior voluntary oral or written consent was secured and the goals of the study were explained to the interviewees so they could take informed decisions. Open type questions were formulated in advance and if necessary, we checked their understanding and asked sub-questions during the interviews. The director of ADS (D-ADS) answered the interview questions in writing, while interviews with other two directors (D-ZLUS and D-ZiSS) were performed orally and online on the videoconferencing platform Zoom. All three interviews were conducted in March 2021, with oral interviews lasting approximately forty minutes.

Research at the *individual level* was based on ten semi-structured interviews conducted with different adult educators. Before conducting the interviews, we

prepared general questions of a predominantly open type and provided a rough idea of the desired sample of interviewees. We purposefully selected adult educators who are employed in organisations of various types (Merriam and Brockett 2007), who work in various fields and perform various AE activities (Nuissl 2010). Thus, in our research we included adult educators from all four types of organisations and from five different areas of activity that enable and support AE³. Information on respondents is presented in Tab. 1.

Table 1– Information on interviewed adult educators.

Interviewees	Demographic data	Type of organisation	AE activities
LU1	46 years, woman, 20 years of work experience, permanent working contract	independent adult education organisation (folk university)	counselling and guidance, programme planning
LU2	56 years, woman, 30 years of work experience, permanent working contract	independent adult education organisation (folk university)	counselling and guidance, programme planning, management
MKLJ1	37 years, woman, 15 years of work experience, permanent working contract	quasieducational organisation (Ljubljana city library)	management
MKLJ2	40 years, woman, 12 years of work experience, permanent working contract	quasieducational organisation (Ljubljana city library)	management, programme planning
SŠ1	45 years, man, 8 years of work experience, permanent working contract	educational institution (upper-secondary school)	teaching

³ The activity of media use has been omitted from our research because there are very few individuals who develop information and communication technology for the purpose of AE in Slovenia.

SŠ2	41 years, woman, 2 years of work experience, fixed-term working contract	educational institution (upper-secondary school)	teaching
U3O1	39 years, woman, 10 years of work experience, copyright contract	independent adult education organisation (third age university Ljubljana)	teaching
U3O2	36 years, woman, 5 years of work experience, permanent working contract	independent adult education organisation (third age university Ljubljana)	support
P	48 years, woman, 15 years of work experience, permanent working contract	noneducational organisation (counselling company)	teaching
F	64 years, man, 35 years of work experience, self-employed	educational institution (private educational organisation)	teaching, programme planning

We individually arranged for each of the interviewees to be interviewed via e-mail, informed them about the goals of the study, approximate length of the interview and provided them with anonymity. To avoid any harm to the respondents, prior voluntary oral or written consent was secured. Two interviews were conducted in direct contact with one of the interviewers in March 2019, while eight interviews were conducted via the videoconferencing platform Zoom or Microsoft Teams in February 2021. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the Dictaphone smartphone application with the prior permission of the interviewees for the purpose of transcription.

The data obtained through interviews were qualitatively processed through coding. First, we edited the material and wrote a literal transcript of everything said. Interview transcripts were then imported into the Quirkos program, with the help of which we continued the qualitative analysis of the material. In the program, we marked the coding units and assigned to them the codes that came to our mind ('open' coding). In a set of different codes, we selected, edited, and redesigned those that seemed relevant to the purpose of our research ('selective' coding). Similar codes were identified and grouped into categories (Saldaña

2009). In the final part of coding, we created three categories – career paths, professional identity and professional development – on the basis of which we interpreted the results.

Regarding the sources, we analysed five policies and legislations that contribute to the professionalisation of AE at the national level: (a) Adult Education Act (2018), (b) Resolution on the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2013-20 (2013), (c) White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (2011), (d) Lifelong Learning Strategy in Slovenia (2007) and (e) Rules on the selection and co-financing of continuing education and training programs for professionals in education (2017). At the organisational level, we analysed six keys (1) *professional organisations* statutes and websites: (i) Andragogical Society of Slovenia (ADS), (ii) Association of Folk Universities of Slovenia (ZLUS), (iii) Slovenian Third Age University (SUTŽO), (iv) Association of Adult Education Organisations in Upper-Secondary Schools (DOIO), (v) Association of Educational and Counselling Centres of Slovenia (ZiSS), and (vi) Slovenian Association of Facilitators (DMS). Furthermore, on the organisational level we as well analysed (2) *professionalisation organisations* that are responsible for primary education and continuing professional development of adult educators⁴: (i) three public universities study programmes offering first and second cycle of studies in AE, these being responsible for primary professional education, and (ii) non-formal educational programmes offered by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE), responsible for continuing professional development of adult educators.

Certain limitations need to be considered in our research as well. All participants come or work in the wider area of Ljubljana (the capital), where the opportunities for professional development are the most accessible and numerous. Situational barriers to participation in training that enable professional development are smaller in our case, while the situation in other parts of Slovenia may be different. In interpreting the results at the individual level, we took into account only the expressed views of adult educators, whereby for a more comprehensive insight into the professionalisation, it would make sense to extend the research also to learners who were involved in teaching-learning process.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 State-society Context

AE in Slovenia is one of the areas where the educational requirements for professionals – these being defined as teachers, organisers, counsellors, and ‘other professionals’ – working in formal and non-formal educational programmes for

⁴ For further elaboration on professional and professionalisation organisations see Schwarz and Mikulec (2020, 13).

adults, financed by public funds, are regulated by the law. The obligatory conditions that adult educators working in formal and non-formal AE programmes must fulfil, and are defined by AE 'Act', are as follows: (a) mastery of the Slovene language; (b) education acquired through master's study programmes; (c) pedagogical-andragogical education⁵; (d) successful completion of a professional examination in the field of education; that is, graduates who finish higher education studies are obliged to complete a traineeship lasting from 8 to 10 months before employment. However, these rules do not apply to all of those adult educators who work in AE provisions that are not publicly funded, for example in enterprises that provide a high and growing share of continuous vocational education to employees (Mikulec 2019, 34; Schwarz and Mikulec 2020, 20).

By analysing policies and legislation that contribute to the professionalisation of AE at the national level we can highlight the following findings. In general, support for professionalism in AE is shown through the legislative framework and all important AE policies. The need for professionally trained staff is emphasised in the 'Resolution', 'White Paper' and the 'LLL Strategy'. These policies emphasise that: (a) a system of quality initial education for AE staff, as well as a system for further education and training based on the actual adult needs of the educators and their employment fields, needs to be established; (b) a sufficient number of professionals should be trained for different target groups and needs; (c) a database of adult educators should be maintained for public service in AE; (d) pedagogical-andragogical education should be adapted to different target groups; (e) quality teaching materials, learning resources and ICT-support should also be provided. Moreover, also the 'Rules' support in-service training and career development programs for adult educators and in this way ensure continuous and stable funding for further education and training programmes of adult educators. However, the Rules has also its blind spots as not all adult educators working in practice are equally addressed: teachers, organisers and counsellors counts as 'professionals' and are eligible to participate in professional training programmes, while other adult educators working in practice (e.g. cultural mediators, mentors in study circles, mentors in self-study centres, adult educators in private educational organisations, etc.) that are not covered by legislation, do not have the right to attain a co-financed program through which they could strengthen their skills needed for working with adults.

⁵ These education programmes (for professionals working in basic and upper-secondary schools and vocational colleges) at university level aim at expanding the knowledge acquired in the academic education programmes and include pedagogical, psychological, andragogical/AE, general, and specialised didactic knowledge, as well as pedagogical or andragogical/AE practice. They are defined by laws and regulations and are mandatory prior to engaging in other professional or management work in the field of education.

3.2.2 Organisations

By analysing two main types of professionalisation organisations – public universities and SIAE – responsible for primary education and continuing professional development of adult educators we can highlight the following findings.

The University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, offers doctoral and master's programmes in 'Andragogy'; subjects covering AE can be studied at the undergraduate level in the bachelor's programme 'Pedagogy and Andragogy'. The University of Primorska, Faculty of Education, offers a master's programme in 'Adult Education and Career Development'; subjects covering AE can be studied at the undergraduate level in the bachelor's programme 'Education/Pedagogy'. AE as a subject can also be studied through the first- and second-cycle of study programme of 'Pedagogy' at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts and through some other study programmes as well (e.g. Organisation and Management, Human Resources). Therefore, all three of Slovenia's public universities offer study programmes at the master's level or AE subjects at the bachelor's level. Study programmes are aimed at full-time students and prepared in line with the Bologna requirements that took force in 2009. Broadly speaking, master's programmes in andragogy/AE equip students with generic competencies in the humanities and social sciences, as well as with professional competencies that enable them to comprehend the relations between various AE phenomena and processes, social and cultural environments, and the characteristics and expectations of individual adults (see Schwarz and Mikulec 2020, 23-24).

SIAE is the main institution responsible for the system of further education and training of adult educators. SIAE developed competence-based professional training programmes for adult educators, which aim to develop new knowledge and skills and help them to develop their own and the common professional identity of an adult educators. Three main types of professional training were developed: (a) general basic and continuing training of adult educators (knowledge of the discipline, andragogical cycle), (b) basic training on the special roles of adult educators (e.g. head and mentor in study circles, teacher in literacy programmes, counsellor in adult education guidance centres), and (c) further training of adult educators (see Schwarz and Mikulec 2020, 24).

By analysing six key professional organisations active in AE⁶ we can emphasise that no single professional association exists in Slovenia, but a variety of associations can be found, serving different objectives and needs of its members. Associations interconnect the same types of organisations (e.g. folk universities, universities for the third age, upper-secondary schools), provide training activities accessible to a smaller number of members (adult educators) and represent their specific interests at the national level (ZLUS, ZiSS, DOIO, SUTŽO). At the same time, they coordinate the activities of their members and through non-formal education, training, Erasmus mobility visits and exchanges, upgrade their

⁶ Detail presentation of each of analysed professional organisations can be found in our previous work (Schwarz and Mikulec 2020, 21-23).

knowledge and help each other. However, two associations (ADS, DMS) target a wider range of adult educators as their members come from different types of organisations. They organise educational events, conferences and short trainings for those who are not members. Overall, all of these organisations first of all represent their interests, but they also provide some form of non-formal education and/or training of adult educators for the specific roles they perform: (a) training of municipal administration staff for the preparation of annual AE plans, (b) training of adult educators working with adults with special needs, migrants and prisoners; (c) training of adult educators for the career guidance and counselling process, mentoring in companies and mentoring of elderly.

3.2.3 Staff-personnel Level

In our interview transcripts, three main categories emerged as being important for professionalisation of adult educators in Slovenia: career paths, professional identity and professional development.

3.2.3.1 Career Paths

In Slovenia, there are two most common ways to enter the field of AE: first, through university study programmes dedicated to AE, and second, that is most common, by gaining knowledge of AE after graduation either through pedagogical-andragogical education or through professional training in non-formal education programmes, provided by SIAE or other professional organisations (Možina 2011). In our sample, four respondents come from the AE field of study, two from other fields of social sciences (psychology, architecture) and four from the technical or natural sciences (geology, forestry, mathematics, chemistry). Therefore, four respondents (Interviewee MKLJ1, U3O2, LU1 and F) acquired AE knowledge during their studies within the university study program Andragogy/AE or the andragogy course in the study program of Pedagogy, three respondents gained AE knowledge by finishing pedagogical-andragogical education at university (Interviewee SŠ1, SŠ2 and LU2), while one respondent acquired AE knowledge through extracurricular activities (later on also through in-service training in company and additional trainings provided by professional or professionalisation organisations [Interviewee P]). Two of the respondents (Interviewee MKLJ2 and U3O1) gained their AE knowledge after finishing their studies; first in the non-formal programs for adult educators provided by SIAE and second through the internal 3-day educational program offered by SUTŽO.

All of our respondents, that did not study AE, entered in the field by their unintentional decisions, 'by chance' or because of external influences, such as lack of jobs in the primary profession. Furthermore, they entered the field after some years of professional work experience outside AE (ALPINE 2008, 97). Among four respondents that studied AE, two (Interviewee MKLJ1 and U3O2) entered the field immediately after their studies, while other two (Interviewee LU1 and F) changed several jobs (types of organisations) in the field through their life course.

Overall, we can emphasise that career paths of respondents are very diverse and that these also differ between individuals who are employed in the same types of organisations or have the same educational background. Employment in AE is influenced by a number of (unpredictable) factors, such as labour market conditions and unexpected opportunities adult educators face. However, although some adult educators entered the field by chance, they enjoy their work and do not regret the given opportunities.

3.2.3.2 Professional Identity

Diverse education backgrounds of adult educators, different forms of employment and a wide range of their work tasks cause difficulties in forming the professional identity of adult educators (Možina 2011, 24-25). Therefore, formation of professional identity of adult educators is a complex process. Some respondents (Interviewee LU1, LU2, MKLJ1, U3O2) make it clear and identified themselves as adult educators: «I am adult education professional» (LU1) or «I think I'm an adult educator» (MKLJ1). Others, expressed their professional identity through achieved university education – for example «I am a forester» (SŠ1) or «If someone asks me who I am, I always say architect» (U3O1) –, but as well emphasised that their professional identity changed through their work experience, for example: «I started as a psychologist, which will help less skilled users to use a computer, computer programs [...] it then developed, of course, that I also see myself as someone who has an impact on education [...] I think in a way this sums up how my identity, the way I see myself, has changed» (MKLJ2) or «[I am] chemical engineer, but now a lecturer» (P). Third ones identify themselves not through university education or AE activities they do, but with something else: «I think I'm more of a *therapist* than a teacher. That I work more often on my psychological strength than on mathematics [I teach]» (SŠ2).

Thus, professional identity of respondents is shaped by their university education ('architect', 'psychologist', 'andragogue', 'forester'), by the AE activities they perform ('teacher', 'lecturer', 'moderator', 'facilitator', etc.) or even something else ('therapist'). We often find also combination of these – for example, engineers who have become teachers/adult educators; andragogues who do their work «beyond the boundaries of the [work] andragogue [do]» (U3O2); a psychologist who influences adult education – that signals coexistence of different identities of adult educators. This is also clearly evident in the case of respondent LU2, which, even though she works for many years in independent adult education type of organisation, also emphasised the importance of her primary professional identity, that she formed during her studies. She repeatedly pointed out that she was an engineer and emphasised that engineers differ from «typical social scientists [...] as a technician, as an engineer you think differently» (LU2).

Last but not least, two of the respondents (MKLJ1 and F) emphasised also the importance of the context that shapes professional identity of adult educators as this can also represent an obstacle to the identification with the AE field: «I say I take care of AE in the library, but now the problem is if I say that

in different events aimed for AE professionals, e.g. Annual conference on AE, Andragogic Colloquium [...] And everyone looks at me a little sideways, hey, it's that girl again, who came from the library [...] Colleagues from folk universities, and others, never took us educators from the library as someone, who really deals with education in the true sense of the word» (Interviewee MKLJ1).

3.2.3.3 Professional Development

Professional development of adult educators is carried out through practice, gaining experience, learning at work, learning from colleagues and other people, self-education, and ongoing training. Two of the respondents (Interviewee SŠ1, SŠ2) attributed greatest value to experience («Experience is paramount», SŠ2), while others emphasised the importance of combining practice and learning from colleagues and other people, for example: «Thus, there must be mutual cooperation of everyone, *everyone* [of colleagues] [...] exchange of experiences, opinions» (LU2). Experience brings different organisational and communication competencies, sovereignty at work, ability to solve problems, adapt and react to different situations. Therefore, respondents pointed out to the crucial role informal learning plays in adult educator's professional development.

However, this is not the only way of learning that respondents talked about. Most of them were as well constantly learning, educating and/or training themselves in an organised context. As part of their professional development, three respondents (Interviewee MKLJ1, F and P) highlighted the 'Train the trainer' model they were involved in, which is about «transfer of knowledge between each other and these good practices, what works, what doesn't work» (P), while one of them (MKLJ1) also highlighted the importance of job shadowing and international mobility. Others emphasised that they are systematically trained and educated in accordance with the organisation's annual plan for education (MKLJ1, MKLJ2) or that they strengthen their professional competencies within associations they are being part of (such as ADS and DMS in case of F) and the learning opportunities they provide. Other four respondents (SŠ1, SŠ2, U3O1, U3O2) have been in the past involved in organised AE training, but recently they are either upgrading their knowledge in other areas (in primary professions in case of SŠ1 and U3O1) or do not feel the need for additional AE training (SŠ2).

Professional development may also depend on the personal circumstances of adult educators. For example, one of the respondents pointed out that due to her family responsibilities she put her professional development a bit aside: «Now there is a little more emphasis on family life, maybe that's why *at the moment* is not so much ambition on the career» (U3O2). Moreover, we observed that some respondents educate themselves out of their own need and interest, while in certain cases, participation in certain educational programmes is also a condition for performing special roles in AE work – as some educational programs are required by the state (pedagogical-andragogical education) or by organisations that employ adult educators. As one of the respondents pointed out: «However, if it is an education to get a license or a certificate, which is a con-

dition for performing a certain activity [...] for example in self-directed learning centres [...] or for being a mentor in study circles [...] These are then other types of education, where you do not acquire just knowledge, but you also get a license [to work]» (LU1). Furthermore, according to the respondents there are also enough opportunities for their professional development, but their use is related with self-initiative, interests and priorities of adult educators.

Overall, we can highlight that some segments of AE are not left to chance and require certain professional competence and that organisations (employers) can promote professional development of employees (through the organisation of internal training programs, or systematic preparation of individual training plans), while a large part of the responsibility for professional development still lies with adult educators themselves.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In our research we showed that focus on the professionalisation of AE and the professional development of adult educators in Slovenia can be traced at all three levels, at least as far as AE in the public interest is concerned.

The state establishes and promotes certain mechanisms through which the professionalisation of AE is strengthened (Egetenmeyer et al. 2019). National regulations and policies relate mainly to AE in the public interest where the need for professional competence and professional development of adult educators is emphasised. The state also regulates the selection and (co)financing of programs that promote professional development of adult educators and contribute to their quality work (Egetenmeyer and K  pplinger 2011). In addition, the AE Act legally determines the conditions that must be met by professionals in publicly recognised AE programs (among others, pedagogical-andragogical education). These are all «tendencies to professionalise the field» (Bron and Jarvis 2008, 41). However, one of the main blind spots at national level is that the state with its policies and regulations do not officially recognise some profiles of adult educators working in practice, which means that they are not eligible to attend co-financed programs of professional development organised by the state. Furthermore, the state also left out a big part of AE filed that is not covered by the state notion of ‘public interest’, such as areas of AE in companies (e.g. human resources departments), AE in non-governmental organisations etc. (Lattke and Nuissl 2008, 11-12).

For the strengthening of professionalism in AE, various organisations, such as universities associations and societies, are also responsible (Egetenmeyer et al. 2019; Schwarz and Mikulec 2020). In Slovenia, there is no single umbrella organisation for AE but a variety of associations can be found, serving different objectives and needs of its members and performing their activities in accordance with their own vision and mission. There are several higher education institutions that offer AE study programs and subjects, as well as programs of pedagogical-andragogical education, which equip students with AE competencies and in this way enable the development of professionalism through formal

educational pathways. However, AE study programmes are not compulsory to enter the job market (Lattke and Nuissl 2008, 12). In addition, SIAE is the main institution responsible for developing systems of further non-formal education and training of adult educators for their different roles in the field of AE. Furthermore, due to the complexity of the AE field, its segregation, a trend common in western societies (Rubenson 2010), is also taking place in Slovenia, which is reflected, among others, through the cooperation of interest groups and the formation of various associations (ZLUS, ZiSS, DOIO, SUTŽO, ADS). These try to assert their interests at the national level, while their influence, which positively promotes professionalism in AE as well, extends to various spheres of AE, including those areas that are not regulated by the state. The latter can be illustrated with the examples of ZLUS and ZiSS. ZLUS with the project 'Step' (KORAK) is targeting (private) companies and tries to become an «extended hand of human resources» in these companies (Interviewee D- ZLUS), while ZiSS, with its attitude towards quality and high standards based on professionalism of adult educators, sets an example to associations and non-governmental organisations with which it cooperates (Interviewee D-ZiSS). Overall, variety of organisations creates many opportunities for the professional development of adult educators, but different interest groups gathered in associations can find themselves also in conflict when pursuing their interests at the national level, lacking common and shared vision of AE.

At the individual level, adult educators are responsible for achieving professionalism, taking care of their professional development (Bierema 2011; Jütte et al. 2011). We elaborated that adult educators in Slovenia can develop their professional competence in many ways, such as by participating in formal and non-formal educational programmes aimed at their professional development, by attending educational events, by self-educating themselves, by learning from work experience and from others (colleagues, experts, participants), by participating in mobility programmes, etc. Furthermore, adult educators in Slovenia pointed out that there are enough opportunities for their professional development and that these depend on their motivation and the incentives of the employer, while those adult educators who are recognised as professionals by legislation also receive additional incentives from the state level. However, we also showed that career paths of adult educators are very diverse – some hold master's degree in AE, while others gained AE knowledge in very short trainings inside their organisations, although they could strengthen their AE knowledge in non-formal educational programmes that are specially developed for different roles adult educators perform by SIAE – and that they differ between personnel who are employed in the same types of organisations or have the same educational background. Moreover, we emphasised that the extent to which adult educators will focus on their professional development depends on their personal characteristics, interests, needs, self-initiative and the circumstances (context) in which they find themselves; special attention is paid to professional development by those adult educators who are primarily engaged in the field of AE, and less by those for whom AE is an additional or complementary field (Lattke and Nuissl

2008, 13). Thus, diverse education background, different forms of employment and a wide range of adult educator's work tasks also cause difficulties in forming their firm professional identity and consequently, as we showed, adult educators rather develop coexistence of different professional identities (Bron and Jarvis 2008, 40; Bierema 2011, 28).

In conclusion, the case of professionalisation of AE in Slovenia shows that the state has implemented some unique solutions through regulations regarding the professionalisation of AE and in this sense Slovenia differs from other European countries, where the field of AE is much less regulated and the responsibility for achieving professionalism is left to the organisations and individuals (workforce) (Jütte and Lattke 2014). Furthermore, Slovenian case also indicates that professionalism is easier to achieve in the areas of AE regulated by the state – as in these the importance of the professional competence of adult educators is constantly emphasised and the scope of opportunities for professional development is also more visible and accessible –, while areas of AE that are not regulated by the state depend on the value that employers and employees attach to their professional development. Finally, what is also evident from our case is that the state, with its policies and regulations, is not targeting all adult educators equally, but just those professionals working in publicly recognised AE programmes, meaning that many adult educators that work in practice are not being recognised as professionals in the field and lack equal opportunities for their professional development. This is one of the main shortcomings that should be more appropriately addressed in the field of AE in Slovenia in near future.

References

- Adult Education Act*. 2018. <<http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7641>> (2023-03-15).
- ALPINE. 2008. *Adult Learning Professions in Europe. A Study of the Current Situation, Trends and Issues: Final Report*. Zoetermeer: Research voorBeleid.
- Andersson, P., Köpsén, S., Larson, A., and M. Milana. 2013. "Qualification Paths of Adult Educators in Sweden and Denmark." *Studies in Continuing Education* 35 (1): 102-18.
- Bierema, L.L. 2011. "Reflections on the Profession and Professionalization of Adult Education." *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning* 20: 21-36.
- Bowen, G.A. 2009. "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method." *Qualitative Research Journal* 9 (2): 27-40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.
- Breitschwerdt, L., Lechner, R., and R. Egetenmeyer. 2019. "The 'New Professionalism' in Adult and Continuing Education – A Multi-level Perspective." *Adult Education and Development* 86: 88-95. <https://www.dvvinational.de/fileadmin/files/Inhalte_Bilder_und_Dokumente/Microsite_AED/Ausgabe_86/DVV-AED-EN-86.pdf> (2023-03-15).
- Bron, A., and P. Jarvis. 2008. "Identities of Adult Educators: Changes in Professionalism." In *Qualifying Adult Learning Professionals in Europe*, edited by E. Nuissl, and S. Lattke, 33-44. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag GmbH & Co.
- Council of the European Union. 2011. "Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning." *OJ No. C 372/1, 20/12/2011*. Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union.

- Desjardins, R. 2017. *Political Economy of Adult Learning Systems. Comparative Study of Strategies, Policies and Constraints*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- DVV International. 2013. *Curriculum GlobALE*. Bonn: DVV International and DIE.
- Egetenmeyer, R., Breitschwerdt, L., and R. Lechner. 2019. "From 'Traditional Professions' to 'New Professionalism': A Multi-level Perspective for Analysing Professionalisation in Adult and Continuing Education." *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 25 (1): 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971418814009>.
- Egetenmeyer, R., and B. K apflinger. 2011. "Professionalization and Quality Management: Struggles, Boundaries and Bridges Between Two Approaches." *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 2 (1): 21-35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela0058>.
- Evans, L. 2008. "Professionalism, Professionality and the Development of Education Professionals." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 56 (1): 20-38.
- Evetts, J. 2006. "Short Note: The Sociology of Professional Groups. New Directions." *Current Sociology* 54 (1): 133-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392106057161>.
- Grotl uschen, A., Stammer, C., and T.J. Sork. 2020. "People Who Teach Regularly: What Do We Know From PIAAC About Their Professionalization?" *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 26 (1): 125-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971419898493>.
- Jarvis, P., and A. Chadwick. 1991. *Training Adult Educators in Western Europe*. London: Routledge.
- J utte, W., Nicoll, K., and H. Salling Olesen. 2011. "Editorial: Professionalisation – the Struggle Within." *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 2 (1): 7-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.relae2>.
- J utte, W., and S. Lattke. 2014. "International and Comparative Perspectives in the Field of Professionalisation." In *Professionalisation of Adult Educators: International and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by S. Lattke, and W. J utte, 7-21. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- K apflinger, B. 2017. "Preface." In *Adult Learning and Education in International Contexts: Future Challenges for Professionalization. Comparative Perspectives from the 2016 W urzburg Winter School*, edited by R. Egetenmeyer, S. Schmidt-Lauff, and V. Boffo, 7-9. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH.
- Knox, A.B., and J.E. Fleming. 2010. "Professionalization of the Field of Adult and Continuing Education." In *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, edited by C.E. Kasworm, A.D. Rose, and J.M. Ross-Gordon, 125-34. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Lattke, S., and E. Nuissl. 2008. "Qualifying Professionals for Adult Learning in Europe." In *Qualifying Adult Learning Professionals in Europe*, edited by E. Nuissl, and S. Lattke, 7-18. Bielefeld: Bertelsmann.
- Lifelong Learning Strategy in Slovenia*. 2007. <https://asemlllhub.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Slovenia_-_Slovenian_lifelong_learning_strategy.pdf> (2023-03-15).
- Merriam, S.B., and R.G. Brockett. 2007. *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education: An Introduction*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Mikulec, B. 2019. "Competences of Adult Education Professionals in the European and Slovene Context." *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 25 (1): 25-44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1477971418805502>.
- Mo ina, T. 2011. "Andrago sko spopolnjevanje in strokovni razvoj izobra evalcev odraslih." *Andrago ska spoznanja/Studies in Adult Education and Learning* 17 (4): 23-43. <https://doi.org/10.4312/as.17.4.23-43>.

- Nuissl, E. 2010. "Profession and Professional Work in Adult Education in Europe." *Studi Sulla Formazione/Open Journal of Education* 12 (1/2): 127-32. https://doi.org/10.13128/Studi_Formaz-8591.
- Resolution on the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the Period 2013-2020*. 2013. <<http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=RESO97>> (2023-03-15).
- Rubenson, K. 2010. "Adult Education Overview." In *International Encyclopedia of Education*, edited by P. Peterson, E. Baker, and B. McGaw, 1-11. Oxford: Elsevier. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01723-1>.
- Rules on the Selection and Co-financing of Continuing Education and Training Programs for Professionals in Education Staff*. 2017. <<http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV13060>> (2023-03-15).
- Saldaña, J. 2009. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London: SAGE.
- Sava, S. 2011. "Towards the Professionalization of Adult Educators." *Andragoške studije/Andragogical Studies* 2: 9-22.
- Schwarz, J., and B. Mikulec. 2020. "The Role of Organisations in the Professionalisation of Adult Educators in Germany and Slovenia." *Andragoške studije/Andragogical Studies* 2: 9-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5937/ANDSTUD2002009S>.
- White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia*. 2011. <<https://pismenost.acs.si/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Bela-knjiga-o-vzgoji-in-izobra%C5%BEevanju-v-RS-2011.pdf>> (2023-03-15).
- Zagir, T., and K.M. Mandel. 2020. "Competences of Adult Learning Facilitators in Europe: Analyses of Five European Research Projects." *Hungarian Educational Research Journal* 10 (2): 1-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1556/063.2020.00016>.

