



WOWIT

**FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL
PROGRAMS FOR
(DIGITALLY) EXCLUDED VULNERABLE TARGET GROUPS**

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FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR (DIGITALLY) EXCLUDED VULNERABLE TARGET GROUPS

EVALUATION CONTEXT GRID

ERASMUS+ NO.: 2021-1-SK01-KA210-ADU-000034089

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1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of the project WOWIT, funded by Erasmus+ (KA210-ADU) is enhancing adult education and improving high quality learning opportunities for adults. By bringing three different partner organizations from different geographical sphere together, a space has been created for the exchange of good practices and experiences in working with different vulnerable target groups. Overall, the participating organizations address with their core activities different target groups. Hence, for the purposes of this publication, following vulnerable target group has been primarily considered: unemployed females / female job seekers.

The evaluation context grid (ECG) encompasses factors that affect participation in educational programs from the viewpoint of the listed vulnerable target groups. The ECG is based on practical experiences gained by the participating organizations and thus proven to have a positive impact on participant's continuation within the started program.

In Slovenia, among the main pillars of work NOVUS focuses on, is adult education and employability. In this context, NOVUS participates in different (inter)national projects that emphasize on different activities, i.e., short term courses (half/one day, multiple days) and long-term courses (multiple weeks). While the later focus on a multiple-stage approach: first, individual meeting in which state-of-the-are and goals are discussed; second, different courses and often alongside supervision as well as reflection of the insights gained, the first immediately indulges into the content and workshop experience.

In Czech Republic, Rovnovazka mainly conducts training, consultancy and mentoring on group and individual level. Mostly complex training and mentoring programs are conducted in scope of EU projects allowing individualized approach and long-term support of the target group members.

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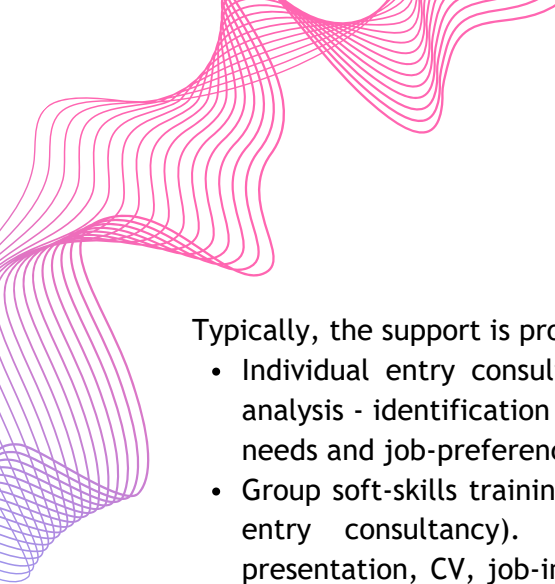
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Typically, the support is provided in this scheme:

- Individual entry consultancy (in the form of structured dialogue) - personal SWOT analysis - identification of one's personal knowledge, skills, and competences, learning needs and job-preferences (2-hours F2F session).
- Group soft-skills trainings / workshops (modules or lessons are chosen on the basis of entry consultancy). Examples of topics: self-esteem, communication, self-presentation, CV, job-interview preparation, financial literacy, work-life, team-roles, stress-release techniques, work-family life balance etc.
- Specific group trainings - i.e., PC courses including Google Apps or social media trainings. Business English trainings.
- Re-training courses - specific hard-skills trainings provided by external certified training organizations chosen for our clients on individual basis (examples: sewing, accountancy, HR, environmental legislation, specific software courses etc.).
- Job - mediation: searching for interesting offers, assistance through job-application process, possibility of provision financial remuneration to employers who employ disadvantaged people or who newly offer flexible jobs (home offices etc.).
- Continual support in the form of individual mentoring and coaching sessions.
- Possible peer-to-peer support via social-network groups.

In Slovakia, FutuReg' mission is to provide programs and activities related to life-long education and non-formal learning for children and women. Trainings can be divided into the following categories: workshops (1-2 maximally 3-day long workshops), courses (duration of 2 weeks), mediation trainings - usually group levels at school, peer mediation with one class. The majority of activities are provided in groups, but there are some which are focusing on individual work. The method of the work is informal education, interactive learning, simulation, dialogs, drama therapy. The FUTUREG team strongly believes in the power of learning by playing, non-formal education and team-work.

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2. VULNERABLE TARGET GROUPS

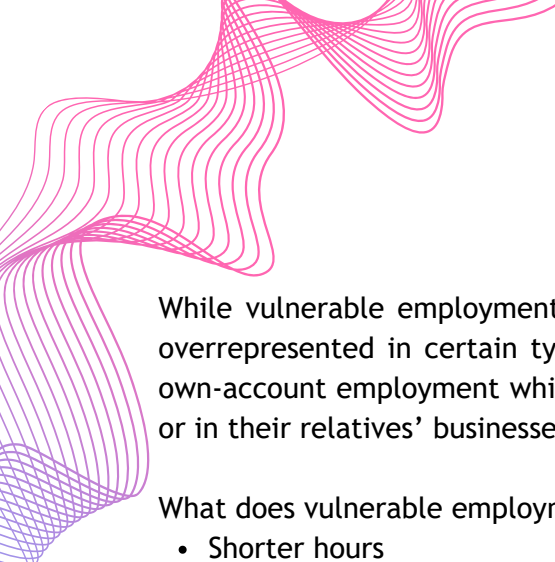
Unemployment, especially long-term unemployment has a negative impact on everyone: the educated and the less educated, the healthy and the sick, the old and the young. When a person is excluded from the labor market for a long time and at the same time from the social environment, a person's self-image begins to crumble. Self-confidence is disappearing. Man does not recognize the potential in himself. He is becoming more and more confused and less and less functional, making it increasingly difficult for him to integrate back into society. It is not uncommon for mental and physical problems to occur (Pirnat, 2018).

When someone is employed or actively looking for employment, they are said to be participating in the labor force. The current global labor force participation rate for women is just under 47%. For men, it's 72%. That's a difference of 25 percentage points (ILO, 2021).

The following table represents the global labor force participation in the WOWIT project countries.

	SLOVAKIA	CZECH REPUBLIC	SLOVENIA
WOMEN IN LABOR FORCE	54,7 %	51,7 %	53,8 %
MAN IN LABOR FORCE	66,4 %	68,1 %	62,2 %
GENDER GAP	11,7	16,4	8,4

Source: ILO 2022, modified



While vulnerable employment is widespread for both women and men, women tend to be overrepresented in certain types of vulnerable jobs: men are more likely to be working in own-account employment while women are more likely to be helping out in their households or in their relatives' businesses.

What does vulnerable employment look like? (ILO, 2021)

- Shorter hours
- Women in paid jobs are more likely to work fewer hours than men, but usually not by choice.
- Unpaid work
- On average, women spend more than three times more hours on unpaid household and care work than men. This invisible labor often eats into the time they could spend doing paid work. Overall, when both paid and unpaid work are taken in account, women frequently work longer hours than men.
- Contributing family workers
- Nearly 16% of employed women - compared with 6% of employed men - are contributing family workers (i.e., self-employed in a business owned or operated by a relative). Such workers are likely to be poorly paid (if at all) and living in poverty, with no employment contract and little access to social protection. This gap is even more pronounced in developing countries.
- Maternity coverage
- Most countries provide some measure of maternity protection for employed women. Despite this, nearly 60% of women do not have a statutory right to maternity leave, and almost 66% are not legally entitled to paid maternity leave. This lack of coverage has a major impact on women's ability to hold down steady jobs and can stop them from returning to work after childbirth.
- Social protection access

Women often do not have access to social protection. When they do, their entitlements are lower, due to low pay, shorter contribution periods and higher incidences of informal work. This problem is particularly acute when it comes to pensions: on average, the proportion of women above retirement age receiving a pension is nearly 11 percentage points lower than that of men.

In countries at all levels of economic development, a woman's personal preference is the key factor in determining whether she will seek out and engage in paid work. However, this preference is heavily influenced by socio-economic constraints and pressure to conform to traditional gender roles.

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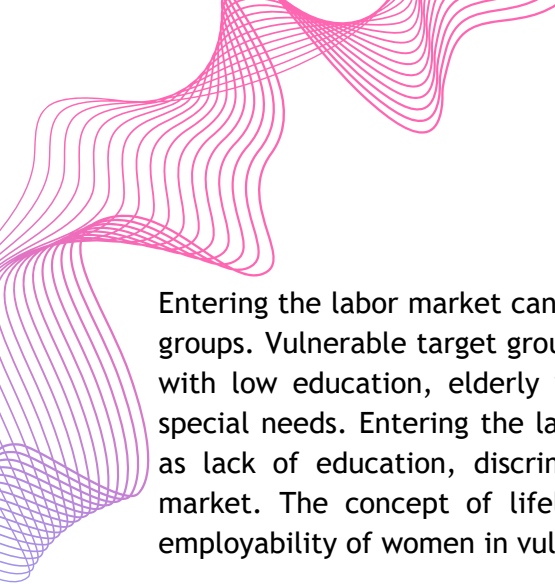
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Entering the labor market can be a big challenge for women who belong to vulnerable target groups. Vulnerable target groups of women can be women without formal education, women with low education, elderly women, immigrants, disabled women and women with other special needs. Entering the labor market for such women can present many obstacles, such as lack of education, discrimination, inequality in employment and access to the labor market. The concept of lifelong learning can help to remove barriers and increase the employability of women in vulnerable target groups.

Lifelong learning is a concept that includes the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities throughout life, regardless of age and education. The concept of lifelong learning is based on the idea that learning is a continuous process that must adapt to the changing needs and demands of the labor market.

Lifelong learning can help women without formal education acquire basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy. It can also help women with low levels of education acquire the professional knowledge and skills necessary for employment in certain professions. For women who are already employed, lifelong learning can help them acquire new skills and knowledge that are necessary for career advancement.

In addition, lifelong learning can help eliminate discrimination and inequality in employment. Women from vulnerable target groups are often discriminated against and have less access to the labor market. Lifelong learning can help level the playing field and ensure equal opportunities for all women. With the help of lifelong learning, women can acquire new knowledge and skills that make them more employable and competitive on the labor market.

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3. CONCEPT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning is a form of self-initiated education that is focused on personal development. While there is no standardized definition of lifelong learning, it has generally been taken to refer to the learning that occurs outside of a formal educational institute, such as a school, university or corporate training. Lifelong learning does not necessarily have to restrict itself to informal learning, however. It is best described as being voluntary with the purpose of achieving personal fulfillment. The means to achieve this could result in informal or formal education (Jarvis, 2009).

Lifelong learning is a continuous engagement in acquiring and applying knowledge and skills in the context of self-directed problems and should be grounded in descriptive and prescriptive goals such as (Fischer, 2000):

- learning should take place in the context of authentic, complex problems (because learners will refuse to quietly listen to someone else's answers to someone else's questions);
- learning should be embedded in the pursuit of intrinsically rewarding activities;
- learning-on-demand needs to be supported because change is inevitable, complete coverage is impossible, and obsolescence is unavoidable;
- organizational and collaborative learning must be supported because the individual human mind is limited; and
- skills and processes that support learning as a lifetime habit must be developed.

The concept of adult women's education of vulnerable target groups and employment is in practice aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for learning and employment for women who face social and economic vulnerability (... or better, social and economic inequality). It emphasizes the importance of adult women's education as a key element in their integration into the labor market.

The goal of educating adult women of vulnerable target groups and employment, who are exposed to social and economic vulnerability, appropriate education and training that will help them acquire new skills and improve employment opportunities. This can include learning new digital skills that are crucial in the modern economy, as well as developing other skills such as communication, leadership and planning, and later successful integration into the labor market. Employment can provide women with independence and financial stability, which can help solve social and economic problems (taking into account the various factors that can affect their integration into the labor market, such as access to technology, language barriers, time constraints, financial constraints and discrimination).

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3.1. LIFELONG LEARNING IN SLOVAKIA

Education and vocational training of adults in the context of the Slovak education system is defined as further education. Further education is a part of lifelong learning and follows school education. It is provided mainly by further education institutions. The goal of further education is to supplement, update, extend or improve qualification obtained in school education; to obtain partial or full qualification, satisfy interests and acquire competence to integrate into the civil society (Eurydice, 2021).

In April 2007 the government approved the Strategy of Lifelong Learning (LFL) and Lifelong Guidance (LFG) by the Decree No. 382/2007. It contains a proposal of the system, aims, analysis and financing lifelong learning and lifelong guidance, a proposal of the system of education quality control and system of recognition of the non-formal education and informal learning results. The strategy has been revised in 2015 and 2020. In 2021, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved the new Strategy for Lifelong Education and Counseling for the years 2021-2030 (MineduSK, 2021). The main goal of the Lifelong Education and Counseling Strategy for the years 2021-2030 is to ensure that every citizen has lifelong access to opportunities to learn, to develop their skills and competences throughout their lives at every stage of life and with regard to individual needs and circumstances so that everyone can realize their potential in personal, professional and civic life.

A significant part of adult education takes place at the workplace and is mainly paid for by the employer (with the possibility of obtaining financial support, for example from European sources). Larger companies and enterprises often have their own lecturers and training staff. Smaller companies often decide to implement training in the form of employee participation in training at an educational institution.

Examples:

- The academy of education a non-state educational institution that has a network of more than thirty centers located throughout the country, also operates in the field of adult education and professional training.
- University of third age at the Comenius University in Bratislava was founded in the spring of 1990 and started its activities in October of that year for the first 235 applicants. It is an interest-based, non-qualifying study. Their students attend lectures of selected fields of study. Upon completion of the studies, the graduates are ceremoniously presented with a certificate of interest-based study at University of Third Age.

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3.2. LIFELONG LEARNING IN CZECH REPUBLIC

In the Czech Republic, analyses and studies related to lifelong learning are most commonly conducted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The Ministry defines lifelong learning as a continuous process spanning the entire lifespan of an individual, which includes any and all forms of learning, formal or informal, intentional or unintentional.

Two strategic documents, both published by the Ministry, stand out when it comes to lifelong learning. The first is the so-called "Czech White Paper" (MŠMT, Národní program rozvoje vzdělávání v ČR, 2001), published in 2001. The official name of this document is 'National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic', and its contents cover a broad range of topics and challenges the Ministry intends to focus on. Among these is the integration of lifelong learning and adult education into the country's education system as a whole or an effort to speed up the development of this field overall. Furthermore, the document includes an analysis of the most prevalent issues and hurdles preventing adults from participating in continuing education, an assessment of quality control within the field, and a list of recommendations to hopefully rectify the situation. The second key document is the 2007 Strategy of Lifelong Learning in the Czech Republic (MŠMT, Strategie celoživotního učení ČR, 2007). This 82-page text is entirely dedicated to lifelong learning and opens with an analysis of existing strategies on both the national and European level.

Next, the document presents a number of strategic goals:

- To create an environment in which lifelong learning can be recognized for its importance
- To develop a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning results
- To promote availability and equality in educational opportunities
- To promote the field of andragogy (education of adults) and recognize that adults need different education strategies than children
- To develop and promote functional literacy and other key competences among adults and seniors alike

Although other documents have been published by the Ministry in 2007, including a memorandum of its cooperation with the Slovak Republic in the field of lifelong learning, this strategic document remains the most recent of its kind.

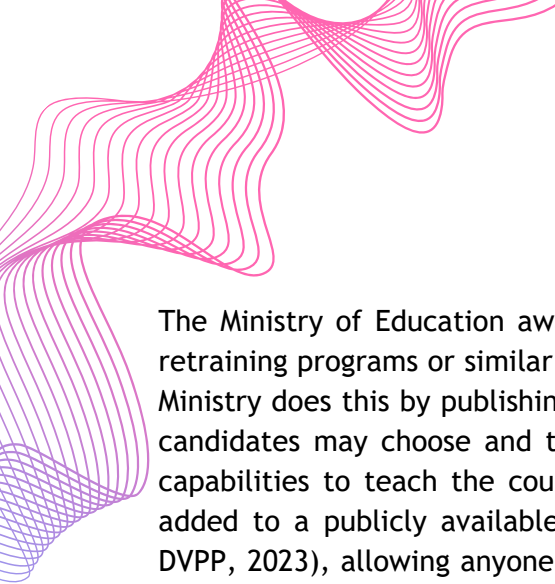
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The Ministry of Education awards accreditation to learning institutions which seek to offer retraining programs or similar courses for adults resulting in certificates or qualification. The Ministry does this by publishing lists of approved study programs and courses from which the candidates may choose and then reviewing applications from each institution to assess its capabilities to teach the course in question. Should an institution be approved, it will be added to a publicly available list (MŠMT, DATABÁZE UDĚLENÝCH AKREDITACÍ V SYSTÉMU DVPP, 2023), allowing anyone to verify its status. The Ministry provides detailed instructions for filling out applications and handing them in, though the review process can take some time.

When it comes to non-formal education, however, anyone may offer courses to the general public. There are a number of organizations which join individual groups and institutions in their efforts to educate adults, such as The Association of Czech Experts in Andragogy (Asociace odborníků v andragogice, z. s. - (AOACR, 2023)).

Another popular concept in the Czech Republic are so-called Universities of the Third Age (univerzity třetího věku), which offer education to retired citizens at a reduced financial cost. These programs are commonly taught at regular public universities throughout the country, with the most famous being Charles University in Prague. Third Age Universities typically charge a small fee (500 CZK / 21 €) per semester and rely on government grants for the rest of their funding. At the end of each Third Age University course, the students receive a certificate. No degrees (such as BA or MA) are awarded in this type of study program, though the aforementioned certificates are required by Czech law. The rest of the law, however (§ 60, 111/1998 Sb.), places most of the decision-making into the hands of the universities and gives them a broad range of options for running Third Age University programs, as long as all participants are informed of all relevant rules and requirements before signing up.

While the Ministry of Education has set promoting lifelong learning as one of its goals, events related to the field remain sporadic and in the hands of private organizations. Some groups offer public lectures or workshops on a variety of topics within lifelong learning, while universities host meet-ups and other events for andragogy students, but any larger events are a rarity. The Czech Labor Office occasionally hosts events in select regions of the country, such as the Adult Education Week (Týden vzdělávání dospělých) in the Hradec Králové Region.

Lifelong learning is likewise a valuable tool in reducing unemployment, according to the studies conducted by the Ministry. Studies published by the Czech Statistical Office seem to support this claim, as adults without tertiary or secondary education tend to be the most frequent among the unemployed. In the category of the 27.9 thousand unemployed 35-44-year-olds, for example, only 2.9 thousand possess a tertiary education degree, whereas 17.1 thousand have only completed high school and 7.8 thousand left the education system after elementary school. This trend continues into the older age categories also, and makes lifelong learning among adults a key component of reducing unemployment.

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3.3. LIFELONG LEARNING IN SLOVENIA

The development of lifelong education and learning in Slovenia began before World War II. Pedagogical theorists who developed the concept understood education as part of a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout adult life (Ozvald, 1927). They argued that initial education should develop the capacity for the subsequent autodidactic learning, and that mutual learning between an individual and the environment takes place throughout one's life.

The first comprehensive policy document on education in independent Slovenia, the 1995 White Paper on Education, recognized the need to improve the quality and the diversity of adult education as well as access to relevant programs. The document also pointed to educational priorities for special groups of adults, such as the unskilled, unemployed, illiterate, migrants, those with other nationalities, women and persons with special needs. It was foreseen that adult education should not only have a compensational role but should also serve as a generator of innovation and development. Overall, adult education and learning was defined as an integral part of a lifelong (permanent) learning strategy.

Lifelong learning is the guiding principle of contemporary education and learning in Slovenia. It is the subject of a strategic document adopted in 2007 by the Minister of Education and Sport who had appointed a special expert group in 2005 (Jelenc, Komljanc, Žakelj, & Barle, 2007). This expert group prepared the Lifelong Learning Strategy, which was one of the outcomes of the implementation of the EU program Education and Training 2010. The Lifelong Learning Strategy incorporates all European definitions and objectives and connects them to the specific conditions in Slovenia. The document defines lifelong learning as »an activity and process which involves all forms of learning, either formal or non-formal and informal as well as incidental and informal learning«. Additionally, the Lifelong Learning Strategy points out that such learning »takes place in different learning circumstances, from birth to early childhood to adulthood and to the end of life, aiming at improving individual's knowledge and skills«. Furthermore, lifelong learning »also results in acquiring interests, character features, values, attitude to oneself and to others as well as other personal characteristics«.

Learning and education can be divided into formal and non-formal categories. Formal education provides us with a publicly recognized qualification, professional certification, or official document. Non-formal education refers to organized learning activities that do not lead to formal qualifications but focus on acquiring knowledge and skills. It takes place outside traditional educational institutions and often addresses specific purposes or needs.

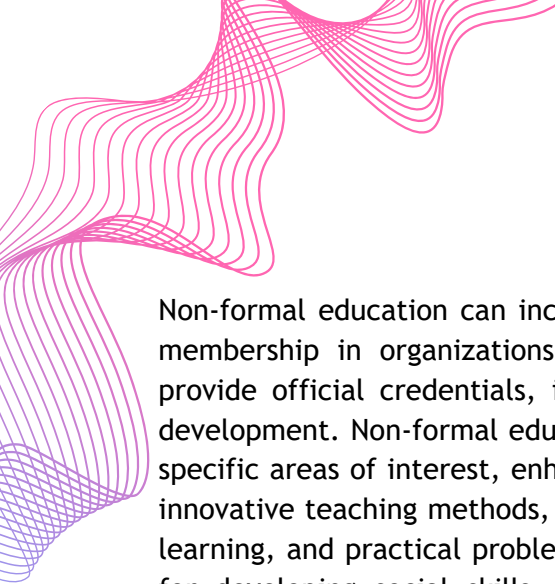
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Non-formal education can include various courses, workshops, seminars, training programs, membership in organizations or groups, volunteering, or internships. While it does not provide official credentials, it offers valuable opportunities for personal and professional development. Non-formal education is flexible and adaptable, allowing individuals to pursue specific areas of interest, enhance existing skills, or acquire new ones. It often incorporates innovative teaching methods, experiential learning, small group collaborations, peer-to-peer learning, and practical problem-solving. Non-formal education can be particularly beneficial for developing social skills, building self-confidence, fostering teamwork, and exploring alternative career paths.

While formal education is recognized by society and often required for certain professions, non-formal education complements it by offering continuous learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom setting. It allows individuals to broaden their knowledge, stay updated with emerging trends, and explore personal interests and passions.

Non-formal education in Slovenia is provided by various entities, including:

- **Non-profit organizations:** Many non-profit organizations in Slovenia offer non-formal education programs and activities. These organizations focus on specific areas such as youth development, adult education, cultural activities, sports, environmental awareness, and community engagement.
- **Companies and businesses:** Some companies and businesses organize non-formal education initiatives for their employees or the general public. These can include workshops, training sessions, skill development programs, and seminars related to their respective fields.
- **Local communities:** Local communities, including municipalities and community centers, often organize non-formal education activities. These can range from language courses, arts and crafts workshops, fitness classes, cultural events, and recreational programs.
- **Government institutions:** Various government institutions in Slovenia, such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, may provide non-formal education opportunities. These can include initiatives for adult education, vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and lifelong learning programs.
- **Universities and educational institutions:** Universities and educational institutions may offer non-formal education programs as part of their continuing education departments. These programs are designed to cater to the specific needs of professionals, individuals seeking personal enrichment, or those interested in acquiring new skills or knowledge outside of traditional academic degrees.

Among more prominent providers of lifelong learning programs in Slovenia are Adult Education centers ("People's University", Ljudska univerza-LU) and University of third age (Univerza za tretje življenjsko obdobje) Both are spread throughout the country and offer a wide range of educational programs and activities for people of all ages and backgrounds. While LUs are founded and funded by municipalities (as public offices), Universities of third age are established by NGOs, mostly in the legal form of associations.

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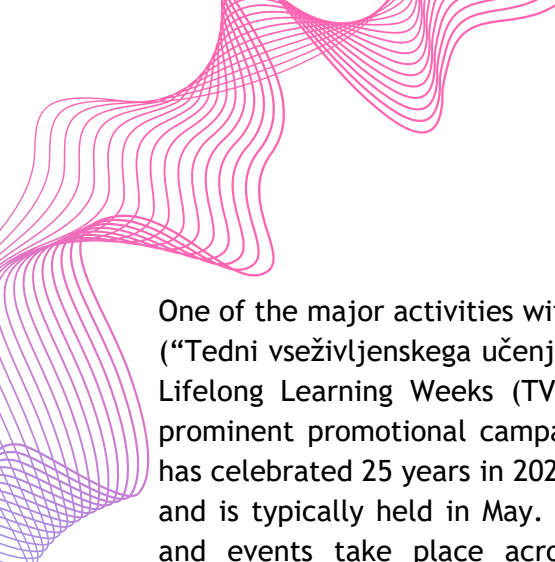
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One of the major activities within lifelong learning in Slovenia are the lifelong learning weeks (“Tedni vseživljenskega učenja”) coordinated by the Slovenian institute for Adult Education. Lifelong Learning Weeks (TVU) is an all-Slovene event and at the same time the most prominent promotional campaign in the field of education and learning in Slovenia, which has celebrated 25 years in 2021. It is a part of the European Lifelong Learning Week initiative and is typically held in May. During the Lifelong Learning Week, a wide range of activities and events take place across Slovenia, organized by various educational institutions, organizations, and communities.

These activities are designed to cater to diverse interests and age groups:

- **Workshops and Training Sessions:** These can cover a broad spectrum of topics such as digital skills, entrepreneurship, languages, arts and crafts, health and well-being, sustainable development, and more. The workshops provide practical learning experiences and hands-on training.
- **Seminars and Conferences:** Experts and professionals in different fields often conduct seminars and conferences to share their knowledge and insights. These events can offer valuable information, discussions, and networking opportunities.
- **Exhibitions and Fairs:** Exhibitions and fairs related to education, career development, and lifelong learning are organized during this week. They provide a platform for educational institutions, organizations, and businesses to showcase their programs, services, and products.
- **Open Days and Guided Tours:** Educational institutions, museums, libraries, and other organizations open their doors to the public, allowing them to explore the facilities, participate in interactive demonstrations, and learn about educational opportunities available.
- **Cultural and Artistic Events:** Cultural performances, concerts, art exhibitions, and theater plays may be organized to promote creativity, cultural awareness, and artistic expression as part of the learning experience.
- **Information Campaigns:** Various media channels, including television, radio, newspapers, and online platforms, play a crucial role in promoting the Lifelong Learning Week. They provide information about the events, success stories, interviews, and other relevant content.

In the year 2022, the event hosted nearly 7.600 events throughout Slovenia that were conducted by more than 1.500 organizations (ACS, 2022).

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4. FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNING

The upcoming chapter encompasses factors influencing learning as well as characteristics of adult learners from theoretical approach.

Adult learning requires building on prior learning, using methods that treat learners with respect, and recognizing that people have different learning styles and have a variety of responsibilities and time commitments. Effective educators also recognize that adults often learn collectively from each other. The optimal role of the adult learner in the learning situation is that of a self-directed, self-motivated manager of personal learning who collaborates as an active participant in the learning process and who takes responsibility for learning (Collins, 2004).

Compared to school-age children, the major differences in adult learners are in the degree of motivation, the amount of previous experience, the level of engagement in the learning process, and how the learning is applied. Each adult brings to the learning experience preconceived thoughts and feelings that will be influenced by each of these factors. Assessing the level of these traits and the readiness to learn should be included each time a teaching experience is being planned.

Six characteristics of adult learners were identified by Knowles (cited in (Russell, 2006; Lieb, 1991):

- Autonomous and self-directed. They need to be free to direct themselves. Their teachers must actively involve adult participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, they must get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership. They have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. Finally, they must show participants how the class will help them reach their goals (e.g., via a personal goal's sheet).
- Adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. To help them do so, they should draw out participants' experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic. They must relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning.
- Goal oriented. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain. They, therefore, appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Instructors must show participants how this class will help them attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course.

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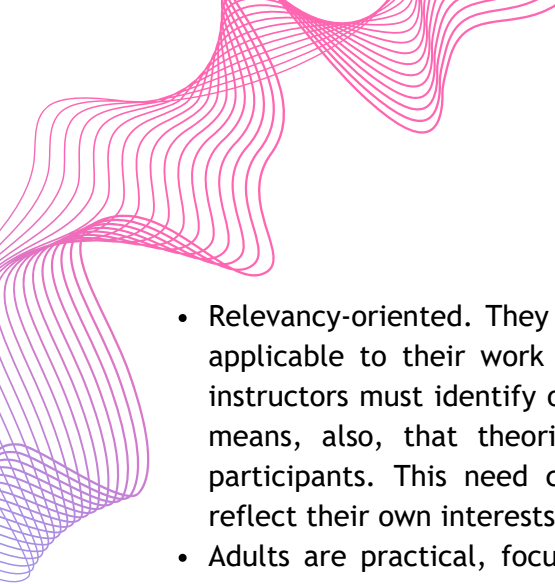
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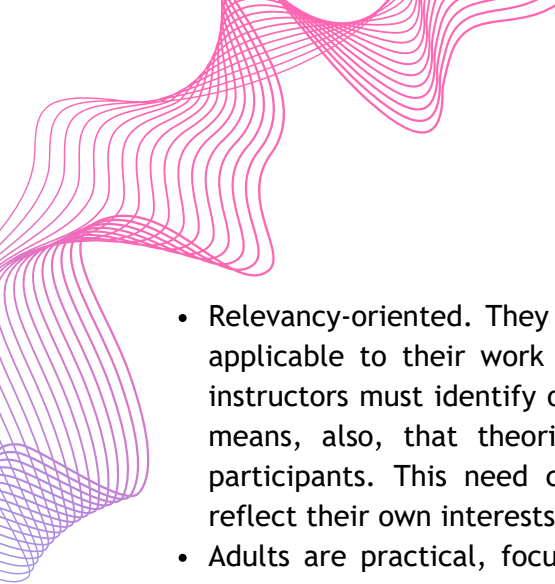
- Relevancy-oriented. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Therefore, instructors must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. This means, also, that theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to participants. This need can be fulfilled by letting participants choose projects that reflect their own interests.
- Adults are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Instructors must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.
- Adults need to be shown respect. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.

Knowles advocated creating a climate of mutual trust and clarification of mutual expectations with the learner, i.e., a cooperative learning climate is fostered.

Unlike children and teenagers, adults have many responsibilities that they must balance against the demands of learning. Because of these responsibilities, adults have barriers against participating in learning. Some of these barriers include lack of time, money, confidence, or interest, lack of information about opportunities to learn, scheduling problems, "red tape," and problems with child care and transportation (Lieb, 1991).

In a broad sense, factors influencing learning can be divided in two main pillars: internal (in the learner him/herself) and external (in the environment) (Ažman & Pečjak, 2008). Internal factors can be further more differentiated among physiological (i.e., physical, mental and sensory condition) and psychological (i.e., capabilities, learning styles, motivation, emotions, attitudes) while external can be further divided into physical (e.g., learning atmosphere, climate, noise, light, temperature) and social (e.g., family, peers, co-workers, friends, etc.). Among external we can also distinguish the nature of learning activity as well as method of teaching and effectiveness of teaching. Besides, prior knowledge and maturity influence learning (e.g., ability to read if speech is not developed or knowledge of letters as precondition for learning how to write).

This analysis focuses on the following elements that should be considered to ensure that participants learn more in depth: motivation, reinforcement, retention, transference, learning styles and creative climate.



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- Relevancy-oriented. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Therefore, instructors must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. This means, also, that theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to participants. This need can be fulfilled by letting participants choose projects that reflect their own interests.
- Adults are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Instructors must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.
- Adults need to be shown respect. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.

Knowles advocated creating a climate of mutual trust and clarification of mutual expectations with the learner, i.e., a cooperative learning climate is fostered.

Unlike children and teenagers, adults have many responsibilities that they must balance against the demands of learning. Because of these responsibilities, adults have barriers against participating in learning. Some of these barriers include lack of time, money, confidence, or interest, lack of information about opportunities to learn, scheduling problems, "red tape," and problems with child care and transportation (Lieb, 1991).

In a broad sense, factors influencing learning can be divided in two main pillars: internal (in the learner him/herself) and external (in the environment) (Ažman & Pečjak, 2008). Internal factors can be further more differentiated among physiological (i.e., physical, mental and sensory condition) and psychological (i.e., capabilities, learning styles, motivation, emotions, attitudes) while external can be further divided into physical (e.g., learning atmosphere, climate, noise, light, temperature) and social (e.g., family, peers, co-workers, friends, etc.). Among external we can also distinguish the nature of learning activity as well as method of teaching and effectiveness of teaching. Besides, prior knowledge and maturity influence learning (e.g., ability to read if speech is not developed or knowledge of letters as precondition for learning how to write).

This analysis focuses on the following elements that should be considered to ensure that participants learn more in depth: motivation, reinforcement, retention, transference, learning styles and creative climate.



4.1 MOTIVATION

Motivation is commonly defined as what explains why people initiate, continue or terminate a certain behavior at a particular time (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). Adults learn best when convinced of the need for knowing the information. Often a life experience or situation stimulates the motivation to learn.

Sources of motivation comprise (Russell, 2006):

- social relationships: to make new friends; to meet a need for associations and friendships
- external expectations: to comply with instructions from someone else; to fulfill recommendations of someone with formal authority
- social welfare: to improve ability to serve mankind; to improve ability to participate in community work
- personal advancement: to achieve higher status in a job; secure professional advancement
- escape/stimulation: to relieve boredom; provide a break in the routine of home or work
- cognitive Interest: to learn for the sake of learning; to satisfy an inquiring mind

Researchers have proposed different ways of thinking about motivation, including looking at whether motivation arises from outside (extrinsic) or inside (intrinsic) an individual (Legault, 2020). Intrinsic motivation refers to engagement in behavior that is inherently satisfying or enjoyable. Intrinsically motivated action is not contingent upon any outcome separable from the behavior itself. Rather, the means and end are one and the same. Conversely, extrinsic motivation refers to performance of behavior that is fundamentally contingent upon the attainment of an outcome that is separable from the action itself. It is performed in order to attain some other outcome. These can be either rewarding (money, good grades, fame, etc.) or punishing (threat of punishment, pain, etc.). Intrinsic motivation tends to be more long-lasting, self-sustaining, and satisfying than extrinsic motivation. For this reason, many efforts in education aim to modify intrinsic motivation with the goal of promoting participant learning performance and creativity. Extrinsic motivation fueling engagement in the activity soon ceases once external rewards are removed. It has also been suggested that extrinsic motivators may diminish in value over time, making it more difficult to motivate the same person in the future (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Motivation affects learning in different ways, e.g., time of active studying (duration, frequency); forms of learning (learning strategies), functional mood (focused/non-focused). As a general rule, teachers need to use as much of the intrinsic suggestions as possible while recognizing that not all participants will be appropriately motivated by them. The extrinsic suggestions will work, but it must be remembered that they do so only as long as the participant is under the influence of the external factors. When outside of that influence, unless the desired goals and behaviors have been internalized, the learner will cease the desired behavior and operate according to his or her internal standards or to other external factors (Huitt, 2001).

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Intrinsic

Explain or show why learning a particular content or skill is important

Allow participants some opportunities to select learning goals and tasks

Create and/or maintain curiosity

Provide a variety of activities and sensory stimulations

Provide games and simulations

Set goals for learning

Relate learning to participant needs

Help participant develop plan of action



Extrinsic

Provide clear expectations

Give corrective feedback

Provide valuable rewards for simple learning tasks

Make rewards available

Allow opportunities for participants to observe more correct exemplars

Allow for opportunities to engage in social learning activities

Provide for scaffolding of corrective feedback



Source: (Huitt, 2001)



4.2 REINFORCEMENT

Reinforcement is a very necessary part of the teaching/learning process; through it, instructors encourage correct modes of behavior and performance. Two types of reinforcement can be distinguished, namely positive and negative reinforcement (Lieb, 1991).

Positive reinforcement is normally used by instructors who are teaching participants new skills. As the name implies, positive reinforcement is "good" and reinforces "good" (or positive) behavior. Negative reinforcement is the contingent removal of a noxious stimulus that tends to increase the behavior. The contingent presentation of a noxious stimulus that tends to decrease a behavior is called punishment. Reinforcing a behavior will never lead to extinction of that behavior by definition.

When instructors are trying to change behaviors (old practices), they should apply both positive and negative reinforcement.

Reinforcement should be part of the teaching-learning process to ensure correct behavior. Instructors need to use it on a frequent and regular basis early in the process to help the participants retain what they have learned. Then, they should use reinforcement only to maintain consistent, positive behavior.

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4.3 RETENTION

Participants must retain information from classes in order to benefit from the learning. The instructors' jobs are not finished until they have assisted the learner in retaining the information. In order for participants to retain the information taught, they must see a meaning or purpose for that information. They must also understand and be able to interpret and apply the information. This understanding includes their ability to assign the correct degree of importance to the material.

Retention by the participants is directly affected by their amount of practice during the learning. Instructors should emphasize retention and application. After the participants demonstrate correct (desired) performance, they should be urged to practice to maintain the desired performance. Distributed practice is similar in effect to intermittent reinforcement.

4.4 TRANSFERENCE

Transfer of learning is the result of training -- it is the ability to use the information taught in the course but in a new setting. As with reinforcement, there are two types of transfer: positive and negative (Lieb, 1991). Positive transference, like positive reinforcement, occurs when the participants use the behavior taught in the course. Negative transference, again like negative reinforcement, occurs when the participants do not do what they are told not to do. This results in a positive (desired) outcome.

Transference is most likely to occur in the following situations:

- Association -- participants can associate the new information with something that they already know.
- Similarity -- the information is similar to material that participants already know; that is, it revisits a logical framework or pattern.
- Degree of original learning -- participant's degree of original learning was high.
- Critical attribute element -- the information learned contains elements that are extremely beneficial (critical) on the job.

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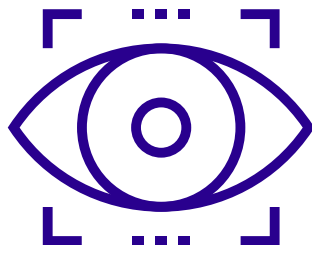
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4.5 LEARNING STYLES

Several approaches to learning styles have been proposed, one being based on the senses that are involved in processing information. An assessment of the learning style is a fundamental step prior to beginning any educational activity (Russell, 2006). Determining the learning style will help identify the preferred conditions under which instruction is likely to be most effective. The most frequently used method of delineating learning styles is in describing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. Below table outlines the characteristics and suggested teaching strategies for these types of adult learners.



VISUAL

Characteristics

- Prefers written instructions rather than verbal instructions.
- Prefers to have photographs and illustrations to view when receiving written or visual instructions.
- Prefers a time-line, calendar, or some other similar diagram to remember the sequence of events.
- Observes all the physical elements in the learning environment.
- Carefully organizes their learning materials.
- Remembers and understands through the use of diagrams, charts, and maps.
- Studies materials by reading notes and organizing it in outline form.

Suggested Teaching Strategies

- Provide lots of interesting visual material in a variety of formats.
- Make sure visual presentations are well organized.
- Make handouts and all other written work as visually appealing as possible, and easy to read.
- Make full use of a variety of technologies: computers, overhead projection, video camera, live video feeds/close circuit TV, photography, Internet, etc.



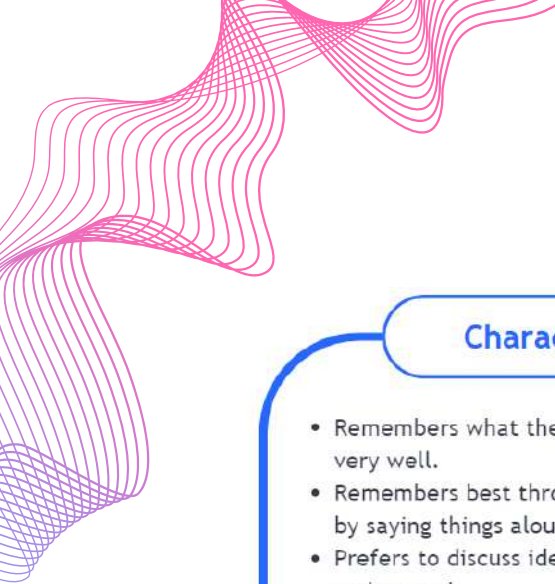
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Characteristics

- Remembers what they say, and what others say very well.
- Remembers best through verbal repetition and by saying things aloud.
- Prefers to discuss ideas they do not immediately understand.
- Remembers verbal instructions well.
- Finds it difficult to work quietly for long periods of time.
- Easily distracted by noise, but also easily distracted by silence.
- Verbally expresses interest and enthusiasm.
- Enjoys group discussions.

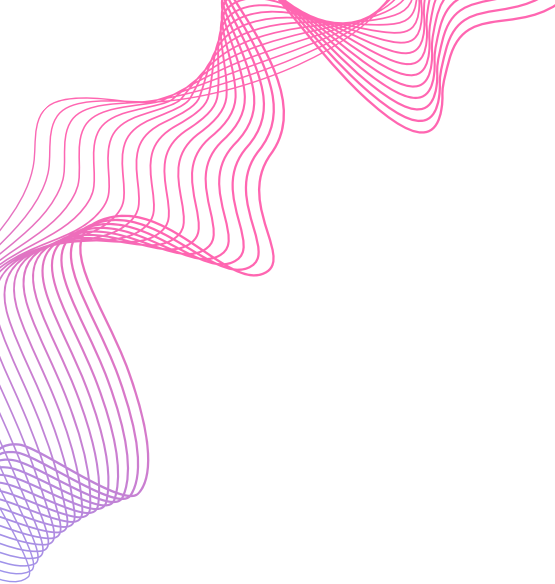


AUDITORY

Suggested Teaching Strategies

- Rephrase points and questions in several different ways to communicate intended message.
- Vary speed, volume, and pitch, as appropriate, to help create interesting aural textures.
- Write down key points or key words before providing verbal instructions to help avoid confusion due to pronunciation.
- Ensure auditory learners are in a position to hear well (be sure hearing aids are inserted and functional).
- Incorporate multimedia applications utilizing sounds, music, or speech (use tape recorders, computer sound cards/recording applications, musical instruments, etc.).





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Characteristics

- Remembers best through getting physically involved in whatever is being learned.
- Enjoys the opportunity to build and/or physically handle learning materials.
- Will take notes to keep busy but will not often use them.
- Enjoys using computers.
- Physically expresses interest and enthusiasm by getting active and excited.
- Has trouble staying still or in one place for a long time.
- Enjoys hands-on activities.
- Tends to want to fiddle with small objects while listening or working.
- Remembers what they do, what they experience with their hands or bodies (movement and touch).
- Enjoys using tools or lessons which involve active/practical participation.
- Can remember how to do things after doing them once (motor memory).
- Has good motor coordination.



KINESTHETIC

Suggested Teaching Strategies

- Permit frequent breaks in teaching session to allow learner to move around room.
- Encourage learner to write down their own notes.
- Encourage learner to stand or move while reciting information or learning new material.
- Incorporate multimedia resources (computer, video camera, overhead transparencies, photography camera, etc.) into programs (teacher presentations and participant presentations).
- Provide lots of tactile-kinesthetic activities in the class.
- Have product samples available for practice.
- Encourage return demonstration of procedures.





4.6 CREATIVE CLIMATE

The motivation to learn is contextual, i.e., if the environment fosters curiosity, participants will be curious, will be eager to learn, ask, discuss, participate.

According to Marentič-Požarnik et al. (2018) several elements contribute to creative climate in the class room environment which enhances learners to examine their creative potential as well as co-create the classes:

- Dynamism and liveliness in the class: encouragement of independence; research and experiments; collaboration; encouragement of self-confidence; internal motivation
- Trust and openness: encouragement of open communication; time for feedback and opinion sharing; respect of different questions and opinions; failure tolerance
- Time for ideas: permission for self-reflection and self-identification of failures; enabling different possibilities at the beginning of course work; second chances when answering; enough time for new idea elaboration
- Humor, playfulness: learning spontaneity; permission of jokes without hurting each other (teacher vs. participant)
- Discussion: encouragement to discussion, inner dialogue (reflection); provision of confrontations; culture of conflicts
- Risk taking: acceptance of ambiguity, vagueness; testing new techniques/approaches; teacher as role model for risk taking; awarding trial/effort (and not only the results)
- Conflict culture

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5 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter contains hands-on experience of the participating organizations when preparing programs for their respective target groups. It can be considered as a practical grid and checklist when conceptualizing and planning programs for excluded vulnerable target groups.

5.1 STATE OF THE ART

FutuReg offers the majority of programs free of charge or with registration fee, it means the time management of the courses, their scheduled time is crucial for its success. If it is possible, especially while working with small groups, we schedule the courses based on previous agreement with the participants, or at least we try to find a solution, what time would be the most convenient for them. Since, we work also with schools, we have to cooperate with the teachers and students attending the mediation in terms of finding time which suits not only based on their personal possibilities but also taking into consideration the school time-table and their requirements. The communication is crucial not only during the course itself, but before - as the participants need to know who can they contact or where to find information. With COVID we learned and we are still learning and facing new challenges, especially when it comes to hybrid or online courses, which are nowadays more often than they were before COVID. Technical issues, how to react in an online environment, since the basic social interaction is missing and the trainer is not able to see and interact with each participant - we have to adapt new strategies how to connect with participants, how to involve them in online world, how to not lose their interest during the presentation or workshop. Based on EU Learning Competences FutuReg tries to list a relevant competence, skills and ability list, which should be fitting with job description requirements on job market. The profile of the candidate (job-seeker) or participant is also an important part to take into consideration while preparing the course. The content of the course is divided into modules.

At school environment, FutuReg works with whole classes with number of students 20-30. The family situation and providing kid-friendly environment is an important goal FutuReg is trying to achieve in its programs. There has to be a person or more individuals (based on how large the groups are) who engage with children and spend the time with them, while their parents can join the course.

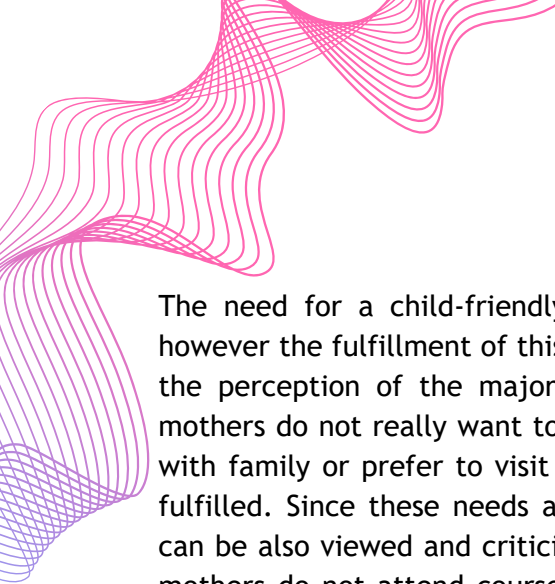
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The need for a child-friendly environment would be a desired condition in the society, however the fulfillment of this need is often neglected and not considered as important from the perception of the majority, which at the end leads to a situation where especially mothers do not really want to attend courses with their children, try to leave their children with family or prefer to visit only places which they are certain that their “needs” will be fulfilled. Since these needs are not always acknowledged in our communities and mothers can be also viewed and criticized for not taking good care of their children, the majority of mothers do not attend courses. Despite mentioned obstacles, there are few NGOs who are focusing on mothers and providing programs especially for them. FutuReg has the opportunity to cooperate with some of these organizations and get the best practice from them.

The most frequent, popular, and efficient products Rovnovazka offers are designed as long-term complex training courses for various vulnerable target groups, while in the center of the activities lies the common goal - re-entering the labor market. The most common target groups of Rovnovazka are: mothers returning to labor market after long-term parental leave (in Czech Republic it takes up to 3 - 4 years out of the labor market with each child); unemployed people 55+; long-term unemployed; young undergraduates; people with cumulative handicaps towards labor market (i.e., combination of more factors causing difficulties in finding an appropriate job).

Programs Rovnovazka offers lies on the basic pillars:

- Individual and cordial approach towards all clients, establishment of friendly and discrete atmosphere from the very beginning;
- Deep entry individual interviews leading to identification of personal situation (family and health situation, disclosing of possible barriers towards labor market, personal work experience, successes and failures, work preferences, hobbies, daily routines, motivations etc. Such a deep structured interview is supplied by personality tests and testing of competences (e.g., IT, language etc. according to the needs and the program goals). This entry process leads to personal SWOT analysis and defining of a so-called Personal Development Plan which means selection of appropriate next steps, recommendation of specific courses, recommendation of the possible employment opportunities.
- Group soft-skills courses supporting self-esteem, which is very important for all the mentioned target groups, supporting self-presentation and communication skills, preparation for job-interviews, CVs designing, and sometimes yet more topics like fashion and make-up, healthy living style etc. To some groups of clients, we also provided a professional photographer to get good-quality pictures for the CVs and professional social networks. With some clients, we made personal video-presentations, which has become often asked from the side of employers especially during Covid times.

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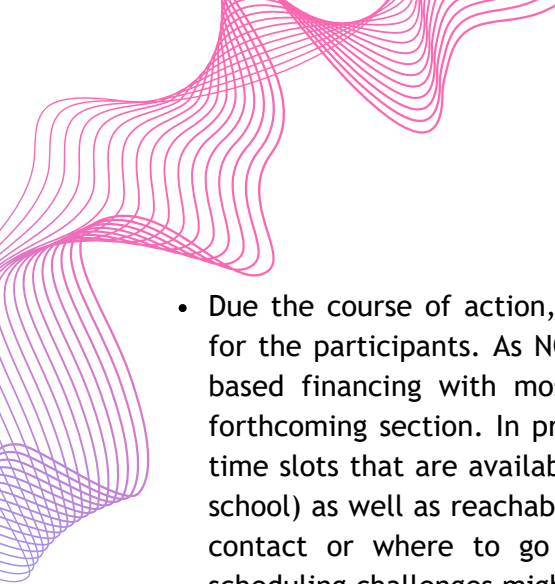
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- The soft-skills courses are followed by IT trainings on various levels according to the needs of concrete participants. All of our participants are led to pass at least the very basic IT course despite their level of education and the chosen working field. Just to gain the basic IT literacy to be able to apply for a job via job portals, and to be able to handle IT somehow in their daily lives.
- Some of the programs Rovnovazka offers (usually for mothers who are usually more educated) contain Business English courses to support clients' position on the labor market (mothers often claim that they have lost language competences during the parental leaves).
- Re-training hard-skills courses are offered to those clients who need to gain some qualification or new competences to be able to apply for a job in a specific field identified in the entry interview.
- During the course of all training activities, clients are further supported by individual mentoring and coaching sessions, while usually they can choose from a wider portfolio of consultants, mentors and coaches, according to their own personal preferences.
- All of the described processes lead to job-placements in ideal cases. In most of the ESF financed programs, we can provide finances to employers as incentives to employ disadvantaged people who might need more care and patience from the side of the employer in the beginning. We usually provide financial support that can cover up to 100 % of staff costs for 6 months, while we motivate the employers to provide longer-term contracts. Even if the employment does not continue after the support is withdrawn, it always helps our clients to get out of the darkness of unemployment, to refresh working habits, to gain self-confidence, and build new competences.

For the success of Rovnovazka's programs, it is always important, whenever it is possible, to:

- set the timing of the courses according to our clients' needs and preferences (often we offer both, morning and afternoon sessions and they can choose);
- use training facilities that are easily accessible by public transport and are barrierless in ideal case;
- offer some small refreshment, if it is possible;
- offer baby-sitting services to mothers attending the courses;
- to cover transport costs for the unemployed.
- to build a network of employers from business as well as non-profit and public sectors that are willing to cooperate - to employ disadvantaged people.
- to cooperate with labor offices to facilitate the process of hiring the clients for the programs.



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- Due the course of action, NOVUS realized that is essential to offer low-entry-threshold for the participants. As NOVUS offers the majority of programs free of charge (project-based financing with mostly national calls), this issue will not be addressed in the forthcoming section. In practical terms this refers to scheduling the courses, i.e., using time slots that are available for the target groups (e.g., in family situation kids being in school) as well as reachability. Participants need to have full information about whom to contact or where to go for further information. Only in this vein, e.g., potential scheduling challenges might be raised by potential participants.

If due the family situation the parent needs to take their child with them, our experience shows that offering programs where minor family members can tag along are highly welcomed. However, in this case the facilities (space requirements for participants as well as their children), a dedicated program for the minors (i.e., adapted materials, child-care services) and topics that address both target groups have to be considered.

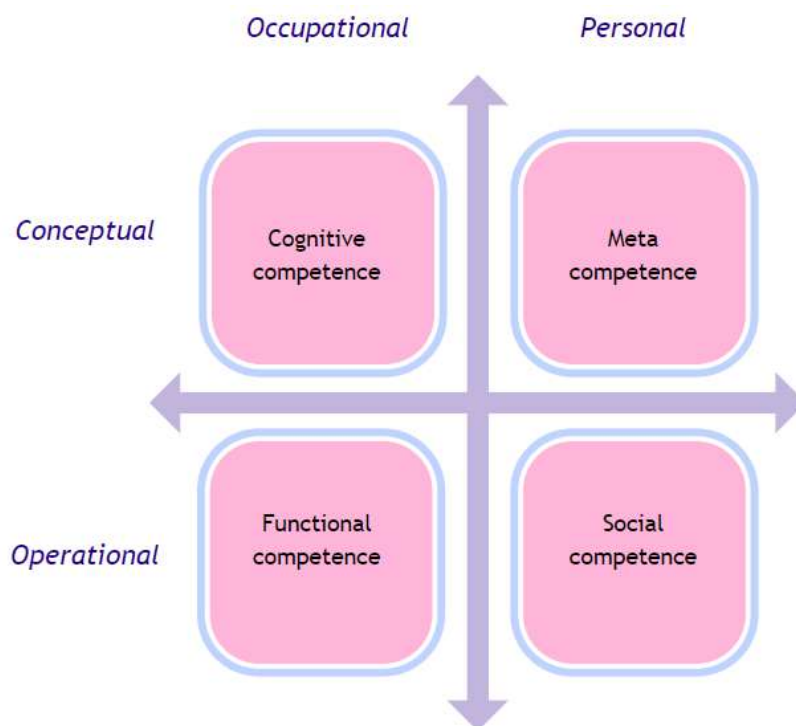
If the participant does not recognize the need for the information (or has been offended or intimidated), all of the instructor's effort to assist the participant to learn will be in vain. The instructor must establish rapport with participants and prepare them for learning; this provides motivation. Instructors can motivate participants via several means (Lieb, 1991):

Techniques and methods that support the teacher/instructor when preparing/starting the course:

- Establishing an open, friendly atmosphere (non-judgmental)
- Appropriate level of difficulty: challenging, yet not overloaded that might lead to frustration.
- Specific/Individual feedback based on their learning outcomes
- Demonstration of benefits (transferability of results) of the learned inputs

Within courses and workshop, we realized that it is highly appreciated if learners know their gain, i.e., which competencies they will strengthen or establish through the course of work.

In Slovenia, we largely adopt the multidimensional holistic model provided by Delamare & Winterton (2005) that distinguishes among cognitive, functional, social, and meta-competence in which each is comprised of two of the following elements: conceptual, operational, occupational, and personal (see figure below).



Source: Delamare & Winterton (2005)

Cognitive competence encompasses the know-that (what): theory, concepts and informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; cognition; ability to think and act in an insightful and problem-solving way. Functional competence encompasses the skills or know-how that a person who works in a given occupational area should be able to do and be able to demonstrate. Moreover, it addresses the ability, on the basis of subject-specific knowledge and skills, to carry out tasks and solve problems and to judge the results in a way that is goal-oriented, appropriate, methodological and independent. Social competence covers dealing with others - the ability and willingness to cooperate, to interact with others responsibly and to behave in a group and relationally oriented way. Meta competence incorporates dealing with oneself - the ability and willingness to develop personally (incl. learning abilities), as well as to develop skills, motivation and attitudes to work and to the wider world.

The below figure shows an example of how in the case of a workshop titled “Innovation management” competences that will be strengthened within the workshop have been exemplified.

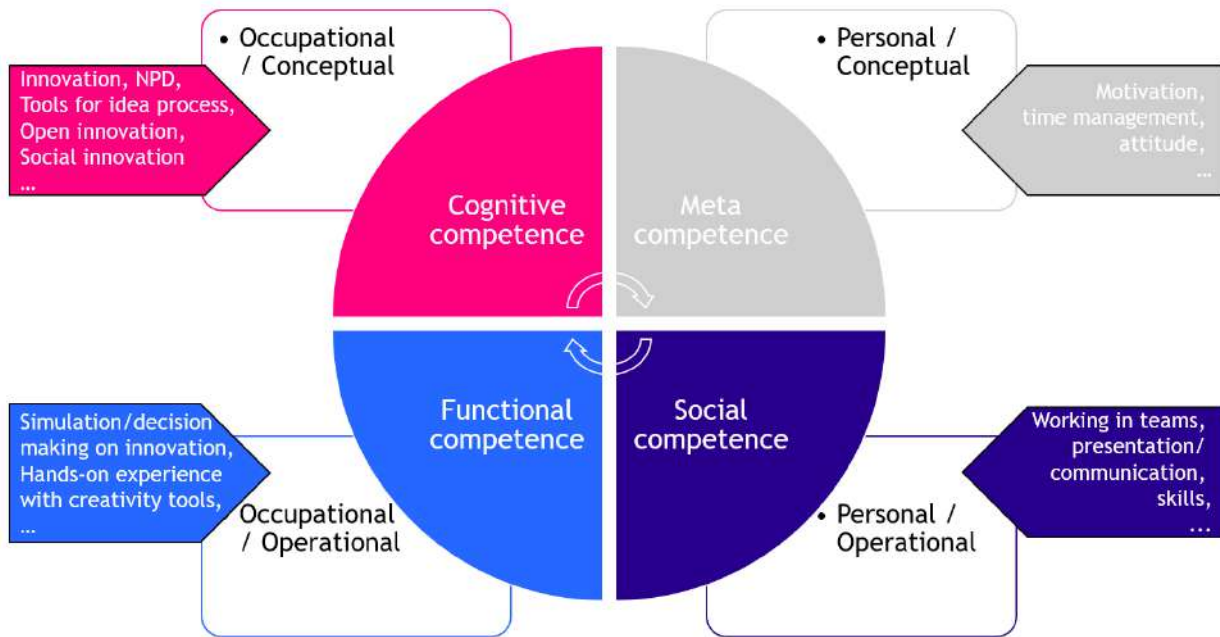
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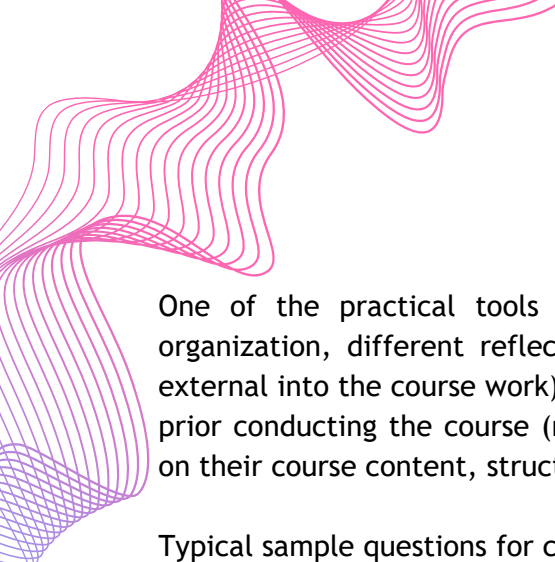


Source: author

The more precise the description of competences addressed within the workshop is, the easier later the evaluation of the attained course goals. At NOVUS, such grids are prepared for most courses that are conducted in groups.

Time component addresses factors influencing a non-formal educational program in manifold ways. The course itself should be reflected already prior conducting it, moreover the peculiarities of long-term programs have to be considered. Another issue is the evaluation of the conducted course for the improvement purposes of the next one.

Based on the experience of NOVUS also the lifecycle of the learner/participant within the learning program has to be considered from the teacher's point of view, too. Prior starting the program, it is mainly the motivation (teacher vs. participant/content), during the course of the program the above-mentioned elements have to be taken into account, while after the course reflection is essential.



One of the practical tools to reflect same learning principles are pursued along the organization, different reflection questions can be applied (prior the involvement of the external into the course work). They are adopted from Collins (2004) and are frequently used prior conducting the course (not only for externals, but also within internal staff to reflect on their course content, structure and planed outcomes).

Typical sample questions for course preparation:

- What are some of the ways you can make training to the learners' practices?
- What are some of the ways you can give participants over their learning?
- What are some of the ways you can use the learners' experiences as a resource for learning?
- What are some of the ways you can keep learners stimulated and involved?
- What are some of the ways you can create a safe, comfortable learning atmosphere?
- What are some of the ways you can help ensure that are successful?
- What are some of the ways you can reinforce learners facilitate self, peer, or instructor feedback?

An introductory consultancy meeting is held before the start of the long-term courses/workshops/trainings in order to develop a common set of goals and an individual career plan for the participant. This affects the disclosure of the motivation on both sides. Based on that the participants can decide which courses and workshops suit their competence goals most.

To monitor their forthcoming and progress during a long-term program, some practical approaches are recommended:

- Upfront definition of meeting dates/meeting frequency/tentative content (if applicable)
- Clarification of expectations (what does the participant/teacher expect)
- Definition of goals

Note taking is highly recommended for later reviews, however not mandatory. In particular, applicable for those programs that have the option of supervision and reflection throughout the program timeline.

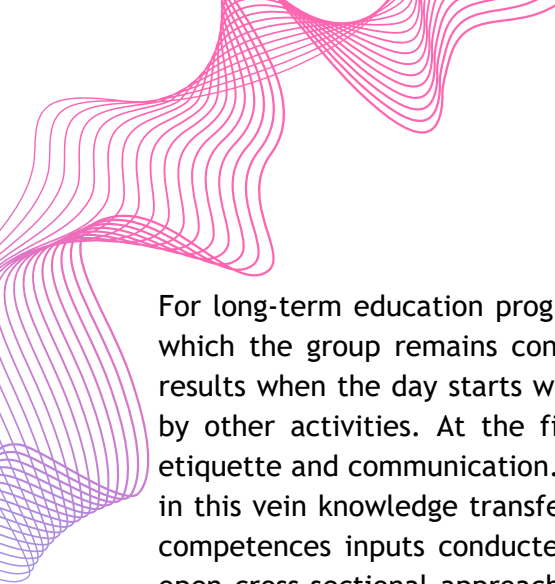
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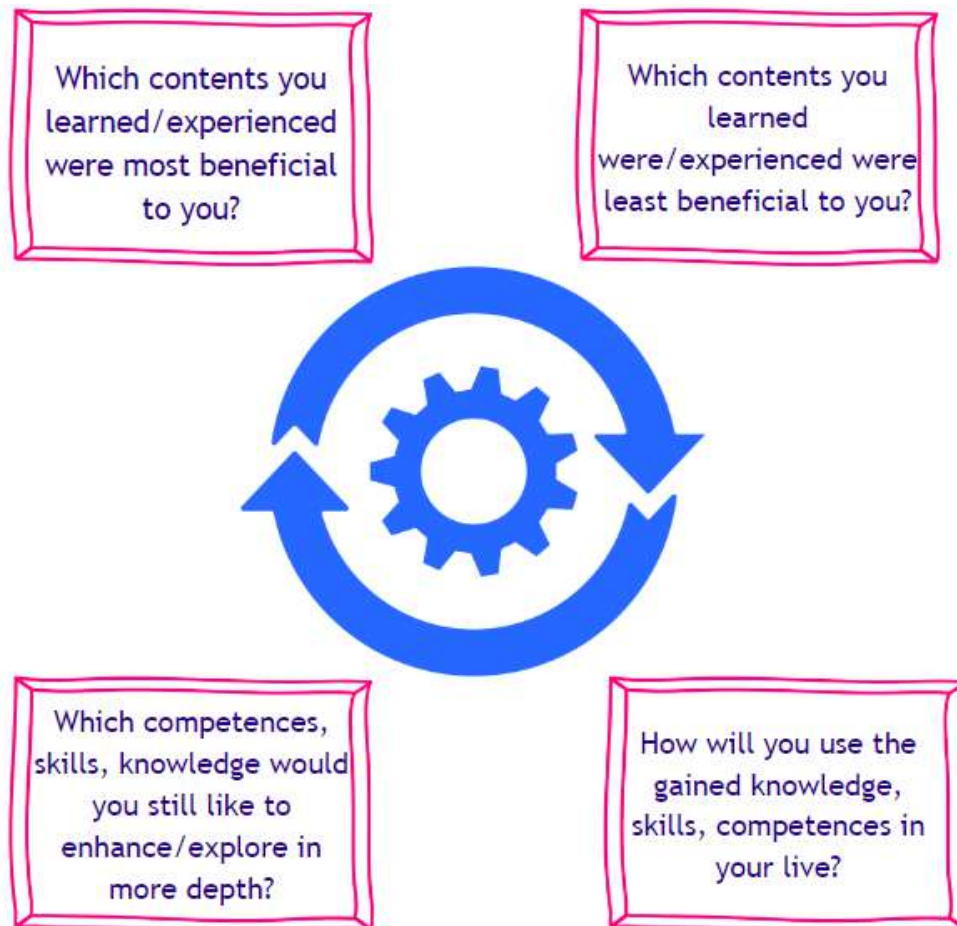
For long-term education programs that last for several weeks and in particular for those in which the group remains constant over the whole period of time, we experience positive results when the day starts with exercise or a walk, followed by coffee and snacks followed by other activities. At the first lectures, the participants are introduced to the rules of etiquette and communication. Moreover, the introduction of each participants make sense as in this vein knowledge transfer within the group might be achieved (e.g., language or other competences inputs conducted by participants themselves). Having such a multilayers and open cross-sectional approach, gives the participants further skills (i.e., organization skills, sharing knowledge, social skills, etc.) yet requires a high degree of flexibility by the teacher/tutor/program leader.

Evaluation is the last stage of the andragogical cycle, but this does not only happen at the end of the program, but it is a process that lasts throughout the implementation of the program, with defined intermediates steps. This has a significant impact on the quality of the program (Možina, Možina, & Žalec, 2020). For example, at the end of any learning sequence, when we want to find out what is in program, the provider can adjust the program accordingly if the chosen teaching methods do not work, etc.

Reflection on the issues that are related to monitoring and evaluation, allow the teacher/coordinator of the program to evaluate the program with different aspects: from the point of view of its components, from the point of view of the participants, from the point of view of teachers, however, the influence of the factors that have (yet) influenced its implementation can also be evaluated and their interaction in concrete circumstances (e.g. teachers' work, time arrangement of modules, situational barriers of participants, etc.).

The following 4 questions guide the evaluation:

1. Which contents you learned/experienced were most beneficial to you?
2. Which contents you learned were/experienced were least beneficial to you?
3. How will you use the gained knowledge, skills, competences in your life?
4. Which competences, skills, knowledge would you still like to enhance/explore in more depth?



Source: author



5. 2. FRONTIERS OF POTENTIAL

Insights of how-to better work with courses or workshop could be divided into 3 main categories: before, during and after the course. To ensure the effectiveness of a realized course, it is important to set up a few steps and to follow them before, during and after the course. Before the course begin, the promotion of the courses - choosing the best channels for promoting the course and finding new or possible participants who might be interested to attend the course. Make promo video, posts on social media, promote the course via local media. The registration procedure - use an online tool to get information about your participants and if needed, you can ask them about their personal references about the content, time schedule, etc.

During the course the focus is on sharing the knowledge of the course content considering the participants expert level, or their level of knowledge about the topic and also considering their abilities and the characteristics of the course, whether it is an online or offline course, how many participants, what age, gender, occupation are they, if they have any special needs or have a special focus on the topic based on their background. By acknowledging the characteristics of the participants and the course itself, we have to choose the best learning model or teaching method. One of the methods we are applying during FutuReg courses is learning by doing and job shadowing, especially when it comes to grant and project management courses.

After the course, there is space for dissemination of the program on local, regional or national level, or even in international level.

Evaluation of the activity is also encouraged. There is an option for qualitative or quantitative evaluation, based on the course content or methods and the participants. Ongoing contact and therefore evaluation with the students, participants after the course is also a good way to get the most feedbacks. A longer cooperation after the realization might give us more information about how useful was the course, e.g., feedback on job position or job skills they have gained, follow up actions based on training and job market situation. Nowadays, social media awareness about the course and many other information are a must to be known and acknowledged by potential participants.

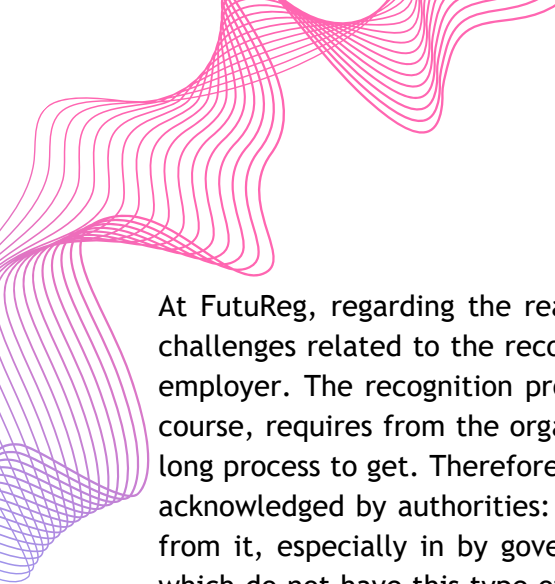
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At FutuReg, regarding the realization of courses and workshops, we have experienced few challenges related to the recognition of our courses by authorities like Labor Office or some employer. The recognition process led by state authorities who can officially recognize the course, requires from the organization who provide the course lot of administration and is a long process to get. Therefore, in Slovakia we have 2 types of courses based on how they are acknowledged by authorities: the one which have the official recognition and might benefit from it, especially in by government or state provided services or jobs. And other courses which do not have this type of recognition; however, it has nothing to do with the quality of the courses.

The biggest obstacle Rovnovazka is facing is the way of financing. It was proven that our complex programs are very efficient; however, they are quite expensive. To be able to realize them, it is necessary to apply for grants on a national level while each project is usually limited by 2 years of duration. The process of preparing the project application is quite complex and the competition among the applicants is huge. Moreover, the project administration is extremely demanding. Even if we are well-experienced, the conditions set by ESF national programs are so unfriendly, that we decided to quit these activities temporarily and to look for other ways to support our clients, even if we know that we will not be able to provide them such a full-service. It would be helpful, if there is something like an accreditation process that would prove the competences of the NGOs to provide certain services, and thus they could run these activities on a longer-term basis. Another way that would help us would be finding a different source of financing, e.g., from private donors. But this would require vast fund-raising activities.

If we observe the process before, during, and after the course's realization from Rovnovazka's perspective, we can say that we might invest more in public campaigns to support the hiring process, to promote our activities, to build networks with employers, and to gain possible donors. We can also work more with our participants' feedback and reflections for the purposes of promotion of our activities.

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5. 3. THE GRID – CHECKLIST FOR FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION

The following figure comprises the factors affecting participation on educational programs from excluded vulnerable target groups based on the theoretical insights and foremost practical experience and work of the participating organizations in Slovakia, Czech Republic and Slovenia.

- **Establish low-entry threshold**
 - Accessible facilities
 - User-centered scheduling
 - Transparency/Information

- **Offer engaging content**

- **Check expectations**

- **Display competence grid**

- **Set appropriate level of difficulty**

- **Assure individualized approach within groups**

- **Make slots for feedback, reflection and evaluation**

- **Provide complimentary services (if feasible)**
 - Refreshments
 - Child-care
 - Reimbursement of travel costs

Source: author



6. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF THE COOPERATION

In terms of the project cooperation, we would like to highlight the following key aspects that are shared within the consortium:

Team dynamics: one of the crucial factors that significantly influenced the success of our project was the positive team dynamics we maintained throughout. From the outset, we established open communication channels, fostered a collaborative environment, and ensured everyone had a voice. This allowed us to leverage each team member's strengths and expertise effectively.

- **Goal clarity:** right from the project's inception, we had a clear understanding of our goals and objectives also concerning the consortium agreement, establishing communication channels, taking active parts and communicating all the information. This clarity helped us align our efforts and work towards a shared vision. We regularly reviewed and revisited our project goals, ensuring that everyone remained focused and committed to achieving them.
- **Roles and responsibilities:** each team member had well-defined roles and responsibilities, contributing to a sense of ownership and accountability. This structure enabled us to streamline our work, minimize confusion, and ensure efficient project progress. Regular check-ins and updates regarding individual responsibilities were instrumental in maintaining this framework. Based on approved projects or agreement. It is advisable to have it in written form, in a chart or some visually easy to understand format.
- **Effective communication:** communication played a pivotal role in our project's success. We established various communication channels, both formal and informal, to facilitate timely and transparent information exchange. Regular team meetings, progress reports, and informal discussions helped us address challenges, share ideas, and make informed decisions collaboratively. Virtual team online and offline meetings on transnational meeting occasions. Setting up online meetings on a regular basis, not only occasionally. Write memos, and maintain continuous communication via more channels: online meetings, emails, phone calls, chats. In case one of the partners was uncertain about some points, we tried to go through the plan in detail, giving space to each partner to share their opinion and questions.
- **Adaptability:** we remained flexible in our approach, swiftly adjusted plans when necessary, and proactively sought solutions to overcome obstacles. Flexibility and adaptability can be achieved only if there is an open and effective communication, so we are aware of any change on time, being able to adapt to it and communicate the changes with the partners.

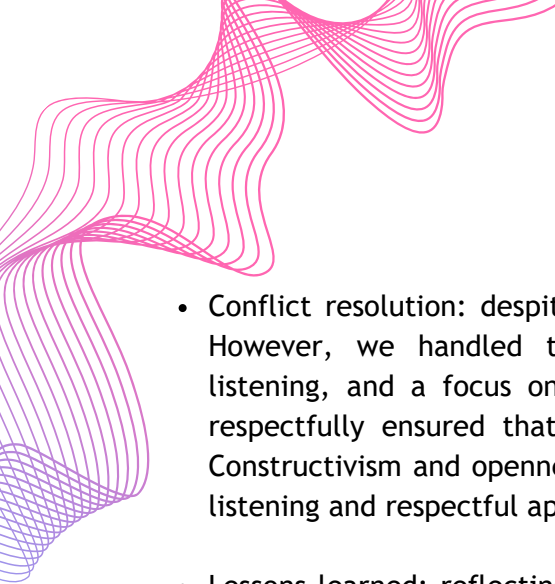
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- **Conflict resolution:** despite our best efforts, conflicts arose within the team at times. However, we handled them constructively by encouraging open dialogue, active listening, and a focus on finding win-win solutions. Resolving conflicts promptly and respectfully ensured that they did not hinder our progress or impact team morale. Constructivism and openness are key to being able to manage conflict situations. Active listening and respectful approach help to maintain the team moral and the mood.
- **Lessons learned:** reflecting on the project cooperation, it is important to identify areas for improvement and learn from the experience. Conducting a thorough retrospective analysis would enable us to identify strengths and weaknesses, highlight best practices, and carry forward valuable lessons into future projects. Working with partners from other countries taught us a lot, especially when it comes to communication, online cooperation, adaptation to others needs, learning new methods, sharing ideas and getting the best practices from them. Also new elements enriching educational process, Slovenian HUB LLL, Czech initiative in MAS (Local Action Group)

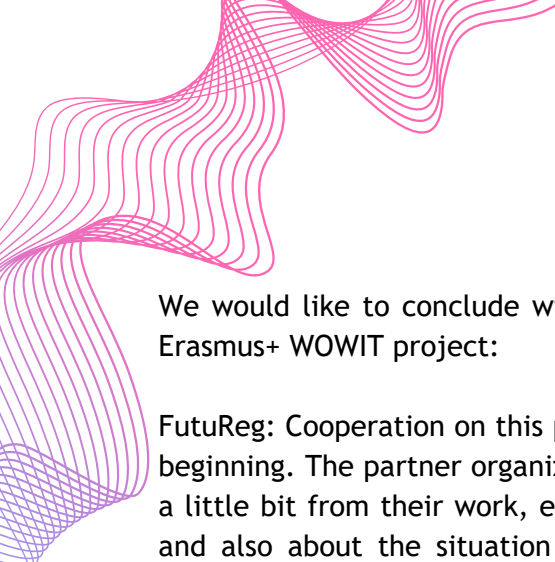
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In conclusion, our project cooperation was characterized by strong teamwork, clear goals, effective communication, adaptability, and constructive conflict resolution. By maintaining these key elements, we were able to overcome challenges, deliver results, and foster a positive and productive working environment. Moving forward, it is essential to leverage these insights and continue refining our collaborative practices to enhance future project outcomes.

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We would like to conclude with some personal notes/insights we have gathered within the Erasmus+ WOWIT project:

FutuReg: Cooperation on this project enriched us in many ways we were not expecting in the beginning. The partner organizations inspired us, shared with us their knowledge and showed a little bit from their work, environment and also gave us more perspective about the topic and also about the situation in their countries. Not only we met incredible personalities within the partner organizations, but the project itself made it possible to meet new people, NGOs who work with the target group and provide wide variety of services for women. We learned also a lot about the topic itself and we do believe that by meeting new people and NGOs, connecting them, we can work on new possibilities and work with the target group in new projects. Last, but not least, we are very proud that during this 2-year cooperation, we were able to arrange conference, workshop and prepare materials: Best Practice Guide and Coursebook which might be used in each country and can be helpful for many other organizations and also for our target group.

Rovnovazka: For Rovnovazka, WOWIT was the first Erasmus+ Small Scale Partnership project in the role of a partner. In comparison with previous international experience, we must say that this actual cooperation was one of the very best ones thanks to the proactive, productive, open, and friendly atmosphere that supported all project activities. The project goals were set clearly and all partners did their best to fulfill them in time and in appropriate quality. The project was run efficiently and was realized smoothly thanks to good leadership and partners cooperation supported with regular virtual contact.

The international events were extraordinarily productive and enriching while it comes to competences towards supporting disadvantaged women on the work market. The project activities, including the international face-to-face events have moreover created a space for building and enlarging national networks of experts and organizations working with women. The partners hosting international events always provided the others perfect background for common work, and allowed the visitors to get to know well the local conditions and environment they are working in. The organization of these events were managed more than well.

NOVUS: The cooperation in the project was truly changing the live of our organization and opening minds for its employees. NOVUS so far was not engaged in international European projects that require English as lingua operandi nor was the topic of women inclusion so central to the activities offered. Albeit, NOVUS consists only of female employees, women inclusion into work market was addressed within other attempts and project the society is running. With WOWIT we extended our primary target group and based on that initiated further projects as we realized that women inclusion in work market in central in the Slovenian context, too. By hosting the last event in Slovenia, i.e., workshop for unemployed we touched based on our preceding core activities and introduce the project partners to our services and programs. The collaboration was inspiring on all levels.

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