

Ildikó Laki: The system of adult education for the elderly in Hungary

1. The system of adult education for the elderly

The current chapter in the history of adult education in Hungary began, following the regime change, in the early 1990s. This form of education by now has become institutionalized; on one hand all the involved educational bodies emerged and integrated themselves with their specific roles within the larger educational system of the country, while on the other the legal setting was also created which made it possible for both private and public actors to invest substantial resources for the furthering of this form of education.. An additional development has been the elevated need to expand the scope of adult education programs depending on age groups and areas of interest, which the system initially was unable or only partially able to accommodate (programs catering for the elderly or the specific needs of young adults).

The long neglected topic of adult education specifically catering for the elderly has come into attention only in the last few years in Hungary. Neither in the amended Act on National Public Education (Act CXC of 2011) nor in Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Education was it designated as a form of public education activity.

Nevertheless, numerous mostly evaluative studies were conducted on the topic each focusing on the protection of the status of the elderly and definition of their position and role in society.

In 2001 the Seniors' Council¹ compiled the Charter for the Elderly, in 2010 the Hungarian Parliament adopted the National Strategy for the Elderly I. Action plan 2010-2012 (Government regulation 1087/2010., April 9), which set down as a goal the need for cooperation among the various actors involved in seniors' affairs to further the successful realization of the Strategy. *The Strategy called for the creation of a Seniors' Open University education plan, the expansion and motivation of lifelong learning schemes within the scope of adult education with a special focus on the elderly and senior citizens in accordance with balanced cooperation among*

¹ <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma/szocialis-csaladi-es-ifjusagugyert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/az-idosugyi-tanacs-tagjai>

different generations and with the prevention of forms of exclusion. Additional targets include the expansion of adult education services on local, county-wide, regional, and national levels, designing specific training methods, and the inclusion and involvement of seniors both as instructors and as participants in the various courses. (Government regulation 1087/2010., April 9, National Strategy for the Elderly I. Action plan 2010-2012)

In 2008 the Seniors' Council commenced the work on the National Strategy for the Elderly. It was adopted in 2009 (81/2009. October, 6 Act of Parliament) in line with the tenets of active aging. This policy end is prominently articulated in the text itself while referring to the WHO policy framework paper (Active Ageing – Policy Framework) published in 2001 tackling the same issues. This paper in a sense was truly revolutionary in that it was the first to treat the elderly as complete individuals, viewing their full potentials and did not limit the topic to social and health-related aspects. The various elements of the Strategy aim to enhance the quality of life for the elderly, building the foundations for permanent social participation and long-term social integration; however, the significance of inclusion in training and education are emphasized in it.

In the Hungarian education system education programs focusing on the elderly appear in two main areas. One is informal learning, this includes various courses, training programs and open universities, all of which exist outside the realm of legal regulation on the elderly. The other one takes place in night schools or as part of correspondence programs within the formal school system, or as certificate offering formal courses. The later form is also not covered by the Adult Education Act. It should be noted that the Act only sets a general framework for adult education.

2. Participation of older adults in further education.

Hungarian figures

The proportion of students in the higher education system out of all those engaged in any school-based education cannot be considered high; among the above 45 year age group it is in fact quite low. A more positive picture is gained by viewing the non-formal and informal learning categories. In the second the

involvement of older age groups is exceptionally high (85.2% of those aged between 55-64 and 95.7% of those aged between 65-74 participate in informal learning).

Table 1.

Participation rates in education depending on the form of learning and the age of learners

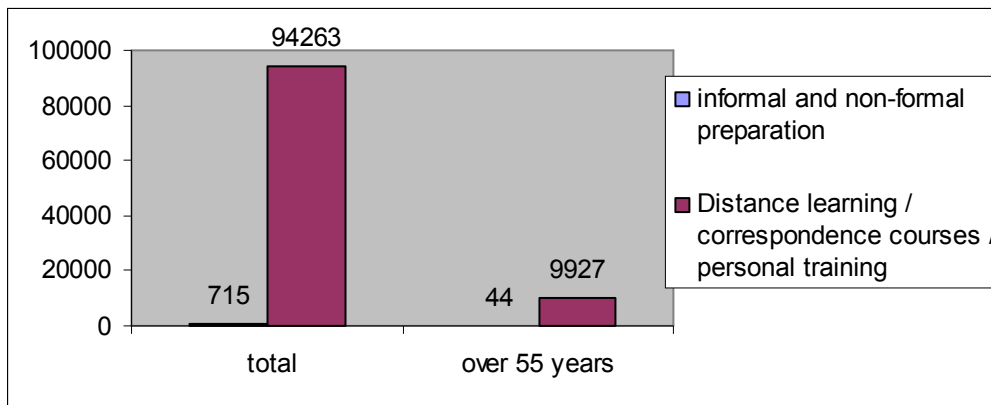
Age group	School-based learning	Non-formal learning	Informal learning
15-24	92,5	9,5	18,9
25-34	40,7	36,8	41,0
35-44	17,9	48,6	51,8
45-54	6,6	44,3	64,1
55-64	1,1	29,9	85,2
65-74	0,0	7,6	95,7
Total	63,3	22,1	33,3

Central Statistical Institute KSH: Lifelong learning, 2004.

In 2011 the Hungarian Central Statistical Office conducted an independent survey about education and forms of training among those aged 25–64 years. The number of respondents, living in private households in Hungary, exceeded 7,000.

According to the survey in the year before (2010) 27.2% of the 25–64 year age group participated in some form of school-based and non-formal learning; institutionalized training courses were most popular among young adults - while nearly 40% of those aged between 25–34 years were involved in some form of training in the preceding twelve months, this figure barely reached 15% for those above 55. In line with international trends education and training courses are more popular among the active working age population and especially those who are actually employed. Among the active population the participation rate exceeded 30%, at the same time for the unemployed it remained around 15% with an even smaller rate in the inactive segment.

Enrolment figures in 2012



Source: OSAP 1665 statistic (<https://statisztika.nive.hu/>)

From the chart above it can be deduced that of the 94,263 students enrolled in correspondence and distance education programs or as private students, the over 55 year old age group makes up about 10.5% of the total. Simultaneously, in the informal and non-formal learning categories their participation hovers around only 6%. The data indicates that in Hungary those of 55 years of age and above show a less pronounced interest in participating in programs offered within the traditional education institutions. The reasons for this may be found in the lack of their motivation and the inadequacy of the education system to properly accommodate the needs and interests of the elderly.

Learning in old age relies on inner, primary motivations. Upon considering the particular Hungarian conditions it can be stated that the following are the main characteristics of learning patterns among the elderly:

Need for communication. Loneliness affects the elderly much more frequently than the younger generations. The diverse venues for learning also translate to potential communication channels to reach out to other individuals, foster the creation of new relationship clusters, and help to maintain and rejuvenate old or existing contacts.

Keeping up-to-date with technological development. The recent inventions in technology, i.e. the internet, generate a desire in an increasing number among the elderly to familiarize themselves with the use of these new devices. They want to be able use mobile phones and digital cameras, send e-mails and browse the net with confidence.

The meaningful utilization of free time. The passage into the inactive age is usually followed by an increase in the amount of free time available. The elderly also wish to spend their free time in the most meaningful manner: they go and join clubs

and associations, participate in courses or attend an open university, learn languages, enjoy their hobbies or go on excursions.

Shared work or professional background. Those senior citizens who already left the labour market due to retirement can find the opportunity to keep afresh with new developments in their former career field and even maintain associations with their ex-colleagues within the training courses or activities offered through adult education programs, e.g. choir of retired teachers, retired miners' association (Bajusz, 2009).

The participation rate in education for the 45 to 64 year age group is under 1% in Hungary, which is far below the EU average. Similarly, the effectiveness of the training courses is also the worst amongst this age group. This may be due to a marked lack of interest exhibited by those of 55-60 years of age who as pensioners are not inclined to be involved in school-based or non-formal forms of education or training. However, around 65-70 years of age there is a measurable increase in interest primarily in informal forms of education. Viewing the available relevant data in Hungary (Csoma, 2005) learning and education in old age generally conform to the following trends: the learning potential of the 55-64 year and 65-74 year age groups is generally falling, which is further aggravated by the socio-cultural divides existing within this generation. Those between 45 and 54 years of age are able without any undue limitations to participate both in formal and non-formal education programs. Simultaneously, this also applies to those between 65 and 74 years of age, although for them the possibility of falling behind or dropping out of a training course is more elevated (Csoma, 2005).

In the case of both groups the motivating factors for learning differ. For these age groups the optimal training programs should primarily involve topics that are useful and practical and are of shorter duration; the several month or year long school-based programs are of lesser importance here. As mentioned earlier, for the elderly an additional motivating factor may be the level of practicality of the skills offered that may be applied immediately in their personal lives, e.g. **Click on it Grandma!** – an introductory level computer course and its continuation **Keep clicking Grandma!**. On the topic of motivation the relationship between the elderly and general society should be mentioned. In Hungary, according to the 2011 annual statistical compendium, of the adult population every third person lives alone, of these 76.4% are over 55 years of age. Thus, one of the main forms of social

integration of the elderly is the strengthening of the venues for social intercourse and belonging. Participation in a training programme, therefore, can become a social function that neither the internet nor the other types of technology based forms of communication can replace.

3. Institutions participating in adult education for the elderly

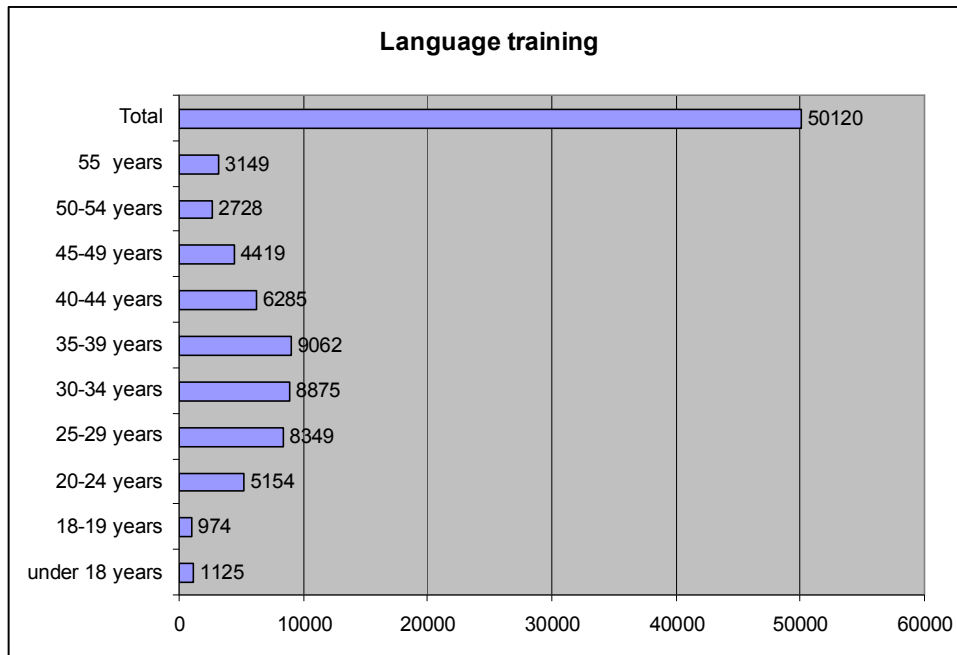
The Hungarian education system is based on three primary segments: elementary, secondary, and higher learning. The existing private schools and those institutions which are managed by NGOs do not function as separate forms of education; they rather indicate the distinct types of financing that applies to such schools. Beyond the limits of this system we may find the various institutions which are involved in adult education and teaching the elderly. In contemporary Hungary adult education for the elderly does not possess a structural system or network. Within the scope of various training and education providers, if the demand is present, education and training courses are organized for the above 50 years age group. Such education and training providers are:

Cultural and educational training centres

Culture and learning centres, some of these cater specifically to the elderly – precise data is not available.

Libraries, archives, public interest associations, and free universities, these bodies overwhelmingly did not establish working networks and function completely independently of one another.

Of the various learning tools open learning offers the best choice to engage in some type of training outside a formal school setting. Examples for such are the various IT and language training courses offered. In Hungary currently those above 50 years of age can study languages in **65 language schools** and can acquire IT skills in 245 either public or private cultural and educational institutions.



Source: OSAP 1665 statistic (<https://statisztika.nive.hu/>)

Educational institutions

For the 60 years and above age group there are no elementary and secondary schooling opportunities in Hungary. In a formal education setting programmes to address specifically the needs of this age group were established only in higher education. The Budapest based King Sigismund College operates at 4 locations in and around Budapest the *Óbuda Open University for the Elderly*. Anyone over 50 years of age can sign up for the courses offered, which encompass topics like botany, education and the elderly, social problems in old age etc. This initiative commenced in the autumn of 2011 and at the end of each course the participants receive a certificate of attendance.

The Győr based Széchenyi István University set up a similar programme for those over 50 years of age in various disciplines following the Open University format. Attendees upon the conclusion of their courses also receive certificates. This programme began towards the end of the previous decade.

In both occasions the course fees are kept at relatively modest sums taking into consideration the financial means of the elderly.

In Hungary we cannot talk about a uniform system of education for the elderly. In every case, the previous two illustrate it quite well, what we see are independent

initiatives where the instruction and the location are provided by a school, but not in the form of an independent teaching centre for the elderly.

So far in Hungary there have not been educational institutions to serve exclusively the needs of students with special needs; the *Óbuda Open University for the Elderly* also rather fills an existing demands than serve as a full-fledged institution for students with special needs (Jászberényi, 2011).

4. Instructors participating in adult education for the elderly

In Hungary in the National Training Register the title trainer/instructor for the elderly is not listed. It exists only in higher education and was introduced three years ago in the following academic programmes:

A specialized programme for trainers/instructors for the elderly was created within pedagogy MA programmes at **three Hungarian colleges/universities**, at the Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Education and Psychology, at the King Sigismund College, and at the Széchenyi István University in the city of Győr, in the latter case the programme is offered under applied social gerontology. All three programmes primarily aim to provide the students with useful skills in active roles as future educators of the elderly.

In secondary education and at the vocational training levels no such programmes exist. As a result the system of professional qualifications has not been established concerning the trainers/instructors for the elderly.

5. Conclusion

Unfortunately in Hungary adult education of the elderly in every respect is far behind the general European trends.

There is no independent educational or cultural institutional system; a number of positive initiatives exist, however these are by far insufficient to satisfy the needs of the more 1.5 million strong elderly population of the country.

We have no uniform training system set up for trainers/instructors in adult education for the elderly. Those involved in secondary education and vocational training have neither the qualifications nor the skills in this area.

Roughly 87% of the educators involved in adult education have never taught or trained the elderly and do not have the necessary skills to undertake such tasks.

Our legal system does not regulate adult education of the elderly. Besides the National Strategy for the Elderly none of the previously mentioned laws and acts include any directives concerning the elderly.

Clearly there is a magnified need for institutional development and investment, as well as the accomplishment of a comprehensive legal settlement of this issue.

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