STUDY CIRCLE TOPICS IN SLOVENIA AND SWEDEN

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Introduction

Slovenia is a relatively small country with 2 million inhabitants on 20,000 square km. Its geography is defined by a great variety of landscape – the passages from the Alpine world to the Pannonian Plain, continental hills and the Mediterranean – and its shift to various foreign rulers in the historical development of the country.

1. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Every individual today is facing, above all, many-sided influences on long-term decisions connected with property reform, and also on adjustment to European standards (for example 7.5% unemployment rate, breakthrough of the information technology, market law implementation, democratic social relations etc.). Every adult in Slovenia has therefore to be able and willing to face the changes and accommodate to them. The opportunities available, are used only when the individual sees an opportunity for further development. These opportunities include study circles (further on SC). We see SC as a flexible and multifunctional form which accelerates integration of a single person or a society into global processes keeping at the same time its identity.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

The aim of the presentation is to carry out a systematic comparison

between the study circles in Slovenia and those in Sweden and look for those features which are crucial for further work and interesting for our Swedish colleagues as well. Our primary goal is to gain a critical insight into Slovenian SC topics in comparison with the Swedish ones.

3. METHOD AND THE DATA

A comparison is deriving from the data from the literature in which some limitations were found which call for further literature research. The data on Swedish SC come from English literature (Oliver 1987, Blid 1989), while the Slovenian data come from the first integral presentation of SC in Slovenia (Mijoč, Krajnc, Findeisen 1993), from a Slovene Adult Education Centre (further on SAEC) study (Klemenčič 1995), excerpts from the evaluation questionnaires, processed by the Faculty of Arts graduates (Malečkar, Chvatal 1997) and part of the preliminary results for the study year 1997/98.

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Basic Issues

1. SOME BRIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATIONS IN SWEDEN AND SLOVENIA AND THEIR ADULT EDUCATION

The number of inhabitants in Sweden is more than four times greater than in Slovenia (8.8:1.9 million) (Statistični urad, 5, 1998). In Sweden most people live in the cities (50% of inhabitants), while the population in Slovenia is more distributed (20% of inhabitants live in cities). The official unemployment rate in 1998 is 5.4% in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 1999) and 7.5% in Slovenia (Statistični urad RS, 7, 1998).

Instead of the direct comparison of adult education (further on adult education) in both countries – which is difficult because of different backgrounds of results – some facts are used as an illustration only. The absolute costs for adult education were higher in Sweden than in Slovenia (the data are in % GDP for 1970, 1980 and 1992; 7.9:4.3, 8.5:3.5, 7.7:5.6), the changes in both countries were not directed in the same way and are not of the same value. In Sweden, in 1994, more than half of the population was involved in some form of adult education (Patterns 1997), while in Slovenia in 1992 this number was only 17% (Ivančič 1998).

2. KEY FEATURES OF THE SWEDISH AND SLOVENIAN STUDY CIRCLES

The most important common features of SC in both countries are the orientation of SC, their basic aim, principles and procedures are (Table 1).

SC are a planned, structured, decentralized form of non-formal adult education, accessible on local level and to the greatest possible extent, built into the individual's everyday life (summarized from Blid 1989, Oliver 1987, Klemenčič 1995)

Characteristics	SWEDEN	SLOVENIA
Implementation	„Bottom-up"	„Top-down"
Tradition	>100 years	5 years
Principles	equality (democracy), liberation of resources, co-operation, freedom to set the objective, planning, active participation, action	
Approaches	Thematic, debate, research course	Thematic, debate, research
Procedures	5-12 participants know each other ■ they are seated so that all can have eye-contact ■ all together their meetings last at least 20 hours ■ the mentors are not teachers ■ active participation and work together ■ increasing the self-reliance ■ planning;	
		■ printed material as the final result; ■ detailed evaluation of SC
Participants	17% inhabitants in 1995	<1% inhabitants in 1995
Structure	Mostly women ■ Small differences between urban and rural areas	75% women ■ 54% 27-45 years ■ 32% level of education is secondary school (1996/97)
Topics	41% art, music, drama ■ 30% medicine, economics, natural science, ... ■ 13% languages n 16% social science, information (Anonymous 1990)	44% culture, handicraft ■ 20% communication, health care, cooking art n 3% languages 36% other (ad hoc comparison)

In Slovenia the *main goal of every study circle* is individual's learning, knowledge revival, gaining skills and experiences. On the other hand people in SC are satisfying other needs than learning etc.; these are the needs for safety, social adherence, emotional attachment, gaining self-confidence and discovering the unknown (Mijoč, Krajnc, Findeisen 1993).

For the social community the SC are significant in the role of complementary educational offer and stimulation of the individuals for assuming active social roles and their implementation in the democratic way. They should therefore contribute both to social democratization and also as to influencing the local surrounding development, which is a *primary goal of the project „Study Circles" at the SAEC* (Klemenčič 1995).

3. THE MOTIVES OF STUDY CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS

The motives of study circle participants are another crucial element indispensable for the existence of SC and their further affirmation. The motives for participation in the SC can be detected at least in two ways: **a)** directly (questions to the SC leaders, mentors and participants) and **b)** indirectly from the SC topics.

Within the five years of SC' implementation in Slovenia, the motives for participating in the SC have been varying. In the first year of the project (1993/94) the prevailing motives for work in SC were as follows (Klemenčič 1995): **1.** an aspiration for innovation in the adult education field (expressed by leaders), **2.** a wish for personal development, learning (expressed by mentors), **3.** a desire to acquire new knowledge and implement changes in the local environment (expressed by the SC participants).

The opportunity for action proved to be the most stimulating both for the best- and the less-well educated, elderly people and residents of the localities with fewer than 1000 inhabitants. Therefore we assume, that these particular groups of inhabitants feel excluded from social events and also feel isolated (ibid, p. 164). SC were indeed most welcome in the localities, where there are no opportunities for adult education (ibid, p. 112) and among people who are generally not involved in any form of adult education (ibid, p. 116). That is why it is important for them to assume this social role.

Later on, the leaders' and mentors' personal motives were identified. Leaders, for example, wanted to get the opportunity to realize their ideas, which they could not do before, and saw the opportunity of obtaining financial support. Mentors were interested in their own education, in new forms of socialization, in their town/village development, and in working with other people (Malečkar, Chvatal 1997). The authors indicate a change of interest in

the second year of project implementation (p=1%, N_1=212, N_2=485), but they do not explain exactly what these changed motives are. The priority still goes to the SC topic, gaining new knowledge and its implementation in the local community.

In the year 1996/97, 331 individuals were part of the investigation, one third approximately were attracted to the SC according to the selected topic, 25% because of the opportunity to socialize with others, 23% a desire for knowledge (Černoša 1998). Only 14% came with the intention to make changes in their locality. In the last study year we have not made any inquiries, though we estimate that there have not been any important changes.

The motives of the Swedish SC participants were studied through SC topics, described in the following chapter. The main motive for coming into the study circle is seen from the following definition: „study circles are a meeting-place to break away from isolation and a way to learn something that was in the person's genuine interest" (Larsson et al. 1996).

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Study Circles Topics and Trends in their Selection

We suppose that for Slovenia the prevailing motive of coming into a study circle is a basic „bottom-up" feature – the choice of the topic. So we compared the SC topics according to the first classification (Malečkar, Chvatal 1997), as the classifications do slightly differ in various sources. Černoša (1998) draws attention to the difficulties which arise while setting the classification criteria. It would therefore be wise to dedicate some time to its improvement which would guarantee international comparability. Table 2 shows the percent of study circles classified according to the topics.

Table 2: Percent of study circles classified according to the topics from the year 1993/94 to the year 1997/98 (source for the years 1993/94 and 1994/95 is Malečkar, Chvatal 1997, for the years 1995/96 and 1996/97 Černoša 1998, for the year 1997/98 the preliminary basic data were used).

SC TOPIC / STUDY YEAR / Number of SC in the year	PERCENT OF STUDY CIRCLES					
	1993/94 n=34	1994/95 n=84	1995/96 n=125	1996/97 n=116	1997/98 n=131	ALL N=490
1. Manual skills	9	14	13	18	21	16
2. Ethnology	0	16	15	15	15	14
3. Cultural creation work	23	7	14	17	12	14
4. Cooking	17	8	5	3	8	7
5. Personal development, relationships	9	11	8	4	20	11
6. Media	3	2	5*	4*	0	3
7. Ecology	3	4	5	4	2	3
8. Computer skills	0	2	1	1	0	1
9. Astronomy	0	1	1	0	0	0
10. Healthy life	0	5	8	12**	5	7
11. Gardening	6	6	2	3	2	3
12. Education	6	7	5	7***	3	6
13. Economy + law	6	6	5	6	5	5
14. Tourism	6	7	7	7	5	6
15. Sport in recreation	3	0	2	0	1	1
16. Foreign languages	9	4	4	2	1	3

* also Communication (4) (Černoša 1998)
** also Quality of Life (14) (Malečkar, Chvatal 1997)
*** also History (5) (Klemenčič 1995)

The table shows a variety of the SC topics which confirms not only the creativity and craving for knowledge of the participants, but also the project goals. Comparable diversity was found by Larsson (1996) even on the level of the single participant. An increasing activity is obvious. These changes during the last years were not statistically controlled as it is rather difficult to bring together various topic fields. We have focused on the prevailing of the first five activity fields, especially the national topic (preserving the dialects, learning the local history, tradition, cooking etc.) where the participants from the frontier region

had been particularly active. Study circles in Prekmurje and in the region of Koper had been particularly careful in preserving the natural and cultural landscape. Their activity is being expressed via artistic products, performances, brochures and expositions, some of them with research documentation. More and more SC have been in the last year dealing with personal development, mutual relations and communication skills. The reasons for this are probably the market needs and regional development.

There were not many socially engaging topics, merely about 10%. One tenth to one fifth of the members tries to actively engage themselves in influencing their local community environment. Mostly there are issues like dealing with the unemployment, discrimination of provincial life in and ecological issues. The majority of the SC participants deal with the topics directed towards awareness of their environment, learning about history, their personality, new skills – learning in its most exact meaning.

In Swedish SC, art, music and drama dominate (41.4%). Medicine, health care, economy, marketing, business, mathematics, communication skills are present in 30% of SC and social sciences and informatics in 15.6% of SC. Last but not least, 13.4% of topics are languages (all Anonymous 1990). Indirect information about the motivation of Swedes to learn in the SC could be extracted from different research results, arising from different research aims. For example, SC topics are divided into activity types: ■ education and ■ leisure time; or into SC concentrated to: ■ individual, personal development or ■ community level (Höghielm, Gougoulakis 1995).

Larsson formed six units: development of interest, learning, friendship development, personal development, democracy development, research group (Larsson et al. 1996).

Up till now no trends in SC topics in Sweden have been found.

It is difficult, even impossible, to generalize on the importance of SC topics since : ■ the non-elaborate classification and ■ the non-examinable validity of the SC topics for identification of the needs for social change.

Another crucial point of comparison is the lack of developmental knowledge and field experience of the Swedish SC. That is why we offer just a reflection upon the meaning of a SC topic as we see it from the facts presented.

The ideal performance of the SC reflects *the needs of people:* the motivation is so high that they achieve the goals without even being aware of all the initial aims. The mode of work in SC allows, makes it possible and even encourages active realization of the participant's needs so the study of the SC topics can indirectly reveal particular social group functioning principles. Would it be possible to find out the different needs of people living in town and those living in rural areas? Would it be possible to identify the dependency on social groups from the natural circumstances? Slovenian geography offers an ideal example for such comparisons. We can also put it the other way round – for SC development, the topics need to accommodate various goals of the particular groups of participants (like people with special needs, peasants, younger unemployed, employed). The support should be given to the skills and knowledge which are not being specially required from the participants but are nevertheless important for the society (ecology education, communication skills, etc.).

The dual role of the SC is being confirmed – at the individual and at the social level – in SC, which have grown into associations. They are undoubtedly of good quality, therefore we can *conclude the quality of a particular study circle* by its topic continuity. Quality is one of the universal principles guaranteeing a successful implementation of this form of learning.

The domination of the topics which are not socially engaging gives rise to some basic issues for at least two levels of performance (the project level and the national adult education strategy level):

1. Project level

■ What could be a logical classification of SC according to the fields of topics? Which criteria would best satisfy our intention to see the social engagement of a particular SC and also of motives of participants?

Example: In the Environmental protection topic (see Table 2, p. 127) some SC concentrate on an understanding of the system functioning while others try to resolve a concrete environmental issue.

■ Can the goals of particular participants be opposite to the project goals?

Among the project goals is also social engagement which does not figure among the goals of most of the participants (Klemenčič 1995, Malečkar, Chvatal 1997, Černoša 1998).

■ How are we to properly evaluate the relative value of the five-times increase of the number of SC in five years? High/ low? – due to: ■ the period of their presence (see Table 2, p. 127), ■ the budget for development of SC (see Basic issues), ■ the number of participants (see Table 2).

2. Adult education national strategy level

■ Can we talk of global trigger mechanisms for the SC topics selection?

Example: social non-engagement is according to Oliver (Oliver 1987, p. 73) an outcome of the material well-being, which encourages individualism and kills the cravings for changes.

■ Does the meeting for „personal development and social change" (ibid.) finally remain without any social change?

■ What is the position of the low percent of socially engaged SC in both countries compared in relation to Blid´s statement that only participation in

the social environment gives to SC importance, adherence and identity (Blid 1987, p. 27)?

■ Is the need for social change a condition for SC expansion? In Sweden this form of adult education shifts from the social alternative to the qualitative spending of free time. What would this statement mean for Slovenia and what is the essential priority of the SC to other forms of spending free time?

■ Is the selection of topics typical for Slovenia according to its spatial and historical characteristics?

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Conclusions

In Slovenia we are trying to enrich the educational offer in the field of accessible forms of gaining the basic knowledge. Through SC we would like to contribute to democratization on different levels from the individual to society in the time of political and social changes in the context of European processes. SC are organized as a project of SAEC as an opportunity for free education and the creation of a sense of community and group belongingness. They have no tradition yet, since the project is in the formation and development stage.

We have developed self-study material for SC leaders and mentors training, and we carry out work on a rational data evaluation. Simultaneously, we have been looking for high quality achievement of single SC by following the primary principles.

The diversity and multifunctionality of SC is in our opinion the basis for their strength as a social and educational form. Our primary goal in this article is to take a critical look at Slovenian SC topics in comparison with the Swedish ones since they were used as the implementation source. It could be questionable if the developmental stage in both countries is comparable at all (Bron 1998), but in our opinion the difficulties rise mainly from the question of the principles and

their development; this, however, goes beyond the aim of the article. Besides the differences in the length of tradition, percent of SC participants from all the inhabitants (see Table 1, p. 124) and financial input of the state (see Basic issues in the unit 2, pp.122-123), similar findings were identified in both countries. We focused on implementation of local changes which is expressed in both countries merely in one tenth to one fifth of SC. We do not know the reasons for this but it would be interesting to identify them especially from the point of the origin of SC. In Sweden, it was at the turn of the century, when SC arose out of social movements; while in Slovenia, it was almost a hundred years later, when SC were introduced at a crucial social turning point. The reasons for identifying of the clue mechanisms of SC performance in Slovenia are as follows: **1.** We see the results of the first five years of the project as stimulative, although the countries with a larger population and budget could interpret them without the context being seen as less important. However, it is surprising though that this delicate social moment of European economical and political association and the increasing unemployment, in which practically every individual is involved, does not stimulate the larger increase of this form of education. **2.** The small size of the state and variety of natural and social circumstances is important. The advantage of the small size state is a strategic importance of such projects, while the geographical variety allows for different research comparisons. **3.** Comparative analysis of the particular SC performance segments in Sweden and in Slovenia show similar features, so we will therefore concentrate on the relation between the local and the global. **4.** SC topics in Slovenia are the basic „bottom-up" motive, which is crucial for their further implementation. **5.** Flexibility of a SC is a key note for stability. In Slovenia flexible and multifunctional forms are necessary, not only in the field of education but in other sectors as well. That would accelerate our integration into global processes while at the same time enabling us to preserve our own identity.

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ADULT EDUCATION POLICIES AND CREDIT BANK SYSTEMS FOR ADULT PARTICIPATION IN KOREAN AND US HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

In the 21st century, the necessity to restructure society including the workplace will require people to be flexible and able to adjust to change. The knowledge and skills acquired through formal basic education provide a basis for flexibility, but even this needs on-going revision and upgrading through adult and continuing education. For citizens people of the 21st century, lifelong learning is not a luxury, but a necessity (Bélanger, Tuijnman 1997, p. 39). All members of society must be motivated and enabled to access and use lifelong learning as a tool for acquiring new knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in the processes that shape future society. Thus, adult education in every society and country is essential for a prosperous and just future.

In many countries, adult education has traditionally been a form of substitute schooling for many adults who were unable to attend formal school. However, its classical role rapidly changed in response to worldwide dissatisfaction with formal schooling and the rapid rate of technological change in the last two decades. Instead of the existing „front-end education" model, there have been attempts to conceptualize „lifelong education" by UNESCO and „recurrent education" by OECD (Giere 1994, p. 1). As a result, the concept of lifelong education has placed children, youth, and adults in an all-embracing yet diversified and cyclic educational system through educational reform and policy in most countries.