

## COMMUNITY CULTURE AND ADULT LEARNING

© László PONYI

(Egri Kulturális és Művészeti Központ, Eger, Hungary)

[ponyi.laszlo@ekmk.eu](mailto:ponyi.laszlo@ekmk.eu)

*This study seeks to present the various types of adult learning that are presently available in the system of community culture. We will briefly outline those fundamental problems of adult education that also influence the adult learning aspects of community culture. We postulate that community culture is now a condition, opportunity and existing practice in the area of adult education, although according to the official view – voiced on more than one occasion – it is not regarded as part of the adult education system.*

**Keywords:** community culture, adult learning, adult education, formal, informal, non-formal learning, lifelong learning

According to point q of supplement 1 of Act CXL of 1997 on museum institutions, public library provision and community culture (hereinafter: “Act on Culture”) “Community culture constitutes the spontaneous extracurricular self-education, knowledge- and culture-acquisition as well as cultural and creative activity of citizens”. This supplement provides a basis for interpretation for formal and non-formal education and informal learning within community culture. Community culture forms part of the cultural sector and acts as its institutional framework, facilitating active community education as well as the mediation of cultural property and services. Its operation is funded by central, local government and other sources and its scope is determined by general and specific statutes. It is a system of conditions and activities that encourages the educational activity of individuals and communities, provides an opportunity for self-education, civil self-organisation, community education, lifelong learning and education involving all segments of life (Koncz & Németh & Szabó, 2007).

The Adult Education Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences came into being in April 2007 charged with the task of examining the situation regarding “Lifelong Learning” in Hungary. Based on their report it can be established that in Hungary only certain elements of the approach exist according to which the process of learning does not end with mastering a skill or acquiring a qualification or degree. A unified system that would ensure the process for lifelong learning has not yet been developed in Hungary. The opportunities for learning are often not transparent for the individual. However, there are positive trends: e.g. the introduction of andragogy programmes in adult education, and adult education having its own public body and journal.

Another important point established by the report is that LLL is an issue and problem that affects the whole of society. It is not just the internal affair of one or two sciences as it is also a pedagogical, andrological, sociological,

demographic and even a public health issue. In the western part of Europe the fundamental issues are how, where and why the individual should study. In Hungary the question is why people do not study.

It constitutes a problem that educational institutions are not open to adult education, while the Hungarian education system maintains and reproduces social inequalities. In Hungary the main focus is placed upon schooling, while scant attention is paid to competences acquired in the framework of non-formal education and informal learning. In Hungary 20% of the population over 15 have less than eight years of formal schooling. This situation could be significantly improved by community culture, which facilitates and promotes informal and non-formal learning; however, at the present time the official professional and political canon does not regard community culture as being part of LLL and adult education. In the EU 9.6% of the adult population participates in education, while in Hungary this proportion is only 3.8%. It speaks volumes that in Hungary 60% of the population over 15 has eight years of schooling, and this proportion does not move up to the higher levels of education. It is an additional difficulty that the education and training available do not match the needs of the economy.

The Act on Culture not only provides a basis for interpretation but also charges public education to engage in informal and non-formal learning. Among the tasks in regard to community culture to be performed by municipal governments the following activities are defined by several points in paragraph (2) of section 76 of the Act as obligatory, of which virtually each one has/may have an aspect that places it within the confines of formal, informal and non-formal learning:

- a) launching spontaneous, extracurricular, self-educational and vocational courses, creating opportunities for learning and adult education to improve the quality of life and life chances of the participants, as well as establishing people's colleges;
- b) exploring and disseminating the environmental, intellectual and artistic values and traditions in municipalities, and the nurturing and enrichment of local cultural practices;
- c) dissemination of the values of universal, national, minority and other ethnic cultures, the promotion of understanding and inclusion, as well as nurturing the traditions pertaining to festivals;
- d) facilitating the activities of amateur creative and cultural groups, and the dissemination of popular science;
- e) and facilitating the building and maintenance of intercultural relations.

Community culture is not and may not only be linked to adult education on the basis of the above-cited law but also on the basis of its tasks and institutions that have developed over the course of history. This remains true even if these areas have on occasion become separate from each another. The areas of adult education interlink and have interlinked with those of education and community culture (Juhász, 2008). At the beginning of the 1990s the network of community culture institutions did not fall victim to the change in the system, as smaller or larger community centres, cultural centres, village halls, culture houses, etc. continued to operate in almost every settlement. Based on the statistics it can be established that the system of community culture institutions covers 90% of the country's settlements.

According to a research project and the related study of 2003 on the users, locations and role played by community centres, half of the country's population between 14-70 – over four million people – visited community

centres for one reason or another (Hunyadi, 2004). These institutions are the most accessible in Hungary and attract the most diverse group of visitors of all the cultural institutions. The study indicates – similarly to Harangi –, that in many cases the community centres represent the only possibility to access culture in some settlements. Relevant statistical data in Hunyadi's study (Hunyadi, 2004) showing the proportion of those who last went to a community centre to learn something in the past year, broken down by education, age and settlement type, can be used in the practice and design of adult education programmes in community culture.

In summary, approximately a quarter of the population pursues some kind of amateur artistic activity in community centres or elsewhere.

*Table 1. The proportion of visitors to community centres in various social-demographic segments in 1996 and 2003*

	1996	2003	Change as compared to 1996
	%	%	%
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	51	52	1.2
female	50	55	<b>4.7</b>
<b>Schooling</b>			
Eight years or less of primary education	43	47	<b>4.1</b>
Vocational school	48	53	<b>5.1</b>
Secondary school leaving certificate	57	57	0.6
Degree	61	64	<b>2.6</b>
<b>Age group</b>			
14-17	75	70	<b>-5.2</b>
18-29	59	56	<b>-2.9</b>
30-39	54	60	<b>6.3</b>
40-49	49	53	<b>3.5</b>
50-59	42	49	<b>7.1</b>
60-70	34	36	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Type of settlement</b>			
Budapest	41	42	1.1
County seat	49	50	0.3
Town	59	57	-2.3
Township	50	58	<b>8.4</b>
<b>Size of settlement</b>			
Township with a population under 2,000	47	60	<b>13.3</b>
Township with a population between 2-5 thousand	53	54	0.9
Township with population of 5-20 thousand	51	64	<b>12.5</b>
Town with population under 10 thousand	63	59	<b>-4.5</b>
Town with population between 10-100 thousand	59	57	<b>-2.1</b>
County seat	50	50	0.3
Budapest	41	42	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>2</b>

A comparison of the data from 1996 and from the research of 2003 allows us to ascertain that the number of visitors to community centres rose by 2% and that the composition of the visiting public has moved towards groups of a lower societal status (women, people with less than eight years of primary education). It is worthy of note that the numbers of those of school age and those of young people have decreased.

Table 2. The composition of those visiting community centres 1996-2003

	1996	2003	change as compared to 1996
	%	%	%
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	51	47	-3.6
Female	49	53	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Schooling</b>			
Eight years or less of primary education	28	33	<b>4.8</b>
Vocational school	26	24	-2.3
Secondary school leaving certificate	32	29	-2.8
Degree	14	14	0.3
<b>Age group</b>			
14-17	8	10	2.0
18-29	28	26	-2.5
30-39	21	20	-1.0
40-49	20	20	-0.1
50-59	13	16	3.0
60-70	10	9	-1.4
<b>Type of settlement</b>			
Budapest	16	14	-2.0
County seat	18	16	-2.1
Town	31	30	-1.0
Township	35	40	<b>5.0</b>
<b>Size of settlement</b>			
township with population under 2,000	15	20	<b>4.5</b>
Township with population between 2-5 thousand	13	15	1.8
Township with population between 5-20 thousand	7	5	-1.2
Town with population below 10 thousand	6	7	1.7
Town with population between 10-100 thousand	25	23	-2.7
County seat	18	16	-2.1
Budapest	16	14	-2.0
Total	100	100	

57% of visitors to community centres are composed of more highly schooled people, while 43% are less schooled. In regard to age, the proportion of 14-30 year-olds is 36%. A large proportion of visitors came from the 30-50 age group, amounting to 73%.

Other data taken from the study shows that 15% of the total population expressed a need for the cultural, arts events, courses and workshops available in community centres. Approximately 30% of visitors to community centres used them as a venue for non-formal learning, courses, as well as popular science programmes and lectures.

Community culture is now an existing practice in adult education. Following the change in the system adult education and vocational training appeared as new activities in this area. Harangi differentiated the following types of non-formal and formal educational and vocational training programmes that appear in community culture (Harangi, 2000, 22-23):

1. Mainly the NQR (National Qualifications Register) training programmes, which prepare participants for some kind of vocation and provide a certificate and qualification (the overwhelming majority of these are in the service and administrative sectors);
2. Training programmes linked to community culture and other areas of culture (pottery, film production, etc.);
3. Training programmes that do not provide an officially certified qualification but consolidate the student's employment situation, or offer practical knowledge and help to supplement income.

In addition, there are programmes that have been generated by the seven-year further education decree pertaining to the cultural sector, as well as labour-market-oriented adult education activities being introduced and developed using EU funds – within the framework of Social Renewal Operational Programmes. (Decree 1/2000 [I.14] on the organised training scheme for culture professionals, its requirements and funding, issued by the Hungarian Ministry of National Cultural Heritage. The decree stipulates that those professionally active in the cultural sector complete a 120-lesson course every seven years.)

Community culture institutions can be regarded as complex LLL institutions since the formal and non-formal education and informal learning and training programmes they offer encompass the entire span of human life from childhood to old age.

According to a study by Erika Borbáth (Borbáth & Tórh, 2009), community culture activities play an important role in the development of children's creativity.

Approximately two hundred thousand children took part in the mentioned workshops in 2006. According to the personal experience of the author of this study, these workshops are outstandingly popular among parents and children alike since they were organised on a non-profit basis, are affordable and exert a positive influence on children's personality development and their communal responsiveness in a fundamentally individualised consumer society. Over one third of the adult population are members of some cultural, creative community. (These include choruses, theatrical, dance, and folk groups etc.). Informal learning primarily takes place in such groups as these. It can be seen from the graph that some one and a half million people are members of these communities.

Community culture plays an important role in the development of key competences. Competence is a multifarious concept and can mean expertise, skills, suitability and ability in a given area.

Within these the author regards the development of communication, cooperation and problem solving competences as being of the most pronounced importance in the area of community culture, and at the same time feasible on the basis of the activities that take place in the above-mentioned communities. The named competences are abilities expected of

the members of any cultural group, while on the other hand the communities themselves develop these competences through their own activities. These competences are a prerequisite for properly functioning cultural groups and an important basis for community development.

Based on the statistics, it can be seen that there is great demand for non-formal and informal learning offered by community culture institutions in the whole population and among the visitors to community centres. We hold the view that based pertaining to informal learning, non-formal and formal educational programmes in the area, it can be taken as proven that community culture represents a living reality, it is a natural consequence of the existing system of institutions and it offers a further opportunity for adult education. In order for the problems detailed in the second chapter of this study to be solved, a paradigm shift is needed above all. It would be important for the actors in adult education, public education institutes, other adult education organisations, civil organisations and the players of community culture to co-operate to develop a joint educational and cultural strategy, major projects and a network in the area of adult education. However, all of this would require not only professional but also political decisions as well as support.

## References

- BORBÁTH, Erika & TÓTH, Erzsébet (2009): A közművelődés feladatai az iskolarendszeren kívüli formális, informális és nonformális képzésben az iskoláskorúak és a felnőttek körében. *Iskolakultúra*, 19 (11), pp. 134-140.
- HARANGI, László (2000): *A nonnormális felnőttképzés helyszínei és aktorai*. In: Harangi, László & Pordány, Sarolta (Eds.): *Felnőttképzés a közművelődésben*. Magyar Művelődési Intézet, Budapest, pp. 25-33.
- HUNYADI, Zsuzsa (2004): *A művelődési házak közönsége, helye, szerepe a kulturális fogyasztásban*. Magyar Művelődési Intézet & MTA Szociológiai Kutató Intézet, Budapest.
- JUHÁSZ, Erika (2008): Research in history of Hungarian adult education. *Szín*, 13 (6), pp. 18-21.
- KONCZ, Gábor & NÉMETH, János & SZABÓ, Irma (Eds.) (2007): *Közművelődési fogalomtár*. OKM Közművelődési Főosztály, Budapest.

## Statutes

- Act CXL of 1997 on museum institutions, public library provision and community culture
- Decree 1/2000 (I. 14) on the organised training scheme for culture professionals, its requirements and funding, issued by the Hungarian Ministry of National Cultural Heritage