Building Inclusive Communities through Education and Learning

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Edited by

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Editorial

Klara Skubic Ermenc
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The book *Building Inclusive Communities through Education and Learning* looks into the complex, multidimensional relationships among three phenomena: learning, education and the community. On one hand, the authors explore the significance of the community to the development of the individual (children, students, adults, the elderly) and to the professional development of the teacher; on the other, they also examine what potential and drawbacks learning and education have for the development of the community itself.

The point of departure is the concept of the community and its relationship with learning and education. Broadly speaking, two different approaches to community building can be distinguished. The first approach champions the development of strong communities, that is, communities understood as "common identities". Such a community provides its members with shared values and beliefs. Plurality and diversity are reined in through the community members' consensus, and education either encourages the development of the community members' common identity or works towards the inclusion of people into homogenous communities. In the education field the concept of strong community is closely related to the concept of integration. Integration refers to the process of mainstreaming of learners with special needs (or minority learners and those of immigrant background) based on the identification of their deficits and aimed towards eliminating or reducing them. To put it simply, such learners are supported in their struggle to become part of the homogenous (school) community, and the individualised educational support is there to help bridge the gap between the majority and the "different". The other approach takes the plurality, diversity and antagonisms to be the *raison d'être* of democratic communities in the public sphere that need not be reined in; today's communities are in many respects characterised by their diversity, plurality and differences rather than being understood as homogeneous entities associated with stability, as well as strong geographical and cultural

boundaries. It advocates "communities of strangers" in which individuals must learn about the otherness of their dialogue partners (Evans, Kurantowicz, and Lucio-Villegas 2016; Wildemeersch and Kurantowicz 2011). This approach is closer to the authors who argue for the constitution of plural, inclusive, "other" communities (Biesta, 2006; Biesta and Cowell 2012) where people speak and work together, but it is not necessary that they always strive for a consensus. They examine the approaches to community cooperation in which people are connected primarily by their ability to respond to those with whom they have "nothing in common" (Biesta, 2006). According to Biesta, such a view on the community and educational institutions is normative; it explores "ways in which peaceful co-existence of what is incommensurable, of what cannot be kept together within a framework, of what is different and other is possible" (2004, p. 310). The concept of inclusion in education requires the conditions to exist for the process of subjectification for everyone to take place, regardless of each individual's characteristics and circumstances. It also requires that the circumstances are established for the creation of a community whose members will cooperate fruitfully regardless of the differences among them. The differences are not seen as obstacles and something that needs to be bridged or amended, but the normal state of affairs.

The book is diverse thematically and methodologically. It covers and intertwines the areas of the education of adults and children, integrating the findings of empirical research, theoretical studies as well as the conclusions of a comparative and a historical study. Although the studies primarily employ Slovenian samples and social context, the authors address the issues that are dealt with by researchers in the global research community; they respond to international debates and engage in the dialogue between the local/partial and the global/universal. Moreover, they respond to international debates and engage in the dialogue between the local/partial and the global/universal. They raise the fundamental issues of the potential of educational institutions in changing the institutions' environments as well as their (in)ability to function autonomously.

The book is an outcome of the research of a group of researchers and university teachers who work at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, in education research and who have participated, since 2015, in the basic research project that looks at the relationships between the community and the school (education) from a variety of perspectives. It differs from other similar monographies by studying the relationship between the community and learning/education from the aspect of children and students as well as from the aspect of adults, employing the concept of lifelong learning. The studies examining attitudes of the community towards learning and

education typically focus on either children or adults, whereas this book explores both common and distinguishing dimensions. What makes the book unique in its attitudes towards teaching, learning, education and the community, however, is its embeddedness in the critical intellectual continental European tradition and the failed historical experience of developing educational communities in former Yugoslavia (1945–1990) with the attempts at achieving collective unity through the community understood as a common identity. By combining two main approaches of understanding of communities and based on quantitative and qualitative empirical studies, as well as theoretical discussions, the authors hope it will offer new insights into understanding how learning and education can be meaningful for communities and vice versa.

The book is divided into four parts and includes thirteen chapters.

The first part of the book, *From Local to Transnational and Virtual Learning Communities,* investigates the concept of the community in relation to learning and education. The concept of community has two basic meanings: the community as a physical (geographical) space in which people live and the community as a social network of people who share interests or characteristics. The authors also take into consideration the fact that with globalisation processes and political integration new communities emerge (the European Union) and that digitalisation promotes virtual communities or virtual learning environments.

Chapter 1, The Pluralisation of Transitions to the After-Working Life Phase: The Perceptions of Sociocultural Animators in Slovenia, shows that an increasing number of studies investigate the processes of older men's (self-)exclusion from the community and the wider society and analyse the dramatic consequences leading to the low quality of the life of these individuals and the wider society. This chapter is a case study of the perceptions of sociocultural animators from Slovenia and their understanding of the social position of older adults in the community. The main research question focuses on the transition to retirement and the possibilities of post-retirement productivity, engagement, learning and participation. Retirement is a significant cut in their biographies that has to be substituted for with something else, and the sociocultural animators' life histories confirm the deep-rootedness of the hegemonic understanding of masculine identity and masculinity capital as well as the need for a redefinition of masculine capital and gender capital. The chapter considers the plurality of transitions to retirement and new life situations that can provide older adults (including men over the age of 60) with better-quality processes of ageing and with better lives.

    The author of the second chapter, Building the European Community through Education and Lifelong Learning, studies the role which used to be ascribed to education but which is nowadays mainly linked to lifelong learning in establishing, maintaining and strengthening the European community. He considers the understanding of the EU as a (geographical) space and a social network of people who share various characteristics and interests. The chapter clarifies the role that education used to have and that lifelong learning has today in European community building, analysing the more relevant EU policies and initiatives pertaining to education and learning. The author argues that education is the 'fourth pillar' or 'core technology' in European community building. It has a crucial role in addressing the EU's common socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges and it attempts to develop the community with a common European identity. The chapter concludes by emphasising the potential of community education at the EU level to address and overcome several contradictions and ambiguities that are inscribed in community education at the local level.

    Chapter 3, "The Community of Inquiry" as a Method of Encouraging Collaborative Learning in the Virtual Learning Environment, reveals that learning and teaching in the educational environment where the teacher and learners are not simultaneously present in the physical classroom has become increasingly common. Slovenia is no exception in continuing to introduce, with increasing frequency, distance education, online learning, blended learning, etc. into educational programmes at all levels. All these educational approaches share an important element which defines importantly the main characteristic of learning in virtual learning environments: specific interaction between learners and teachers during learning (and teaching). The main difference, and according to many the main disadvantage, of all kinds of education in virtual learning environments is a lack of interaction and the absence of a community (of students and teachers). Research into virtual communities and the processes of developing these communities in virtual learning environments is a relatively new area of research in online learning. The authors of the chapter present the theory of the Community of Inquiry (CoI). The CoI model assumes that effective e-education is not simply a consequence of the working of cognitive factors and the teacher's interventions; rather, the social aspect is equally important, which means that effective e-education requires the existence of a community. The authors analyse the significance of the concept of the community and its characteristics in e-education in terms of the CoI model. They focus on the findings of empirical studies of the effects of each element on the quality of learning and teaching in virtual learning environments.

In the second part of the book *The Reflection, Research, Self-Evaluation and Strengthening of the (School) Community*, the authors consider that community can also denote a (professional) group of practitioners, for instance teachers, mentors, etc. They investigate various dimensions of the relationships between the research done by community members (citizens and educators) and the communities that their research and engagement with self-evaluation help build and change.

Chapter 4, Action Research in Community Education, shows that adult and older-adult community education is closely integrated in the cultural environment. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this chapter consists of cultural studies and the concepts of non-formal education and community development. The author analyses selected examples of community education (in Slovenia) that developed on the basis of action research and identifies the differences between (traditional) action research and participatory action research by emphasising the importance of the latter to socio-cultural changes. The examples used in the analysis (intergenerational learning education, green education, education in a library/museum) all employed participatory action research and were part of international projects. Action research links up with action learning with new research and learning environments emerging as the consequences. Community development occurs through the development of new practices (via learning in the community). The 21st century is the century of looking for practices that will address the complexity of the challenges of the relationships between humans and technology as well as humans and making meaning. The author considers the combination of action research and lifelong learning to be a new paradigm of learning and development in the environment implemented through research and educational projects in the community.

Chapter 5, The School as a Research Community and Its Significance to Quality Learning and Teaching, turns our attention to schools and to teachers whose role, it is argued, also need to become researchers of the educational practices. Teachers' research is defined as creating knowledge in practice where teachers—alone or with the help of external experts—study and improve practical situations and interpret their findings in light of the set educational goals. Practitioners' research is especially important to the institutions and communities that wish to develop the culture of quality assessment and assurance as well as make steady progress. The chapter presents the findings of a study conducted with a sample of 1530 teachers, school counsellors and head teachers from Slovenian primary and secondary schools. The author use the empirical study to explain the attitudes of the responding educators towards research and what conditions

should be fulfilled, according to them, to make them do research more often and to consider the school as a genuine research community. The emphasis is on the atmosphere that should be created in a research community for research to be successfully carried out and for research findings to be taken into account when attempting to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The chapter examines the beliefs of the responding educators regarding the importance of school climate to research and the degree to which the school management encourages them to do research.

Educators are acknowledged as chief agents in creating space for the mutual learning and collaboration of very diverse individuals in the community, argue the authors of the Chapter 6, Implementing Reflective Practice to Improve Our Participation in the Community. This demanding task requires that they are able to reflect on their own pedagogic practice critically, which various authors seem to be unanimous about. It remains relevant how we educate and train teachers and other educators so that their actions are well thought-out, autonomous and responsible as well as, particularly in conflicts, ethically well judged. The chapter brings a comprehensive overview of reflection in professional training and in encouraging educators' professional and personal development. To facilitate the introduction of reflection, researchers differentiate between a number of reflection complexity levels and depths, developing various reflection encouragement models. Some models are more systematically and analytically oriented, others are more holistic and intuitive. The authors highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the models, enabling informed decisions about choosing and combining them in concrete learning situations. They especially emphasise that when developing critical reflection two dimensions ought to be joined: first, developing the skill of critical thinking so that we are able to recognise the assumptions underlying our beliefs and actions and, second, critical reflection should be related to a wider social context, to power relations in the social group, to values and fundamental social questions. Analysis of different factors of encouraging in-depth critical reflection enables us to define guidelines to implement reflective practice that leads educators towards autonomous and responsible actions in the community where they work and live.

In Chapter 7, The Role of the Community in the Processes of the Self-Evaluation of Compulsory Education in Slovenia, the authors analyse the role and significance of self-evaluation in ensuring the quality of compulsory education in Slovenia. They present the systemic position of self-evaluation in formal documents at the national level, the key conceptual characteristics of self-evaluation and the most widespread solutions of its implementation. Self-evaluation is an increasingly important process in

primary-school education and, consequently, the object of intensive theoretical examination. Among the reasons is the increasing institutional (as well as individual) autonomy of individual schools and teachers, which leads towards greater responsibility of schools for the quality of their work. An important advantage of self-evaluation is enabling debates on quality among all the participants in the school's educational work. It paints a picture of the school's functioning from a variety of perspectives. It enables an insight into how an aspect of the school's work is seen by teachers, students, parents, the management, the school counselling service and others who may be involved in the self-evaluation. Being part of the national projects of quality assessment and assurance, schools participate in the external evaluations and collaborate more closely with the local community and external partners.

Part Three, *Preschools and Schools as Community Co-Creators*, focuses on preschools and schools as the institutions contributing—through strengthening their ties with the community—to the child's or adolescent's broader development (their subjectification and socialisation) and co-creating the communities they enter.

Chapter 8, The Characteristics of the School–Community Collaboration in Slovenian Primary Schools, argues that each school, especially each primary school, is integrated into its wider social environment. Its goals and activities significantly co-create the life in the local community, its individuals and groups. On the other hand, the local community, with its characteristics and opportunities, helps determine the activities in the school as an educational institution. The chapter presents some essential characteristics of collaboration between the school and individuals or institutions in the community. In the theoretical part of the chapter, the authors analyse the basic characteristics of the partnership between the school and the community. They also look at the purpose of the collaboration, which is dependent on and determined by the agreements between the partners and the opportunities and conditions presented by each partner. In the empirical part of the chapter, the authors present part of the findings relating to the empirical study on the collaboration of Slovenian primary schools with different partners, which the authors carried out in the autumn of 2014. On the basis of the results obtained and examples of good practice, the authors conclude that schools engage in collaboration with individuals and institutions in the community in a wide variety of ways. The manner of collaboration should always be adapted to the unique context, situation and needs of the partners involved.

Narrative knowledge achieved through artistic languages is just as important to the development of culture and civilisation as natural sciences

and technological knowledge, show the author of the Chapter 9, The Cooperation of Preschools and Schools with Artists and Cultural Institutions. In the 19th century the significance of art for the development of humanity was mainly emphasised by *Geisteswissenschaft* or humanistic pedagogy, whereas today the thesis on the importance of artistic experience is advanced by reform and critical pedagogies. The former focuses on the image of the rich child and her/his autopoietic development that is well suited to the child's learning about her-/himself and the world with the help of numerous artistic languages and playful symbolic creativity. The latter relates personal and social empowerment to the critical recognition of one's position in society and perspectives of entering the world as a subject. Therefore, it advocates the artistic practices that present social circumstances critically and set up autonomous zones of artistic expression as an engaged way of entering the world. This is predominantly expressed by urban art and participatory approaches in performance art, blurring the borders between performers and the audience. In preschools and schools these goals can be attained in various forms of work with artistic content: for instance, education in art, education with art and education through artistic experience. The author starts from the notion that artistic experience, in combination with other pedagogic means, has an almost irreplaceable potential, since it accesses the experience and knowledge of reality in a specific manner, as a symbolically mediated experience and as an engaged, critical way of entering the world and of changing the world. The chapter looks at a number of selected practices of the collaboration of artists and cultural institutions with schools and preschools in Slovenia and it highlights the pedagogic significance of their achievements.

Chapter 10, *The Play with Me!* Festival – A Case of Blurring Borders between Education and Sociability?, focuses on special educational institutions that used to isolate children and adolescents with special needs, but today they seems to aim at preparing them for life in the wider community and at raising awareness in the wider community of the importance of inclusive societies. More specifically, the study focuses on the festival called *Play with Me!* that a special educational institution, catering for students with intellectual disabilities, located in the capital of Slovenia, has organised for the past decade. The authors of the chapter present the main findings of two studies that they carried out in relation to the festival. The aim of the first research study was to gain insight into the beliefs of those taking part in the *Play with Me!* festival in order to evaluate the inclusively designed festival activities and answer the central question regarding the role of a special educational institution on the path to a more inclusive society. The second study looked at general attitudes towards

inclusion and specific attitudes tied to the place where inclusion is put into effect. The findings imply that the festival events have become a sort of intersectional third place (referring to Oldenburg's concept of the third place and Morrison's typology of places), combining two functions of the first two: it has clearly defined goals, because it tries to reconcile the tasks of education with the tasks of wider social policies, thus strengthening the inclusive orientation both of the education system as a whole and of the community at large. Yet, it attempts to reach these goals in a playful manner, encouraging volunteering at the festival and in individual playful activities that the participants choose according to their interests, looking for ways to present their artistic expressions, hoping to socialise and have fun in a relaxed atmosphere.

The final, fourth part of the book, *The Role of the Teacher in Educating Students for the Community and in the Community Today and in the Past*, takes the reader back in the 19th century and finishes with some burning issues of contemporary education. In the 19th century Slovenian teachers undertook subversive activities in order to foster the development of the Slovenian community. Today such activities are no longer needed. However, there is a need for teachers to educate the young in the spirit of respect for the Other as well as discuss intolerance and exclusion in the school and society. Nevertheless, the school ought not to get caught in a trap and let itself become a catalyst for social problems. It should look for new forms of its own autonomy, the author of the final chapter concludes.

Chapter 11, The Influence of Slovenian Teachers in the Development of the Slovenian Community in Austria-Hungary, studies the out-of-school activities of Slovenian teachers during the Austro-Hungarian period. The chapter is a historical analysis of the 1867–1914 period, in which the author identifies the influence of Slovenian teachers' out-of-school activities on the development of Slovenian communities in Austria-Hungary's autonomous regions with Slovenian population. The author examines the teachers' impact on the education of the Slovenian population as well as on the development of the Slovenian education system and university. Teacher colleges that educated future Slovenian teachers did so in the German spirit, not in Slovenian spirit, which corresponded with the existing Austrian educational policies. In addition to the requirements of Austrian state educational policies, even in opposition to them, Slovenian teachers saw one of their main goals in spreading the Slovenian language, culture and print. The findings show that outside schools Slovenian teachers worked towards and influenced the development of the Slovenian community through their Slovenian teachers' associations and their print that encouraged all Slovenian teachers to do national and national-awakening

work. In addition to print, they also looked after school libraries. Their teacher conferences were important, too, just like attending national rallies and setting up the Slovenian School Museum in Ljubljana. Thus the teachers worked towards the establishment of Slovenian schools and university with Slovenian as the language of teaching, Slovenian textbooks and, generally, the development of the Slovenian community.

The author of the Chapter 12, How Should Schools Avoid Strengthening the Excluding Attitude towards Contagious Others in the Community, demonstrates how intolerance, exclusion and stigmatisation may be (are) present in schools, which makes it necessary to consider education for respect for formal social norms and the shared values inscribed in them. The author acknowledges that normality is a social construct. Consequently, respect for diversity and particularity (in addition to education for the "shared and the common") is the starting point of education in public educational institutions in Slovenia. She recognises human rights as "an empty, universal idea". Everybody should be protected in her/his particularity, and the measure of universality is the individual at the bottom, the position that each of us shares in one way or another. Education in public schools should, therefore, integrate both the 'socio-critical' element and the element of coexistence in the community. The limits (objectively) set by others (the state, the institution) must be clear about the possibilities of change and influencing the changes. The teacher cannot adopt or express the view that the existing norms—although they are reflected upon and critically thought about—may be bypassed despite their being legal and in force. However, this does not mean that they cannot be debated critically and that we should not look for possibilities of changing them. In this context teachers should be able to reflect on the formal framework of human rights and values that are the origin of formal norms. They should also be able to recognise the elements of legislation and the curriculum that are potentially incompatible with these values.

The final chapter 13, Schools under the Strain of Societal Expectations, argues that nowadays a school is under considerable strain imposed by parents, the state and pedagogic disciplines. The school seems to have become the main culprit for the accumulated problems and difficulties that individuals in a society or community are unable to deal with on their own. Moreover, the school seems to be a catalyst for the problems. Such a position is neither favourable nor useful for the school, while it also points to a lack of knowledge regarding the laws according to which schools function and the relationships between the school and society or the community. Without doubt, the school must follow the demands and requirements of the present time. It must also be sensitive to change, and it

is the initiatives and demands coming from different groups of civil society that play an important role in it. The latter help experts and politicians reflect various findings in school legislation and pedagogic practice. However, it is vital to be careful about the effects of possible changes in the paradigm of European educational tradition in public/state institutions. To be successful in working towards a better and higher-quality school, different initiatives should be justified and argued for in the spirit of European cultural tradition, just as they should be considered feasible in a particular society or community.

It is our hope that the book could be regarded as a valuable collection, and would contribute to a better understanding of the multifaceted relationships among learning, teaching, education and the community.

Acknowledgment

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PART ONE

FROM LOCAL TO TRANSNATIONAL
AND VIRTUAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

CHAPTER ONE

THE PLURALISATION OF TRANSITIONS
TO THE AFTER-WORKING LIFE PHASE:
THE PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIOCULTURAL
ANIMATORS IN SLOVENIA

MARTA GREGORČIČ

Introduction

The starting point for this chapter is the thesis that significantly fewer men in the third and fourth life stages than women of the same age realise the importance of lifelong learning and of the advantages of active participation in the community. The low participation rates of older men in organised learning programmes and other free-time activities are evident from a number of research studies (Merriam and Kee 2014; Schuller and Desjardins 2007; Tett and Maclachlan 2007), many of which link this to the men's quality of life, which is lower than the opportunities available to them in their environments otherwise allow (Courtenay 2000; Golding 2011a; 2011b; Oliffe and Han 2014). Research also demonstrates that older men marginalise, isolate and alienate themselves more frequently than their female partners (McGivney 2004; Williamson 2011; Vandervoort 2012; Holwerda et al. 2012), that they are more likely to be subjected to loneliness (Wang et al. 2002; Paúl and Ribeiro 2009) and that they increasingly rely on their wives and life partners, depending on them emotionally as well as in terms of care, etc. (Vandervoort 2012; Dettinger and Clarkberg 2002).

Various statistical data, too, confirm that older men are less active than women. The largest discrepancy, in women's favour, in participation in the community programmes of active ageing in the countries monitored by Eurostat found are in Sweden (14%), Denmark (9.9%), Finland (7.7%), Iceland (7%), Estonia (5.5%) and France (4.9%) (Eurostat 2017). Although men are more active than women in Croatia, Germany, Turkey and Switzerland, the difference is practically negligible (between 0.2 and 0.6%)

(ibid.) and should be considered from cultural and religious aspects – but mainly through *gender capital*.[1] The discrepancy in Slovenia is 3% in women's favour (ibid.), but men's participation in various organised programmes of active ageing is substantially more limited: the average share of men in Activity Day Centres in Ljubljana is 15%, while Adult Education Centres and the Third Age University are similarly perceived as predominantly women's organisations managed by women. The reasons for men's non-participation in the existing activities are, among others, the feminisation of the learning programmes and their staff (Carragher and Golding 2015; Owens 2000), the negative perception of their schooling in the past (Mark and Golding 2012; McGivney 1999; 2004), the weakening of cognitive and social capital, which is part of the ageing process and which determines men more than women (Merriam and Kee 2014; Schuller and Desjardins 2007; Tett and Maclachlan 2007), etc.

In view of all the reasons it is important to establish why older men in a number of countries, including Slovenia, have been, essentially speaking, excluded as relevant participants in society, because the consequences of their marginalisation are dramatic. The men's exclusion and inactivity in the third and fourth life stages have a significant impact on the quality of their lives, on cognitive and mental capital (Golding 2011a; 2011b, Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project 2008), on emotional well-being (Williamson 2011) and, of course, most importantly, on their health (Coutenay 2000; Giles et al. 2005; Golden, Conroy, and Lawlor 2009; Mark and Golding 2012; Schmidt-Hertha and Rees 2017). Numerous social factors strongly influence health quality, too. In their meta-analytic review of 148 studies, Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton (2010) concluded that individuals with sufficient interpersonal relationships have a 50% increased likelihood of survival compared to those who are lonely.

However, the general conditions for quality ageing in Slovenia are similarly inadequate, as 16% of retired people are at risk of poverty (55,000 retired women and 23,000 retired men) (SURS 2018). In the context of the EU-28 Slovenia's Active Ageing Index (AAI) is at the bottom of the list of countries, together with Poland, Greece, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. Moreover, Slovenia's position has been worsening (it fell from the 20th place in 2012 to the 23rd place in 2014) (UNECE and EU 2014). Adult participation in education and training has been decreasing (from 16.2% in 2010 to 11.7% in 2015) and so have public funds invested in adult

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[1] According to Huppatz and Goodwin (2013), *gender capital* may be an extremely useful concept for exploring men's and women's movement through occupational social spaces, and thus sheds light on the continuity and reproduction of occupational segregation.

education (from 56 to 24 million during the same period) (Drofenik 2015). Participation levels in lifelong learning programmes have likewise been declining faster than the EU average (IMAD 2018). Hence, Slovenia ought to regulate the areas that impact on the quality of the life of older adults in the third and fourth life stages, otherwise the situation of retired people – in view of predictable demographic, social and economic trends – is likely to aggravate even further.

With this in mind we prepared the three-year Erasmus+ project *Old Guys Say Yes to Community*.[2] The project has been coordinated, since September 2016, by the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, in collaboration with partners from Portugal, Poland and Estonia.[3] The aim of the research was to find out how to improve the participation of older men (aged 60 years or more) in the local community and, in particular, how to encourage older men's socialisation, informal learning and inclusion in the organisations which are not primarily meant for education and learning in the third and fourth life stages.

This chapter discusses the perceptions of fourteen sociocultural animators from Slovenia of two out of nine main conclusions arising from the national research study. We included the animators in our study because we take them to be important promoters of cooperation and integration in their local communities, initiators, motivators and the personalities whose work, example, actions and life histories strengthen, develop and largely define the communities they live in. Their thoughts indicate to what degrees and in what ways the protagonists of active ageing in Slovenia contributed to the key recommendations of our project. Also, their attitudes and values allow us to shed important light and lay emphasis on the instances of good practice that their lives and examples provide in the third and fourth life stages.

The next section of this chapter outlines the methodology of the study, highlighting the research sample of the fourteen sociocultural animators. The third section begins by addressing the acute social issues of older adults in Slovenia through the perspectives of the sociocultural animators' narratives, followed by a focus on retirement as 'a breaking point' in the process of making new sense of one's life and the contemporary pluralist practices of gradual transition to retirement. The concluding section of this

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[2] Strategic Partnership for Adult Education, agreement number: 16-KA204-021604, case number: KA2-AE-9/16.
[3] In addition to the University of Ljubljana and the Slovenian Association of Adult Educators, the other participants were the University of Algarve, the University of Wrocław, Tallinn University and the Association of Estonian Adult Educators – ANDRAS.

chapter sums up the findings and compares them with the relevant findings of the project partners from Estonia, Poland and Portugal, taking account of specific local and national contexts.

The method and the sample

As part of our project we undertook an extensive qualitative research study in the spring of 2017. Each partner country carried out three focus groups including representatives of non-governmental organisations and national institutions, a hundred semi-structured interviews with men aged 60+ years and analyses of ten examples of good practice of the men's participation in their communities. The semi-structured interviews took an average of one hour and a half and they were, as a rule, conducted by qualified interviewers at the interviewees' homes. The interviews consisted of four sets of questions: (1) the interviewees' personal life histories; (2) their roles in the community and their understanding of the community; (3) an assessment and understanding of the lives of men aged 60+ in their communities, their knowledge and skills; (4) their engagement with and participation in formal and informal organisations as well as the advantages in knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices they had gained in that way.

To analyse all the interviews we used the method of open coding and selective/focused coding (Glaser 1978; 1992). First, we employed open coding to find preliminary thematic categories arising from the interviewees' statements, and then we used focused coding to develop conceptual categories that synthesise more data/codes (Glaser 1978; 1992). The project findings were summarised in *A Recommendation Letter for Local Community Authorities in Slovenia* (Gregorčič, Jelenc Krašovec, Radovan, and Močilnikar 2018), encouraging the implementation of strategies for and policies on lifelong learning, longevity society, quality ageing in local environments (with an emphasis on men over 60). The recommendations are under public discussion, and they will be handed over to local and state authorities when the project finishes.

For the purpose of this chapter we analysed the perceptions of fourteen sociocultural animators from different parts of Slovenia that were selected and defined as socially active by the students of the Socio-Cultural Animation and Education for Community Development course at the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of

Ljubljana.[4] The interviewees were selected by the interviewers who knew their past work and the local community, and who were qualified to carry out the interviews (expert sampling). The interviews were done in April and May 2017. The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity; therefore, the research findings are presented so as not to reveal their identities. Like the entire sample, these data were also first processed in two stages (open coding and focused coding), but we analysed the selected interviews again, specifically for this chapter, with regard to the two pre-selected categories presented in the following section.

As seen in Table 1 the average age of the interviewees was 67.5 years, the youngest was 60 and the oldest 79 years old. Seven interviewees had vocational education, one had post-secondary and six had higher or university education. Half of them had worked in better-paid jobs and they had been in management or decision-making positions most of their lives. Four of them were still in paid employment and ten were retired. Three interviewees came from an urban environment (Ljubljana), the others lived in rural areas: six in the Posavska region, two in the Gorenjska region, two in the Osrednjeslovenska region and one in the Jugovzhodna region.

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[4] The interviewers, students of the Socio-Cultural Animation and Education for Community Development course, were Petra Žemva, Mateja Lapuh, Manca Marolt, Tia Kajdiž, Kristina Gašpir, Anja Germovšek and Tina Dragovan.

Table 1-1: Past and present (non)formal and informal free-time activities of the participating sociocultural animators from Slovenia

nr.	age (years)	education level	occupation	status: retired/ employed	marital status	(non)formal and informal free-time activities in the past	(non)formal and informal free-time activities today	membership of organisations (nr. in the past/today)
I-1	70	VII	forestry engineer	R	Married	forester, mountaineer, union member, hunter, ecological movement, writer and cultural worker	forester, mountaineer, hunter, ecological movement, chess player, writer and cultural worker	5/3
I-2	78	VII	teacher	R	Married	professional and free-time commitment to the local community, founder, chair and member of a number of cultural and interest associations and initiatives, recreation, travelling, choirs, fruit farming, gardening	active in the arts (choir leader, folklore, etc.), tourism, fruit farming, exiles, gardening, food self-supply, etc.	6/3
I-3	76	VI	*	R	Single	the arts became his profession and defined his life history (singing, dancing, theatre plays, reading, etc.), travelling, performances	pensioners' association, association of Liberation Front members, various cultural clubs, the Red Cross, choir leader, travelling, events organiser, presenter, hiking	7/4

The Pluralisation of Transitions to the After-Working Life Phase

I-4	69	IV	metal shaper	E	Married	life in the nature (recreation, sport, games), peer cooperation in the local community up to the present day, farm work, entertainment, music	winegrower and farmer including daily neighbourly help in these areas, plays the accordion, goes for walks	2/1
I-5	62	VII	economic technician	R	Married	sport clubs, tourism, active in the local community, gardening	secretary to four clubs, looks after elderly mother and grandchildren, educates himself, does a lot of sport (tennis), travelling, hiking, etc.	5/4
I-6	64	VII	lawyer	R	Married	dominant identification with the job, consequently few free-time activities, yet still active in three	mountaineering, pensioners' association (active in different sections), trips, the arts (theatre, festivals, opera), participation in local politics	3/3
I-7	74	VII	teacher	R	Widowed	active in a political party, president and representative of different local institutions (including the state level), travelled a lot	gardening, travelling, reading, but active only in the pensioners' associations (active at local and regional levels)	3/1

I-8	79	VII	teacher	R	Divorced / in cohabitation	professional and free-time commitment to sport as a coach and president of various sport clubs, choir leader, column writer	sport (esp. tennis, chess), reading, writing columns, painting, drawing portraits, gardening	2/0
I-9	61	IV	*	E	Married	athletics, ball sports, firefighting	gardening, mushroom picking, firefighting	1/1
I-10	67	IV	textile technician	R	Married	strong identification with the job (machine maintenance), civil protection, house council	maintenance, hand skills, neighbourly help, working on the computer, walks, house council	3/1
I-11	66	IV	electrical technician	R	Married	sport (football), village fetes, dancing, socialising, the arts (choirs), mountaineering	gardening, working around the house, two choirs, walks, football, learning and playing games on the computer	3/2
I-12	64	IV	machine operator	R	Married	did not have any hobbies as he spent his life providing for the family	sport animator (walks, cycling, different exercises), active representative of the neighbourhood	0/1
I-13	61	IV	trade technician	E	Widowed	worked on the radio and TV, active as a self-taught musician in a band (concerts in Slovenia and abroad)	musician (concerts in Slovenia and abroad), recreation, nature, hiking, basketball	1/1