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global and national challenges*

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Emerging citizens in functional basic education for adults

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents experiences from two projects on basic adult education in Serbia. The way life skills, civic education and responsible living are included into the curriculum is depicted and analyzed. Teaching and learning materials, developed for educating adults in basic education in topics related to citizenship, environmental issues, health, peace, tolerance, equality, democracy, are presented. The focus is on their position in the curriculum, their depictions and formulations in the textbooks, and the way they are taught based on these materials. Some success indicators and factors are shared at the end, as well as lessons learned.

KEYWORDS

adult basic education; life skills; functional literacy; teaching and learning materials

Context

For countries in political and economic transition, the teaching of knowledge and skills needs to quickly surmount numerous economic, political and social problems. After 2000, Serbia had several challenges—to deal with the consequences of conflict and war in the former Yugoslavia, of the years under the authoritarian regime and the international sanctions and isolation, and to start the transition from a state-run economy to

a modern, free market-driven economy. An additional challenge was the process of European integration, which not only changed the political landscape of the country but also created a problem for the still very traditional political and civic culture. In terms of education, the situation was exacerbated by the large number of functionally illiterate adults in the population, a factor which increased the challenge of addressing the new economic, political and social problems.

Several education initiatives were launched and various projects implemented during this period. This overview of the experience with curriculum, textbooks and other teaching materials is drawn from two such projects:

Functional basic education of adult Roma (FBEAR), supported by the Roma Education Fund and implemented by the Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. 'FBEAR experiment has provided a new, tested model for functional basic education of adults' (Medić, Popović, Despotović, Milanović, 2010, p.46). It involved 10 primary and 25 secondary schools within 11 municipalities, including almost 300 beneficiaries. (Medić et al., 2010, p.89). Curriculum was developed by a large expert team, while the team for the development of didactical material counted only 26 members.

Second chance: Systemic Development of Elementary Practice Based Adult Education in Serbia was supported by the European Union (IPA 2008—Instrument for the Pre-Accession Assistance) and the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and implemented by the consortium of several international partners and pool of national experts. The project involved 4000 participants during two school years, and was intended for adults above 15 years of age with incomplete elementary education or without vocational qualifications, with priority being given to socially vulnerable target groups. The new system was piloted by 80 elementary school teams and 75 teams in secondary vocational schools. Fifty master trainers organized trainings for more than 1000 teachers about the curriculum

delivery and teaching methods for adults, and broad partnership was created at national and local level.

The aim of both projects was the development of elementary, practice-based adult education in Serbia that is accessible and adaptable to the needs of adult learners, focused on life skills and competencies and based upon lifelong learning. FBEAR was a kind of a pilot project, whose success led to the second project (Second chance), which took it further—to the establishment of a system of functional elementary adult education in Serbia.

The concept of functional basic adult education was developed, along with a methodology for its monitoring and evaluation, but probably the most important result is the formal establishment of the new system of basic education for adults in Serbia, with appropriate legislative procedures. This has replaced the old, traditional system that was simply a 'shortened' copy of the formal school system developed for children. An important result is also a newly designed curriculum along with newly developed and published teaching and learning materials.

The concept of functional basic adult education is structured in the three levels of education, which comprise: (1) full basic education for adults, (2) enabling employment (through the vocational part) and (3) continuation of education (through general education subjects). Beyond the program for children, the adult curriculum includes citizenship skills in the broadest sense of the word, which are gradually developed through all three levels (Medić et al., 2010, p.69).

The challenge of creating new curricula

The previous program and curriculum for full basic adult education was different from the children's curriculum only in its duration, which was exactly half. In all other characteristics, the programs were the same: the adults were supposed to learn content tailored to children, with no specially adapted textbooks or learning and teaching materials.

The most important step was, therefore, to create a new curriculum that responds to the needs of adult learners. The formal requirements and expected outcomes were taken into account, as well as the needs and real-life situation of adults. The curriculum was created parallel to the subjects of traditional elementary education; that is, mathematics, physics, history, language, etc. However, the need to respond to the requirements and challenges of the new era was immediately recognized and accomplished by establishing five 'functionalization' dimensions, or levels of the curriculum (Medić et al., 2010, pp.58–62), as shown in figure 1:

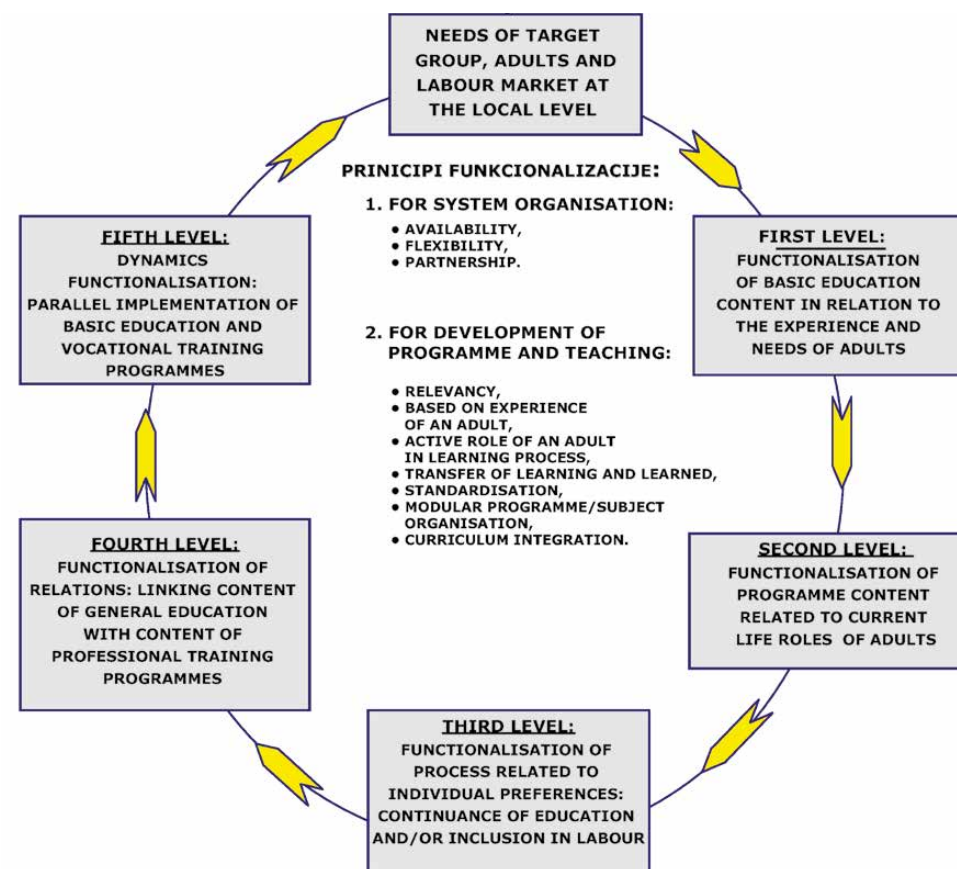


Figure 1: The five levels of functionalization of the curriculum (Medić et al., 2010, p.59)

The first level of functionalization relates to the tailoring of curriculum to the needs of an adult in general, and to the needs of special target groups (e.g. Roma), in such a manner that all subjects taught to adults have relevance for the roles of participants in their work and life realities specific to the target group. The functionalization related to the target group is carried out by providing them with specific knowledge and skills through the content of curriculum, which was preceded by the analysis of the concrete target group, consultations with the representatives of related communities and relevant research studies.

The second level of functionalization is focused on the life roles of adult participants in general—for their personal development, citizens' roles and family lives. Since such topics were hardly present in the existing curricula and in the 'traditional' subjects, new subjects were introduced. Having in mind that adults have important roles not only in their working life, but even more in their families and in their social environment, the precondition was that their motivation to learn will increase if the learning content is in the function of the roles they carry and take. The following new subjects were introduced: basic life skills—for the beginner's level, responsible living and civic education—for the second and third levels, also entrepreneurship and IT literacy. All new subjects present one more important step ahead from the previous curriculum, which lacks an entire segment of different contents necessary for the life of adults in society—primarily in terms of civic participation, health care education, family education etc. This level of functionalization, therefore, provides adults with the necessary knowledge in the priority areas of everyday life and thus the possibility to voice their personal activism, as well as initiative for active job-seeking.

The third level of functionalization focuses on work-related competencies and on the possibility to gain knowledge and competencies that enable participants to continue their education. Thus, adults got a second chance to obtain basic education, enter

the world of work, or continue their education in the next level. For the participants, it was very important to have the opportunity to simultaneously acquire general education and training for a particular occupation. The fourth level is based on the close connection between general subjects and selected trainings for future occupations. A part of the curriculum of general education subjects includes knowledge specific to the chosen training programs for vocational courses that run parallel to the basic education courses.

Obviously, the second type of functionalization is the most closely related to the challenges faced by a society in a post-conflict era and transition. New approaches and topics and the need for new knowledge, attitudes and skills were challenges for curriculum developers, since there were no models, standards or guides. Therefore, the curriculum developers planned 'backwards'—starting with the behaviors and skills needed and having in mind the characteristics of the target group—that is, adults without basic education, and with low levels of literacy.

The new courses were structured in the following way (*Druga šansa*, 2013 b-c):

Basic life skills

- Responsible living (health and factors influencing it; family and family life and roles, gender equality; life situations and orientation, finding places, finding sources of various information);
- Civic education (personal documents, relevant institutions, procedures for applications);
- Entrepreneurship (responsibility, self-confidence, planning of personal life and career; creativity, initiative, problem-solving; critical thinking about and problem solving in the local community, social environment and influences, strategies for action; quality of life).

Responsible living and civic education

- Citizens' rights, duties and responsibilities (different rights, ways to get them, civic rights in the EU);
- Peace and violence in the community (stereotypes, prejudices, tolerance, group pressure, violence prevention, achieving peace);
- Information (types of information, use and misuse, public information), sources of information (types, importance, mass-communication, Internet, tabloids, risks);
- Local and national government (structure, responsibilities, ways of functioning, community level, democracy—its importance and preconditions for its functioning), civic initiatives and civic activism (NGOs, local associations, initiatives);
- EU (development, rationale, structure, functioning, ethnic and religious diversity) and the European integration process (advantages, human rights, gender equality, minority rights, solidarity, mobility).

Life skills (non-violent communication; conflict prevention)

- Family as a system (recognizing strengths and weaknesses of one's family, cycles in the life of a family, functional and dysfunctional family patterns, violence);
- Improving the quality of family life and of parenthood (parenting styles, children's needs, rewards and punishments, school problems, conflicts);
- Health education (reproductive and sexual health, HIV and AIDS, STDs; smoking, alcohol, drugs and prevention).

Textbooks and teaching materials

The difficulties around developing textbooks and other teaching and learning materials were multiple. The main challenge quickly became clear: there could not be a single universal textbook for each subject. Since the project was targeting the unemployed, women, rural populations, redundant workers, the

underemployed, and especially those at risk of job loss, such as ethnic minorities, etc., making one textbook per subject or field would be possible only on a very theoretical, broad level and would not meet the needs of the participating adults. It became obvious that developing and adapting different kinds of materials would be needed. So, traditional, printed books were not planned, but rather a collection of 'working papers' and suitable handouts and similar materials.

In the FBEAR project the teaching materials were developed by the team of experts, after which training was organized for teachers of all subjects. The teachers were also accompanied by the experts during the first stage of developing the training materials. In the project targeting the adult Roma, 'assistants' from the Roma community were engaged to help participants overcome the difficulties in learning and orientation in administrative and social issues. Together with the experts, they first developed 'Proposals for designing didactical materials', which included numerous suggestions and recommendations. An important piece of advice was to use anything that was fit for the purpose which could help participants learn about the topic, and which was close to their life experience and relevant for them. A variety of materials was suggested, with different media, different styles, approaches and levels of required engagement. For example, for the 'responsible living' in the project for Roma, it was suggested (Medić et al., 2010, p.150–151) to use:

- The Constitution of The Republic of Serbia;
- The EU Human Rights Charter;
- City maps, list of addresses of relevant institutions, public transportation map;
- Various forms (for embassies—visa-related, passport, form for identity cards, health insurance card, etc.);
- Calendar (and an 'empty' calendar, so participants can design their own calendar and practice planning skills);

- Movies and video-clips, magazines (educational institutions were advised to subscribe to magazines that could be used in teaching), CDs;
- If visits to various institutions were organized, materials could be brought from the visit, analyzed and discussed (museums, theatres, the zoo, the botanical gardens, the city water supply facility, fire-fighting unit, the Red Cross, an NGO, etc.);
- Devices for measuring different levels of environmental pollution;
- Schemes and charts: for example, showing the circulation of water in an unhygienic settlement and the consequences for fruits and vegetables, food and health;
- Health-related articles from newspapers, examples of vaccines, thermometer, condoms and other family planning methods;
- Items for everyday life: compass, scales, manometer, batteries, magnets.

A handbook for each subject was developed as a kind of orientation for the teacher. Later, for each topic, a draft of the proposed plan for didactic materials was prepared by the ‘assistants’, discussed with the teacher, adapted if needed, and adopted. Material would be copied for each of the participants, who would make a collection of these materials in a folder, thereby creating their own ‘textbook’. Additional, supplementary materials could be added for each curriculum unit. Since this was quite a new way of working, it was constantly monitored and improved., Participants showed a great level of satisfaction, reflected in a low percent of drop-outs (especially for this type of target group) and high satisfaction of attendants with the classes (Medić et al., 2010, p.175).

The project for the functional basic education of adults developed two types of resources—a guide for the teacher and a handbook for participants. Basic life skills were included in the handbooks for the first level of education, and responsible living/civic education in the second and third levels.

The topics covered by *Basic Skills* (at the first level of education) and *Responsible Living/Civic Education* (at the second and third

levels) were also treated as cross-cutting issues. For example, during the IT courses the topics chosen for internet surfing should be related to civic education (e.g. videos about the EU, reports about national and religious issues and how they are arranged in the EU, videos about other countries and cultures, issues about consumerism, etc.); in biology courses, issues related to the environment should be tackled (e.g. pollution, human role in environmental degradation, possibility for environmental actions in the local community, sustainable lifestyles, etc.). An example is the task (one of many of that kind) for participants to decide, for each of the offered items, what kind of waste is, for example, recyclable, biodegradable, medical, or dangerous (Druga šansa, 2013a, p.162), as shown in the illustration from the participants’ handbook below.

Further on, during the preparatory training, teachers were instructed to choose teaching materials—such as pictures—that were not gender- or culturally-biased. Some materials were aimed,

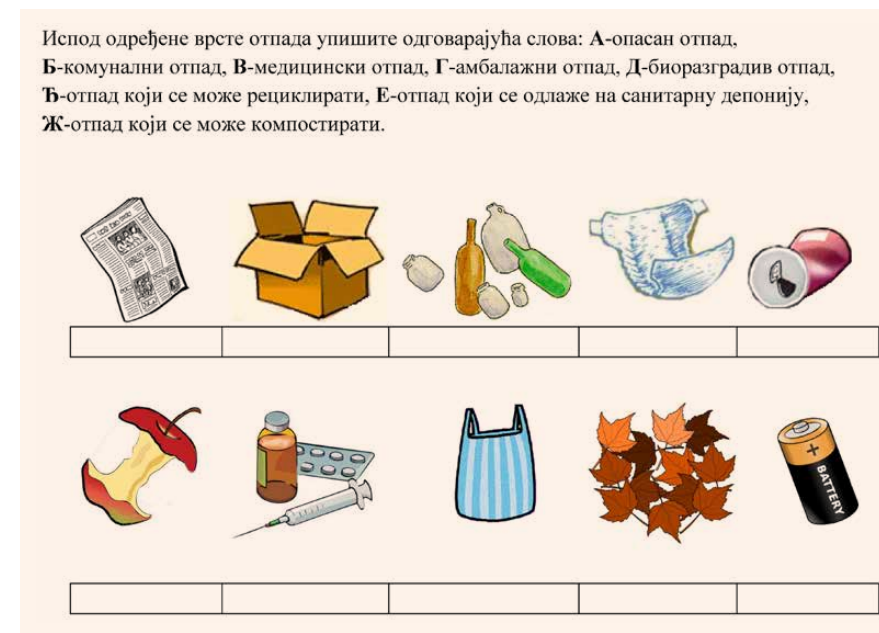


Figure 2: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.162.

нема довољно воде за пиће, хране, медицинске опреме, здравствене и социјалне заштите. У савремени проблеми човечанства спадају нарушавање мира и безбедности што изискује стварање услова за безбедност, толеранцију, мирну сарадњу и очување мира. Уједињене нације и друге међународне организације ангажују се да ублаже или отклоне све ове проблеме.



Figure 3: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.106.

ПРАВА КОЈА СЕ ОСТВАРУЈУ У МОЈОЈ ПОРОДИЦИ	
Чланови породице-домаћинства	Права
1. -----	1. Право на рад и права из радног одн
2. -----	2. Право на пензију
3. -----	3. Услуге социјалне заштите
4. -----	4. Материјална подршка
5. -----	5. Заштита породице и деце
6. -----	6. Право на образовање
7. -----	7. Здравствена права
8. -----	
9. -----	
10. -----	

Figure 4: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.2.

directly or indirectly, at increasing a sense of global citizenship, using illustrations not common in the previous Serbian textbooks. For example *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.106 (figure 3).

This sense of belonging to an international community and connection to the 'wider world' was strengthened by a compulsory foreign language (English) even in the first cycle of education, with low-literacy participants.

The teaching materials provided numerous real-life situations that made participants reflect and analyze. For example, in the

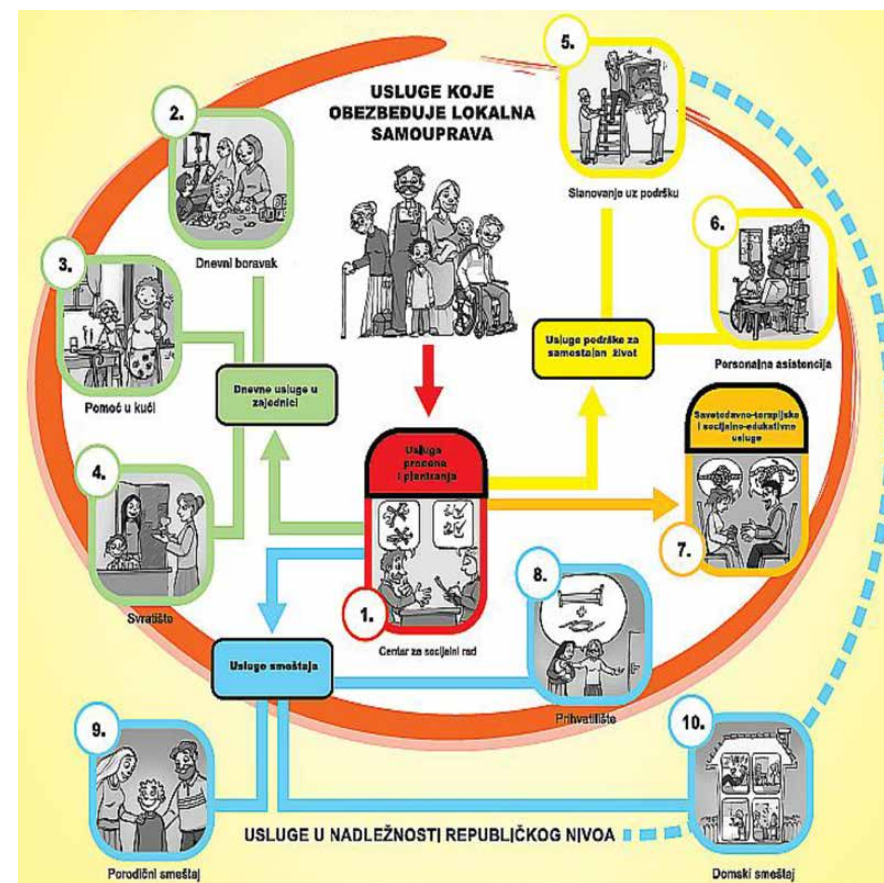


Figure 5: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.253.

activity in figure 4, various human rights are listed, with a task of connecting each right listed in the right-hand column with the family members (children, parents, grandparents) added to the list in the left-hand column (*Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.254).

Since many participants came from underprivileged and socially disadvantaged groups, an important topic was also to make them aware of their rights, especially in relation to various social services and the responsible institutions, where it was important to teach learners about the difference in responsibilities between local and national level, for different groups of beneficiaries. Thus they would learn how and where to practice their rights (*Druga šansa*, 2013c, p.253):

A similar task concerned the connection between rights and responsibilities, or about violence, with different types of violence and their causes. These were analyzed as a starting point for the discussion. Participants could also talk about violence they had experienced and witnessed, which could evoke an emotional process that might support learning. They would be encouraged by teachers to share experiences, to give examples of such events, to tell how they felt, and to think about the feelings of other participants in the process. Thus, they learn not only to understand and manage emotions that will certainly emerge in situations when violence occurs, but will also increase empathy, solidarity and readiness to act as responsible citizens, preventing the use of violence wherever possible.

Life situations and questions about possible reactions in different life situations were frequently offered in teaching materials. For example, the topic of non-violent communication consisted of describing several situations, with the task for participants to describe their reaction or a solution to the situation. The aim was to broaden the repertoire of skills of non-violent communication, but also to initiate emotional reactions and the kind of interaction that would lead to an intensive process of emotional learning

Similarly, topics that participants might have experienced themselves would start with reflections, dilemmas or personal



Figure 6: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p35.

stories. Facts and fallacies about the use of psychoactive substances were confronted, and participants were invited to share their personal views and experiences. Other health risks and risk behaviors are also an important topic in the curriculum, depicted and discussed in several subjects.

The use of illustrations, charts and photos was encouraged. For example, to explain the topics relatively distant from participants' experience, such as the main bodies of the EU (*Druga šansa*, 2013c, p.35): see figure 6.

This would be a starting point for a role play or similar game, where not only knowledge would be increased, but also social interaction among participants, as well as curiosity for the diversity of cultures and ways to deal with it. Ethnic, religious and cultural diversity as one of the positive values of EU would be pointed out, as well as mobility. Writing a postcard might sound old-fashioned, but some target groups can really enjoy learning how to do it, as shown in the illustration in figure 7 (*Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.36):

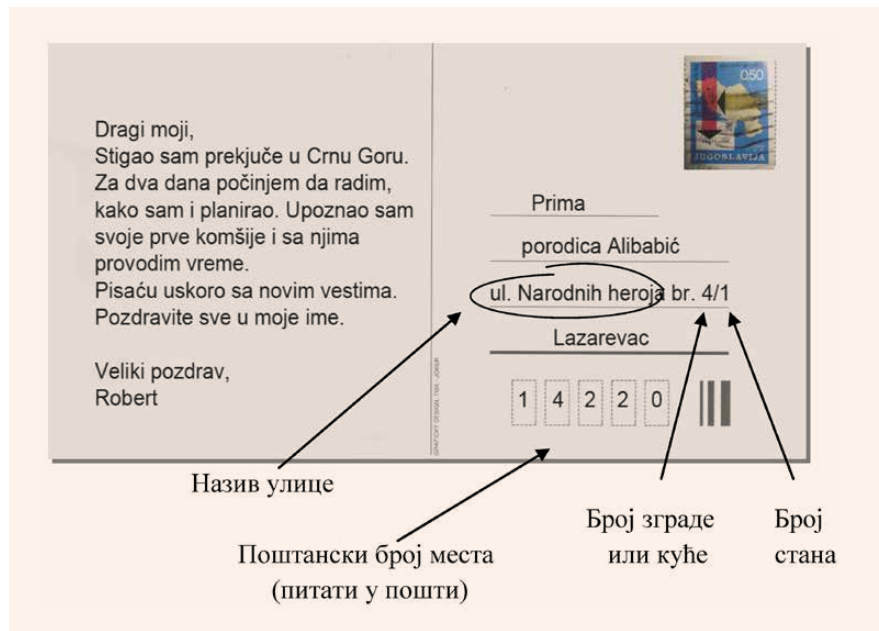


Figure 7: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.36.

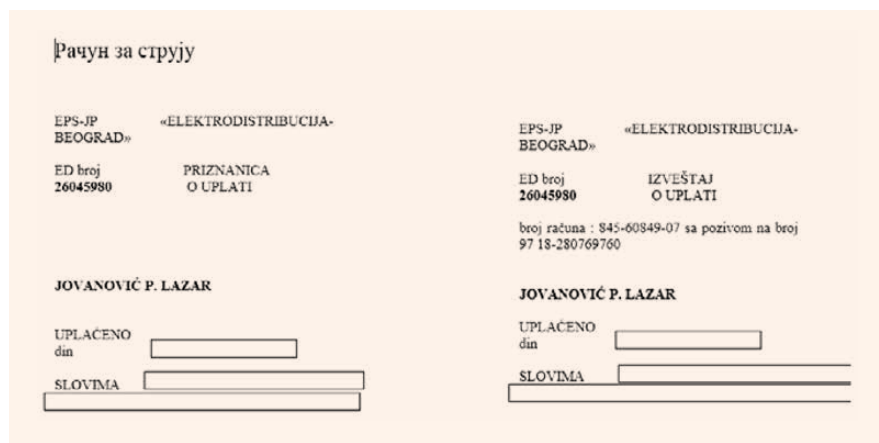


Figure 8: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.17.

Similarly, a practical task included 'how to read a monthly invoice for household electricity costs and check if it is correct'; for this activity, an image would be given with additional copies to be filled in as a form of exercise.

A role play depicting someone complaining to a public institution was also included, showing a critical, active citizen, aware of his/her rights and practicing his/her social skills, interaction and non-violent communication.

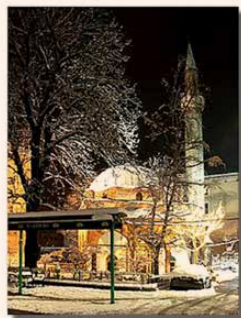
Lessons about discrimination, with a focus on discrimination against women and on gender-based violence, included texts from newspapers and magazines, where discrimination was not only discussed, but also the ways that it is reported in the media (the use and misuse of information), the responsible institutions at local and national levels, the initiatives that could be taken to prevent it, and similar related topics. In order to support social learning, many tasks in the teaching materials are planned for groups and teams.

Issues related to the recent past and the war in former Yugoslavia are mentioned in a very limited way. Lessons in more distant history included activities such as identifying responsibility for the Holocaust (*Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.123):



Figure 9: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.123.

4. Погледајте пример непоштовања локалних споменика културе припадника других народа или вероисповести. Потом покушајте да одговорите на постављена питања



џамија Ферхадџија, Бања Лука



Изглед џамије Ферхадџије у Бања Луци, уништене током рата у Босни. Данас, после рата џамија се обнавља.

Figure 10: *Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.137.

It can be seen that personalities from the region are hardly mentioned in the history materials. But the values the curriculum is based on do send a clear message even without mentioning direct responsibilities. For example, there is an illustration of a mosque in Bosnia, showing it before the war and after it was destroyed in the war. The lack of the respect for local cultural monuments of people from other religions or cultures is indicated in the title (*Druga šansa*, 2013a, p.137).

The questions that follow these images invite a critical examination of what happened, of the consequences and of participants' feelings, and of examples where tolerance, mutual respect of cultures and peaceful co-existence are possible. There are also pictures of various objects from different religions, with parallel quotes from the Bible and the Koran.

Conclusions

The curriculum and materials developed for adult basic education in Serbia clearly reflect the social and political context of the country at a certain stage of its development. The required

transition to the new economic model and skills is clearly reflected, as well as the new political orientation of the country, which is oriented towards the EU, trying intensively not only to increase knowledge and develop skills, but also to develop positive attitudes towards the EU and its values. Topics such as sustainable development and environmental issues are also very present in an effort to create a curriculum and textbooks that would reflect this new orientation of the country. Cultural diversity (including the presence of content relevant to Roma participants), religious diversity and tolerance, gender equality, human rights and similar topics are also high on the agenda. Identity nurturing, inclusion and social cohesion are obviously the aims, especially when it comes to ethnic minorities.

What is partly missing is addressing the recent past, in particular the conflicts and war in the former Yugoslavia. The curriculum contains only basic facts about recent conflicts—the amount of information is very limited, probably reflecting the main idea of that moment in the political development of the country, that people shouldn't be obsessed with the past, but have an orientation to the future, moving forward, progress, and 'catching up' on what was missed in the years of war and isolation, as fast as possible.

Past conflicts and war are not sufficiently reflected, even in the formal education of children, and reconciliation among countries was tried on, a political and economic level, without critically reflecting on the past and addressing the responsibilities for past events. One of the reasons was also intensive disputes about the recent past, different interpretations of the events and political manipulation of the data and nationalist narratives in the public arena. Critical voices, dealing with the recent past, and alternative views on the history of the region were missed in the society, coming just from a few experts and from civil society (such as the four-volume *Teaching Modern Southeast European History. Alternative Educational Materials* (Koulori, 2005), developed by a team of experts from all countries in the region, intended as an alternative resource for secondary social studies). However, material like this

did not enter the formal education system, adult education and education initiatives supported by the government. Nevertheless, the main values of respect, tolerance, peace, human rights, and the way that different nations, cultures and religions can live together are clearly present here in the textbooks and teaching materials.

On the professional side, the use of adult learning principles and the respect for professional standards in working with adults is obvious, enabling, among other factors, valuable results, including the success of initiatives to modernize the basic education of adults and to make it fit for the challenges of the new phase of development of the country.

- The approach proved to be successful according to several criteria—internal evaluations of the projects, and external evaluation of the FBEAR project (Medić et al., 2010). Furthermore, the project Second chance was included in the list of the best EU projects in Serbia (EU, 2015). But the very low level of drop-out, high employment rate and the high level of satisfaction speak for themselves. The most important indicator is the fact that the concept and the practice replaced the traditional, obsolete system of basic education of adults at the country level.
- There were plenty of factors that made the approach a success, and each of these was carefully analyzed. Focusing only on teaching material, it could be said that the following main andragogical principles were crucial factors: relevance of the topics for the participants, closeness to their life and work situations and their timeliness. Further on, the flexibility in use and the possibility to combine the textbooks with other learning and teaching material, temporarily developed and used, was significant, since it gave teachers the opportunity to further adapt to the needs, pre-knowledge and specifics of the target group. Not only that—flexible use, where main facts and ideas are presented, but examples could be replaced, also enabled adaptation to the concrete situation and changing circumstances. Another important factor was the visuality

of learning and teaching materials and the way they were developed and designed—interesting, dynamic, and inviting personal experience and reflection. Last but not least—even the best curriculum and textbooks are useless if they are not used in a good way. Therefore, intensive preparation of teachers to use and further develop materials was, and continues to be, a precondition for success.

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