

The educational opportunities for older adults in rural and urban municipalities

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Abstract

The aim of our paper is to investigate what the differences between rural and urban municipalities are with regards to the educational opportunities for older people. With the method of multiple case studies, we have determined that in selected municipalities there are significant differences in educational possibilities for older adults in rural and urban local municipalities. The readiness of older adults to enrol in education not only depends on the extent of educational opportunities in a municipality, but also on the various measures for encouraging the participation of older people in education. On the basis of our findings, we suggest the following further steps to improve the educational opportunities for older people in both rural and urban municipalities: educational programs are free of charge and accessible; they have responsive content and organisation of education, based on older adults' needs; that there is cooperation and networking of different providers of educational and spare-time activities for older people in the community etc.

KEYWORDS: communities, rural, urban, older adults, education

Introduction

Educational and leisure activities have a crucial role in making older people more active in their everyday life. Education is a significant factor influencing the well-being of an individual and a community; the influence of education is more dynamic in communities with more systematic development of educational activities (Field 2009: 7).

In this paper, we compare the data gathered in selected urban and rural municipalities in Slovenia, which give some explanations for the interrelation of rurality/urbanity, well-being, and the educational opportunities for older people in municipalities. Prior research in Slovenia has shown that the educational opportunities for older adults (more than on the level of the well-being of the municipality) depend on whether the municipality is urban or rural (Kump & Jelenc Krašovec 2012). In this paper, we analyse the differences regarding the educational opportunities for older adults in selected urban

and rural municipalities in Slovenia. We investigate who the holders of such activities are, and how responsive those offering the activities are to the needs of older adults, and also how connected and integrated the educational institutions and other voluntary associations are that offer educational and learning possibilities for older adults.

Urban vs. rural in the context of community and personal well-being

Rural/urban differences are not easy to define. The differences as well as the cooperation between rural and urban areas are of great interest mostly for economists and geographers (Wokoun et al. 2010: 1882), who attempt to analyse and further support balanced territorial development, but from an educational perspective these questions are equally important.

Among the most frequently and commonly used definitions of rural and urban areas is the OECD's definition (*Eurostat 2013*), which uses a regional typology according to which regions have been classified as predominantly urban (PU), predominantly rural (PR) and intermediate (IR). For this process three criteria are used: 1) population density (the percentage of regional population living in rural or urban communities¹); 2) percentage of the population living in rural communities; regarding this criterion we differentiate areas as *Predominantly rural (PR)*, *Predominantly urban (PU)* and *Intermediate (IR)*²; 3) the size of the nearby urban centres.

Scott et al. (2007: 4) describe urbanity as an area with employment in administration and services, with a higher-than-average educational level, high accessibility of services, information accessibility, but low fertility and mortality, a low sense of community, and varied ethnicity. In contrast, rural areas are defined as more dependent on the primary industry sector, agriculture and forestry, as areas with a lower-than-national average educational level, low accessibility services and information, but a higher sense of community.

The data show that more than half of Europeans live outside major towns and that European rural areas have a higher proportion of older people, aged 55 and over (Giarchi 2006: 705). The disproportionately greater number of older people live in rural and remote regions, facing considerable social and economic change, a loss of infrastructure (social and health services), and population change (Inder et al. 2012: 182); consequently, older people are amongst the most vulnerable groups in the entire population. Understanding the differences between rural and urban areas is essential, because some research (Giarchi 2006; Inder et al. 2012; Scott et al. 2007) has shown that rural deprivation is more complex and common than urban deprivation.³ In rural areas,

¹ Community corresponds to Local Administrative Units (communes, municipalities, etc.).

² Region is: Predominantly rural (PR) if more than 50% of its population lives in rural communities; Predominantly urban (PU) if less than 15% of the population lives in rural communities; Intermediate (IR) if the share of population living in rural communities is between 15% and 50%.

³ There is no universally accepted definition of deprivation; in the past, *deprivation* and *poverty* were used interchangeably. Poverty means mostly a lack of financial and material resources, while deprivation is more a multi-dimensional concept that includes consideration of financial resources, material commodities, and the ability to participate in social life (Scott et al. 2007: 16). Deprivation also relates to those who do not or cannot enter into ordinary forms of relationships (Townsend 1987).

social exclusion and the risk of poverty is often more difficult to identify. Ageing in rural areas opens questions related to social isolation, reduced mobility, and limited access to community and health services.

Rural poverty is understood as more concealed than urban poverty, and geographical remoteness is another aspect that influences the welfare of communities. Conversely, Scott et al. (2007: 19) assert that 'deprivation is popularly presented as an urban phenomenon' and that living in rural areas is more often understood as a place with a better quality of living. Differences in measurements appear due to different definitions of deprivation, but also due to the fact, whether we consider the deprivation of the area or individual. Moreover, Shucksmith et al. (2009: 1279) affirm that there are significant differences regarding rural and urban deprivation between richer and poorer European countries.

Regarding education and skills deprivation, Scott et al. (2007: 16) assert that this is also a vital asset that contributes to the disadvantaging and deprivation of residents. The access to services (education, communication, social care, health, civil society associations, etc.) is often geographically defined and is connected with the educational characteristics of an area. Findsen and Formosa (2011: 15) state that in deprived communities where social services, material resources, civic activities, and social relations amongst neighbours are low, the quality of life of many older people remains limited. Ageing as a biological, psychological, and social process takes place in the social space in which older people live; the economic, environmental, social, cultural, educational, and human conditions in the rural and urban communities are crucial for their activity and well-being.

Well-being and education of older adults

To determine how rurality and urbanity actually define the living circumstances of older people, we should develop our discussion towards the role of different social and educational possibilities in a certain environment. How do those possibilities influence the well-being and quality of life of older people, and how might they create a cohesive and inclusive community?

In most of the discussions, the geographical dimension was paramount in defining a set of people as a community; bonding and common interests among this set of people are also vital (Gilchrist 2009: 3). A community can be defined as a social unit, bounded by physical and social borders (Loughran 2003: 89). Therefore, communities may be seen to be inclusive to some people and social groups and exclusive to others; they can also be elitist and oppressive. Better facilities and services network influence the well-being of community members as well as the cohesion and development of the community as a whole. There is a dearth of research about the role of an adequate network of educational organisations and educational programmes for the well-being of older people in communities, but more is known about voluntary associations, which may influence creating and maintaining social cohesion in the community as well as affecting perceived well-being based on co-operation, collaboration, and trust (MacKean and Abbott-Chapman 2012: 50).

Well-being includes personal well-being (health, personal relationships, safety, standard of living, achievements, community connectedness, and future security) and the

well-being of the communities (the level of a country's functioning, the assurance of local public services for people, education, social care, health care, etc.) (Cummins et al. 2002: 4). Well-being is most often defined as 'the state of happiness, health, and prosperity' (Rovan et al. 2009: 70). It is a complex concept that includes objective and subjective⁴ factors. The objective components of well-being are demographic, economic, social, and environmental factors (Rovan et al. 2009: 70). The most complex and heterogeneous amongst objective factors are social factors, which most directly influence the well-being and the quality of life of individuals.⁵ Some objective factors can influence the self-assessed well-being of older people.⁶ The subjective ratings were significantly higher when some of the social factors were high. According to Activity Theory, the psychological or subjective perception of well-being and life satisfaction in an old age can be maintained by a high level of involvement in activities that are 'positively correlated to the benefit of essentiality' (Nimrod 2007: 77).

Policy documents define a stimulating and diverse environment as one of the main predictors for healthy and active ageing; for example, the World Health Organisation in its study on Global Age-Friendly Cities ascertains that playing key roles in communities (volunteering, working, sharing knowledge, and experiences or being caregivers) give sense to older people's lives. However, these activities need to be supported by ensuring inclusive, accessible, and safe environments (WHO 2007). The report also emphasises the opinions of the interviewed older people, suggesting that having more and varied activities closer to where they live would foster bonding with other age groups and cultures within the community; at present, these activities are inaccessible in the experience of many participants in the project (WHO 2007: 39). Similar findings are reported by Nimrod (2007), Blace (2012) and Cummins et al. (2002), who assert that all kinds of activities within community groups (mental, physical, educational and social) can play an vital part in maintaining older people's well-being, as long as they contribute to life satisfaction.

Quality of life as a concept is an indication of the overall well-being in the society; it is a multidimensional concept that involves objective living conditions, subjective well-being, and the perceived quality of society (Veenhoven 1996: 5); it is measured by objective and subjective indicators (Fahey et al. 2004: 1). According to Shucksmith et al. (2009), knowledge, education, and training are one out of the six most important core areas for measuring quality of life. Other research has confirmed the influence of social support and social networks on the health, mental health, and quality of life of older people in different living environments (Shucksmith et al. 2009; Inder et al. 2012; Fahey

⁴ Freedom, happiness, safety, the quality of life.

⁵ Social factors are defined by Rovan et al. (2009) as: individual life index (income, unemployment, living conditions, access to goods); index of education (preschool, primary/basic school, higher education); health; free time/leisure; crime rate; efficacy of municipality administration; individual well-being (subjective perceiving of well-being – suicide level, abortions, divorces, fertility rate, etc.).

⁶ This is confirmed by research findings: a study of older people's self-assessed well-being (Montross et al. 2006) showed that 92% of the interviewed older people, despite chronic physical illness and some disability, rated themselves as ageing successfully if they thought that their quality of life is good, if they are able to be active and if they still have close friends.

et al. 2004; Šadl & Hlebec 2007; Jelenc Krašovec & Kump 2007), but further research on the role of community-level factors and the role of education for the quality of life of older people and personal and community well-being is needed.

As our previous research (Jelenc Krašovec & Kump 2009) shows, education can be understood as a means of establishing older adults' social networks; education provides instrumental and emotional support, reduces social exclusion, and forms a context for the socialisation of older adults. Field (2009: 6) argues that nevertheless 'there is compelling research evidence of a positive overall association between education and well-being, the relationships are probabilistic ones,' but there is no relevant research on the topic. However, he ascertains that education influences well-being at different levels: there is a direct effect on well-being (helping people develop capabilities and resources which influence their well-being), an indirect effect (leading to outcomes that allow people to increase their resilience in the face of risk), and a cumulative effect (influencing the social and economic environment in which people spend their lives). The evaluation of the educational opportunities, the quality and responsiveness of the offer to the needs of older adults, and finally the evaluation of the cooperation amongst educational institutions and voluntary associations is essential; any kind of generalisation about the different educational needs of older people regarding rural or urban areas is dangerous and unacceptable.

In this paper, we compare selected urban and rural municipalities regarding the main well-being characteristics, the main characteristics of the living environment, and the educational possibilities of older people. We are focusing on the following questions:

- What is the difference between rural and urban municipalities regarding the extent and quality of educational opportunities for older adults?
- Who are the holders of educational activities in selected municipalities?
- Is the range of educational services responsive to older adults' needs?
- How connected and integrated are the educational institutions and other voluntary associations offering education for older adults?

Research methodology

The availability of educational opportunities for older adults is investigated in the framework of the research entitled Care for the Older People within Communities in Slovenia. In this paper, we present the results of the primary research, specifically the results of multiple case studies of 22 selected municipalities, which were partly explorative and partly descriptive case studies (Yin 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark 2011). For further analyses, we have selected three Slovene municipalities: an urban municipality (Novo Mesto) and two different rural municipalities: remote rural municipality (Puconci) and "close to the city" rural municipality (Starše).

The selected municipalities were also considered according to their level of well-being (according to Rován et al. 2009)⁷, which might add another dimension

⁷ Slovene municipalities were, according to the level of well-being, classified in four groups: High well-being communities (in economic and social terms highly developed communities), balanced well-being communities, moderate well-being communities, and low level well-being communities.

to the evaluation of educational opportunities in the selected municipality. According to Rován et al. (2009), the urban municipality (Novo Mesto) is in a high well-being municipality, Puconci is a low well-being municipality, and Starše is a moderate well-being municipality.

First, we performed an overview of the educational opportunities for older adults in the selected municipalities. We collected the data over appropriate webpages, on the bulletin boards of organisations (libraries, health centres, voluntary associations, day centres for older adults, etc.), and advertisements in local newspapers, on radio and television, and with personal contacts with the representatives of organisations. Interviews on the educational opportunities for older people were held with the providers of education for older adults and with older persons. We were interested how people experience the educational possibilities in different municipalities, why and how often they participate in educational programmes, what hinders them from participation in education, and how they evaluate the accessibility of the educational opportunities.

The questions varied for different interviewees. All interviews were transcribed; the material was organised and prepared for the analysis; the concepts were categorised, and the analysed material was interpreted.

Novo Mesto – the urban municipality

The urban municipality of Novo Mesto is a part of Slovenia's south-eastern statistical region and consists of 98 settlements. In mid-2010, the municipality had approximately 36,200 inhabitants.⁸ Their average age was 40.1, which is lower than the average age of the Slovenian population (41.6 years). According to the classification of Rován et al. (2009), the municipality of Novo Mesto is ranked in the group of high well-being communities. In Slovenia, there are 15 such municipalities (9.4% of Slovenian land) with a high level of urbanisation. According to the number of inhabitants, this is the largest group (36.5% of Slovenian population) with a high standard of living and the highest values of economic indicators. In these municipalities, the level of education of inhabitants older than 15 years is higher than the national average (Prebivalstvo 2003).⁹ In comparison to the Slovenian average in 2010, there was a higher number of employed people and a lower number of registered unemployed people among the working-age population¹⁰ (Slovene Municipalities in Figures 2012).

⁸ In 2010, on average. 154 municipality inhabitants lived on a square kilometer of land, meaning the population density was higher than that of the country (101 inhabitants per km²). Also in 2010, a positive natural increase rate of 4.9 per 1,000 inhabitants was recorded (the Slovenian rate was 1.8).

⁹ Completed levels of education: 33.8% of population finished grammar school or less (Slovenia: 33.0%), 51.7% finished high school (Slovenia: 54.0%), and 14.5% finished a higher level of education (Slovenia 12.9%).

¹⁰ Among the persons between 15 and 64 years of age (i.e. among the working age population) approximately 63% of them were employed or self-employed, which is higher than the Slovenian average (59%). On average 8.1% of the municipality's working age population was registered unemployed, which is lower than the national average (10.7%).

Educational opportunities for older people

The town of Novo Mesto, which is the municipality's centre, as well as the administrative, economic, and cultural centre of the south-eastern region, offers the most educational opportunities for older adults. In this field, The Development and Education Center (RIC) has the main role as an organiser of The University of Third Age (U3A). The U3A program offers its students more than 30 educational programs in various topics¹¹ and most of these programs charge a fee (from €40 to 106), but U3A members can also choose from five free educational activities.¹² Among the U3A members, the most popular of the aforementioned programs are trips and programs on health. Women are the sole participants in some programs and in the great majority in others. The only exceptions are computer courses, in which both genders are equally represented.

Older adults receive special attention from three retirement associations. The Retirement Association of Novo Mesto organises cultural and educational activities, including writers' and artists' groups, a mixed choir, a lifelong learning book club, and a course for expanding one's knowledge about computers, the Internet, and email. They also promote health in old age by educating their members about maintaining good health and eating healthily. The Novo Mesto Retirement Association for Free-Time Activities organises its educational activities in cooperation with Grm Grammar School, which provides the space. Their free programs include lectures on health, history, and traveling. Their members can also participate in organised hikes, join a folklore group, and attend organised group visits to the theatre in larger Slovenian cities. The Krka Retirement Association organises lectures on topics such as health, diet, gardening and traveling.

Free lectures on health are also offered by the Novo Mesto Health Center in cooperation with RIC, municipal retirement homes, local communities, the Red Cross, and self-help groups. The Miran Jarc Library organises some free educational programs for older adults.¹³ The participants in these programs are predominantly older women. The library also participates in the all-Slovenian voluntary project, Symbiosis – e-literate Slovenia, aiming to increase computer literacy of older adults through intergenerational learning.

In the municipality of Novo Mesto, there are more than 140 associations (some with older adult members) that also organise educational (lectures, workshops) and free-time activities (trips, competitions, games, hikes, etc.). Intergenerational cooperation and learning are present in several of these associations (e.g. in firefighters' associations).

¹¹ Let's Travel Together, Travel the World on a Bus, Foreign Languages, Living Happy and Healthy, We are Masters Too, and Grey Matter Matters.

¹² Thursday Meetings, Study Group – Reading with Manca Košir, Improving our Computer Skills, Learning for a Successful Life – Expanding our Horizons, and Learning New Foreign Languages.

¹³ The Reading Badge for Adults (promoting reading), Stories from behind the Desk (presenting well-known people) and Thursday Meetings (various lectures, literary evenings, book presentations).

The opinion of the organiser of educational activities for older people on the educational opportunities, participation, motivation and barriers of older people

We spoke with the coordinator of the RIC and U3A programs about educational opportunities and the participation of older adults. They inform older adults about their offers in a variety of ways: by posting information on a notice board and on the RIC website, by sending individuals SMS messages and emails, by sending catalogues on education to people's homes, and with ads on the local radio and on various media websites. However, the most successful way of disseminating information remains "by word of mouth". The available programs have a high attendance rate, so they are satisfied with the response of older adults, who also come from the neighbouring settlements and other municipalities. On how they determine the educational needs and interests of older adults as well, as the satisfactions of participants, the coordinator said:

At the end of each program the participants fill out an evaluation questionnaire which helps us find out how satisfied they are with the offers, the time of the program, the execution, and the lecturer. They also give us their suggestions. For example, if they are dissatisfied with a lecturer, we provide a different one.

This indicates that the RIC collects information about the needs and interests of participants in their educational programs, but they do not research the needs of a wider group of older adults. According to the coordinator, older adults can choose from many activities, which are also organised by numerous other associations, but many of them simply do not take advantage of this wide array of offers. She thinks the problem is that older adults are not motivated enough and have too much to choose from, so it is sometimes difficult for them to decide which program to participate in.

The opinion of the active older adult on educational opportunities, motives and barriers of older people

A 69-year old retired electrician has been an active member of U3A for 10 years. He regularly participates in computer courses and excursions. He believes that RIC and U3A offer a wide variety of educational programs and that everyone can find something for themselves. When asked if he has the opportunity to influence the formation of content and the execution of educational programs, he gave us a positive answer: 'Most definitely. I am a member of the RIC Program Board that includes seven external members, users. We can provide comments and influence which programs get selected.'

He is also a member of the Krka Retirement Association and participates in their various lectures on health and computer courses, as well as trips and hikes. He is also informed about other educational possibilities because he participated in various programs when he was still employed. He takes part in educational programs to socialise, make new friends, broaden his horizons, for personal growth, and above all to 'keep track of things.' Since he has good computer skills and also shares his knowledge with others; he is sometimes quite proud of himself.

The opinion of the non-active older adult on educational opportunities, motives and barriers of older people

In a conversation with a 73-year old retired textile worker living on the outskirts of town, we found out that she is not informed of the educational possibilities for older adults in her town and that she is also not interested in them. She might participate only in a free gardening course if it took place in the vicinity of her home. She is a member of a retirement association but does not participate in their activities because she lives too far away from the centre of town. She does not miss socialising because she has friends, as well as things to do in the garden and the vineyard. Her lack of interest in education probably stems from her previous schooling experience:

I didn't have opportunities because I grew up on a farm and had to work a lot. I wanted to become a salesperson. But the school was too far away, and my mother, who then became a single parent, could not afford to pay for my education. Then I had to find a job and work only for survival.

Puconci – the remote, rural municipality

The municipality of Puconci is a part of the Pomurje statistical region and consists of 23 settlements. In mid-2010, the municipality had approximately 6,100 inhabitants.¹⁴ The average age of the municipality's inhabitants is rising faster than in Slovenia as a whole; in 2010, it was 42.8 years, while the national average age is 41.6 years. According to the classification of Rovan et al. (2009), the municipality of Puconci is ranked in the group of low well-being communities. This group consists of 52 municipalities (17.3% of land and 7.6% of Slovenian population). An average municipality of this group is economically poorly developed, mainly rural, has an above average number of recipients of social benefits, a high level of registered unemployment, and its inhabitants have the lowest level of education.¹⁵ In comparison to the Slovenian average, in 2010 the municipality of Puconci had lower employment and higher registered unemployment in the working-age population.

Educational opportunities for older people

The rural municipality of Puconci has modest educational opportunities for older adults. Even though they have approximately 40 associations, most of them organise firefighting, sports, cultural, and tourist activities. Most of the free-time activities designed especially for older adults are made available by the Puconci Retirement Association. Occasionally,

¹⁴ In 2010, on average 57 municipality inhabitants lived on a square kilometer of land, meaning the population density here was lower than that of the entire country (101 inhabitants per km²). Also in 2010, a negative natural increase rate of -2.5 per 1,000 inhabitants was recorded (the Slovenian rate was 1.8).

¹⁵ After the last population census in 2002, in this municipality the finished level of education of the inhabitants of 15 years of age or older was noticeably lower than the national average (Prebivalstvo 2003). Completed levels of education: 51.5% of the population finished grammar school or less (Slovenia: 33.0%), 43.7% finished high school (Slovenia: 54.0%), and 4.8% finished a higher level of education (Slovenia: 12.9%).

they hold lectures on health and craft workshops. At the association, they believe that there is no interest in education. For example, they have received an offer from the Murska Sobota U3A for programs on computer literacy and foreign languages, but the members of the associations showed no interest in them. The association is more active in other areas such as culture (a women's folklore group, choir, art, and literary groups), sports (hiking, winter sports, cycling), and social activities (visits to ill and elderly members as a part of *Seniors for a Quality Life at Home*, an intergenerational project). The municipality has outpatient and dental clinics that are privately owned and do not offer educational programs. Furthermore, the Brigita Retirement Home, a private secure care facility, offers no educational programs and is barely in touch with the local community. In the municipality, churches mostly offer pilgrimages, while the evangelical humanitarian organisation EHO Podpornica helps the socially disadvantaged and the ill, most of whom are older adults.

The opinion of the organiser of educational activities for older people on educational opportunities, participation, motivation and barriers of older people

It was difficult to find someone to speak with about the educational opportunities for older adults because most people we asked were unwilling to participate. Finally, an evangelical pastor with a master's degree in theology agreed to have a conversation with us. She organises educational and cultural events at the Štefan Küzmič Memorial Home in Puconci. The home organises many exhibitions, concerts, and lectures (on health, psychology and history). Even though these activities are intended for all age groups, most of the participants are older, and with at least a high-school diploma. Among the participants are also older adults from the neighbouring settlements and even highly educated people from the centre of the neighbouring municipality. According to the pastor, the reasons older adults do not participate in these activities in larger numbers are psychological. Many of them feel unworthy and, when invited, say: 'This is only for those with high education.' She is familiar with the older adults' needs for education; the problem is that she sees the problems and the older adults do not. These events are generally financed by the municipality, making most of them free for participants.

The main barriers they face when organising lectures and other events are financial restrictions, the difficulties with finding appropriate providers (who would be prepared to participate for free instead of requiring high fees) and a lack of integration and collaboration between the municipal organisations. Another problem is that the village's spiritual and cultural stagnation that cannot be reversed overnight. It would also be necessary to attract young people and make them accustomed to the local culture. They have already thought of designing a questionnaire and visiting village people in person to talk to them about their needs and interests concerning educational and cultural events. She is supportive of including all social classes and age groups in the community activities and intergenerational partnerships. She believes that in order for people to be more involved, various municipal organisations should collaborate when preparing for

joint projects: a factor which is now lacking. She thinks that older adults could do a lot to contribute to the well-being of the community, especially with regards to its culture and spirituality.

The opinion of the active older adult on educational opportunities, motives and barriers of older people

In the settlement of Šalamenci, we spoke with a 65-year old retired high-school graduate about the educational opportunities for older adults. She is participating in the retirement association's volunteer training for the project 'Older people for older people.' In this project, volunteers work together with social services and record in person the problems that older people in the municipality face and what conditions they live in.

As a member of the retirement and tourism associations, she regularly participates in working out, cycling, trips, and hikes, takes part in culinary and flower-arranging workshops, as well as participating in a folklore group which she joined in order to socialise and to satisfy and 'relax her mind a little bit.' She mainly finds out about the associations' activities from others, but also on the local radio and newspaper. She does not use the internet because she does not have a computer, but would gladly participate in a computer course if it were organised in the municipality. She takes part in educational programs because it gives her pleasure to see her own progress. Her friends and family are supportive of this. She has always been involved in learning programs, even when she was still employed. She would like to encourage older adults not to stay locked away inside but to get out among people, make new friends, and educate themselves in any way so that they strengthen their brain and vitality.

The opinion of the non-active older adult on educational opportunities, motives and barriers of older people

We conducted another interview in Šalamenci with a 66-year-old retired carpenter who is a member of the local community association, tourism association, and a political party, but none of these organisations offer any forms of education. He would be prepared to pay for education because 'even prayers to God aren't free anymore.' There are no educational opportunities in his village; the municipality also does not offer the education that he desires; the neighbouring municipalities are too far away. In his words:

In the village, it's not possible to organise much because there aren't enough people; we lack the initiative for group work, or an exchange of experiences. The most detrimental to people's socialising is television: in the evenings, everyone sits in front of their TVs to see what's going on around the world and that's all there is. When you're older, you can't take part in evening educational programs available 15–20 km away.

He self-critically admits that it is also difficult for him to get out of the house in the evening but that there are no educational programs earlier in the day. As he said, he believes in the importance of education:

I support adult education in all age groups. You need to keep educating yourself as long as you're alive. Every day something new happens, and if you don't keep track of things, you get lost in time.

In his opinion, the associations have enough free-time activities (events, folklore groups, choirs, work-outs etc.) to satisfy the needs of village people. They are, however, lacking educational programs, such as those that help people acquire the computer skills that are nowadays indispensable. If the municipality offered these, then older adults would be able to educate themselves on their own by using computers, as they do elsewhere. At the same time, he asks himself how many people in his village would even be interested in a computer course. Organising such classes for one or two participants would of course be unreasonable and unprofitable.

Starše – the rural “close to the city” municipality

The municipality of Starše is a part of the Podravje statistical region and consists of eight settlements. In mid-2010, the municipality had approximately 4,150 inhabitants (Slovene Municipalities in Figures 2012).¹⁶ The average age of the municipality's inhabitants was 41.8 years, which is slightly higher than the average age of the Slovenian population (41.6 years). In the municipality, the number of older adults is higher than the number of children. The data show that the average age of the municipality's inhabitants is rising faster than in the rest of the country. According to the classification of Rován et al. (2009), the municipality of Starše is ranked in the group of moderate well-being communities. This group consists of 70 municipalities (covering 35.9% of land and 33.5% of Slovenia's inhabitants) with moderate economic conditions and a living standard slightly below average. Inhabitants aged 15 years and older have a slightly lower level of completed education than the national average (Prebivalstvo 2003).¹⁷ Compared to the Slovenian average, in 2010 the municipality of Starše had lower employment and higher registered unemployment in its working-age population.

Educational opportunities for older people

The providers of education for older adults in the municipality of Starše are the village hall, health centre, grammar school, associations and parish. The village hall offers a free computer course, with older members of the municipality among the participants. It is funded by the European Social Fund and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. In the coming years, the municipality intends to build an intergenerational centre in Trniče and an Older Citizens' Home in Starše to fulfil the needs of older people. The health centre holds free lectures on health. The Starše Grammar School participates in the intergenerational project Symbiosis – e-literate Slovenia, through which older

¹⁶ In 2010, approximately 122 inhabitants lived on a square kilometer of the municipality; the population density was higher than in the entire country (101 inhabitants per km²). In the municipality, a positive natural increase rate of 2.9 per 1,000 inhabitants was recorded (in Slovenia 1.8).

¹⁷ Completed levels of education: 32.6% of population finished grammar school or less (Slovenia: 33.00%), 59.3% finished high school (Slovenia: 54%), and 8.1% finished a higher level of education (Slovenia: 12.9%).

adults learn the basics of computer use, internet surfing, and email use. Another, already traditional, intergenerational activity is In School with Grandmothers and Grandfathers, which is organised by the Starše Grammar School. The parish of Št. Janž na Dravskem polju organises parish pilgrimages to churches in Slovenia and abroad for those interested in religion, religious architecture, and history. Usually, more than half of the participants are of 65 years of age or older. The participants pay for the pilgrimages themselves.

The associations offer modest educational opportunities; most of them organise free-time activities. For example, two municipal retirement associations do not have educational activities but organise various trips, cycling, and nine-pin bowling for their members. There are four municipal firefighters' associations with older members who have the status of veterans. They do not perform field work anymore, but still participate in regular monthly drills and pass their experiences on to younger members. A lot of older adults participate in the Starše Cultural Association, where approximately half of the members are older than 65. The association's main activity is choir singing. Some older adults also participate in the other three municipal cultural and art associations, the main purpose of which is to preserve the folklore, customs, and traditions by presenting them on stage. The highest number of educational activities is offered by the Starše Ajda Association – The Women's and Girls' Association for the Preservation of Countryside Tradition. The average age of members is 55 and almost half of the members are 65 years of age or older. They are mainly retirees, housewives, country wives, and some teachers who are interested in socialising and acquiring new knowledge. They have organised several educational programs as well as numerous workshops on cooking, gardening etc.

The opinion of the organiser of educational activities for older people on educational opportunities, participation, motivation and barriers of older people

In the settlement of Marjeta na Dravskem polju, we talked to a professor who organises educational activities at the Ajda Association. The association mostly informs members about their activities verbally, through representatives in various villages who forward thoughts and comments of members about past events to the management. The management learns from these opinions and will attempt to organise things in a better and different way in the future. The rooms for carrying out their activities are provided by the municipality, grammar school, and fire station. The reasons older adults opt not to participate in educational programs are, in her opinion, a lack of motivation, health problems, the village environment, and the problem of transportation. Another barrier is the modest range of educational programs, about which she said:

We live in the countryside after all and there aren't many opportunities here. There are plenty of options to socialise, but for educational opportunities it is better in the villages of other municipalities.

She thinks that computer courses are especially beneficial for older adults because she believes that they are quite illiterate in their computer use, and in this sense the municipality is falling behind. She is sure that associations could do more in this area.

The opinion of the active older adult on the educational opportunities, motives and barriers of older people

In the same village, we interviewed a 70-year-old retired technical illustrator who is a member of the Ajda Association and the retirement association. She regularly participates in Ajda's workshops as well as trips, hikes, and organised cycling. She is informed about the options for educational and free-time activities for older adults and thinks that there are almost too many of them, because she does not have enough time to participate in everything. She would like to participate in a choir (but believes that she does not have the ear for it), working out (but feels that is too crowded), and a computer course (of which she was not informed soon enough). Her biggest problem is transportation because she always has to ask someone to drive her.

The opinion of the non-active older adult on educational opportunities, motives and barriers of older people

In the village of Trniče, we talked to a 74-year old retiree who worked as a cleaning-lady for a short amount of time and was otherwise a housewife. She is a member of the retirement association but does not participate in it actively. She used to go to their activities, but does not leave the house anymore because she has to take care of her husband who is ill and would be upset if she left home in the evenings. Her experiences with grammar-school education were good: 'It was fun in school,' she says. However, her father died early; there were no possibilities for further education and they had to work on the nearby farms to earn money. She explains her reasons for not participating in education in later years by saying:

If I joined some sort of educational program, then others would be able to see that I don't know anything. That's why I prefer to stay here, at home. Besides, an old hag doesn't need to study anymore!

She does not believe there is anything that would make her interested in organised education. She already knows everything she needs for working at home. She likes reading books about flowers and medicinal plants. However, she would like to have a computer so that she could play games on it, like her neighbour.

This is another example of an older adult retired woman with a low level of education, who in the had performed low-qualified work and now also cannot find the courage to join the existing community activities; this standpoint is further enhanced by stereotypical views on old age: she believes that old women should stay at home and so she does.

Findings and discussion

Our research shows that the differences regarding the extent and quality of educational opportunities for older adults between selected urban and rural municipalities in Slovenia are evident. Two of our selected rural municipalities (Puconci and Starše) have low service and information accessibility, and lower-than-national-average educational

levels. Those factors, and probably also the fact that the selected rural municipalities in our research are municipalities with moderate and low level of well-being, influence the extent of the educational opportunities for older adults, which are in both cases modest. Both of the selected rural municipalities have very few organisations offering educational activities for older people, but the situation is worse in Puconci (the remote rural area). Researchers have indicated the substantial social marginalisation of rural populations, and especially the older adults farm population in Slovenia (Trbanc et al. 2003); rural areas are losing vital social institutions (cultural homes, schools, libraries, etc.), and bus and rail connections are diminishing.

We discovered some similarities but also differences regarding holders of the educational activities for older adults in selected municipalities. The opportunities for older people in both rural municipalities in our research are mainly provided by voluntary associations, which offer non-formal educational and leisure-time activities. In contrast, the selected urban municipality (Novo Mesto) is well-equipped with different services, has many different formal and non-formal educational possibilities for older people, and has good information accessibility. In the selected municipalities, the educational opportunities for older people are mostly free of charge (financed by EU funds, municipality and state funds, etc.). A low level of participation in education is very often connected with a low level of education and the poverty of older people, regardless where they live.

Mobility, and consequently the limited access to education, are the most often cited barriers for education by older people particularly in rural areas, which holds true especially for the older adults without a driver's license or without a car. The providers often overlook how important it is (especially for socially more endangered older adults) to ensure performing of the education close to home. This could be solved with the organisation of transportation for the older adults and with the development of learning possibilities for older adults (e.g. study groups, life-long learning points, travelling libraries, visits and learning at home, etc.) also in smaller settlements. Other authors similarly ascertain that due to the decreasing mobility in later life, the accessibility of services in living environments become increasingly significant both in rural and urban areas (Filipovič Hrast et al. 2012; Kneževič Hočevār & Istenič 2010; Trbanc et al. 2003). We can agree with Scott et al. (2007: 16) that generalisations based on urban-rural differences are in this case problematic.

The perception of the adequacy and responsiveness of the educational services offered to older adults' needs depends mostly on the level of activity of older adults. We determined that older adults who are active in communities are relatively satisfied with the educational opportunities. However, non-active older adults show dissatisfaction with the educational opportunities in their community. Their inactivity could be the result of a lack of attractive educational offers, but further analyses show that this is not the key barrier to participation. Non-active older adults in both rural and urban municipalities mainly cite situational barriers like lack of time, health and financial problems, distance from an educational site and care for family members, but we have also observed stereotypical perceptions of aging.

The level of education and the previous occupation have a significant role in the educational process; the higher the educational level, the more likely a person will

be actively involved in community activities offered and the more likely the person will attempt to influence the opportunities and performance of educational activities. Our research, therefore, confirms the findings of other researchers (McGivney 2001; Sargant et al. 2000; Withnall 2006; etc.): adults who left school early in their childhood and later did not enrol in education as adults are not interested in third-age education, are afraid of it, and even show resistance to it (in both rural and urban areas). They usually cite multiple different barriers for participation in education. The opposite holds true for adults who were active learners during their whole life.

Our findings show that educational institutions and voluntary associations in urban municipalities have up-to-date webpages with extensive information on their activities, while voluntary associations in rural municipalities as a rule do not have webpages. Scott and his colleagues (2007: 4) ascertain that rural areas have lower service and information accessibility, but a higher sense of community. In general, this might be true if we take into account all inhabitants of certain rural municipalities, but for lower-educated older people living in rural areas in Slovenia the sense of community might also be extremely low, especially if people do not cooperate in social events and do not have access to information. This is also proven by research on farms in rural areas in Slovenia, which shows that farmers did not participate in wider social networks and that their social network still only consists of their closer siblings (Kneževič Hočevar 2012: 69).

We can posit that connectedness and reconciliation between educational institutions and voluntary associations, offering educational activities for older adults in selected urban and rural municipalities, is very low. There are some attempts to connect different generations through activities, organised by local schools; however, generally speaking, cooperation is uncontrolled.

The interviewed educational providers reported that the needs and interests of the older adults for education in local environments are not being specifically established and that they prepare programs according to their own estimations. We have found that the providers are rather self-content and mainly do not plan for the expansion of the educational opportunities; if older people do not participate, the reason is their low level of education and insufficient motivation.

We can summarise that participation of older adults in education does not depend only on the extent of educational opportunities in municipality; it should be followed by other measures for encouraging the participation of older people in education. In our opinion, in both rural and urban municipalities, the further steps needed to improve the quality of the educational opportunities for older people are: that educational programs are free of charge and accessible; they have responsive content and organisation of education based on older adults' needs; there is cooperation and networking of different providers of educational and spare-time activities for older people in the community; there is accessibility of information and educational counselling activities; and there is competent and trained staff in educational institutions and enthusiastic older members in voluntary associations.

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Povzetek

Namen našega prispevka je proučiti razliko med urbanimi in ruralnimi občinami glede ponudbe izobraževanja za starejše ljudi. Z metodo multiplih študij primerov smo ugotovili, da obstajajo pomembne razlike v možnostih izobraževanja starejših v ruralnih in urbanih lokalnih skupnostih. Toda pripravljenost starejših za vključitev v izobraževanje ni odvisna le od ponudbe izobraževanja v občini, ampak tudi od različnih ukrepov za spodbujanje udeležbe starejših v izobraževanju. Na podlagi rezultatov ugotavljamo, da bi bilo v ruralnih in urbanih občinah potrebno v prihodnje izobraževalno ponudbo za starejše izboljšati tako, da bodo izobraževalni programi brezplačni in dostopni, da bo vsebina in organizacija izobraževanja ustrezala potrebam starejših, da se bo vzpostavilo sodelovanje in mreženje različnih ponudnikov izobraževalnih in prostočasnih dejavnosti za starejše ljudi v skupnosti in podobno.

KJUČNE BESEDE: skupnosti, ruralno, urbano, starejši odrasli, izobraževanje

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