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CRITICAL DISCOURSE OF QUALITY IN ADULT EDUCATION

Abstract: *This paper analyses and critically evaluates the quality of adult education. The quality of adult education is strongly influenced by neoliberal conceptions and is more often than not reduced to measurable indicators, whereas the other aspects of adult education are neglected. The author points out that quality in adult education is a rather vague and "slippery" concept that reflects different ideological, economic, social and political values. Therefore, it is important to approach the concept of quality from the perspective of critical pedagogy. Critical discourse defines adult education as a process whose focal point is an individual who educates oneself because of emancipation. The emancipatory role of adult education, viewed as a process of liberation, empowerment, questioning and development of all human abilities and interests, is being neglected in the economic discourse of quality, which consequently casts doubt on the ultimate purpose and goals of adult education. Due to the aforementioned doubts, a whole line of contemporary myths about adult education appears, while adult education has simultaneously become an instrument of adjustment, which is reflected in its quality.*

Keywords: *critical pedagogy; emancipatory discourse; myths in adult education; neoliberalism; quality assurance*

INTRODUCTION

The question of quality in adult education is closely connected with the purpose and goals of adult education, which are determined by numerous (global) actors and creators of education policies. This fact brings into question broader social, political, cultural, and economic goals that greatly surpass the issue of adult education. Although numerous national and EU strategic documents recognize the importance of adult education, the implementation of efficient educational policies and practices is still lagging behind. National educational systems are still primarily focused on the education of children and young people, during which negligible steps have been made to transform the system to encompass and consider the needs for lifelong learning, especially for adult education.

The heterogeneity of adult education has to be understood as one of more important features that affects its quality. A high-quality adult education satisfies adult learners' expectations, helping them to develop the desired learning outcomes at a satisfactory level. These kinds of expectations may largely vary because adult learners undertake learning for different purposes, from social and professional involvement to career advancement as well as from changing jobs to expanding personal interests. Therefore, the diverse needs and goals of adult learners demand diverse selection of formal and informal opportunities to learn, from *second-chance education* to vocational training, higher education and *education for pleasure,* with the aim of individual self-actualization.

Adult education encompasses a broad spectrum of learning activities with various extensive legislation, policies, management, structures, priorities, goals, service providers, personnel, organizational forms, learning content and learning outcomes. Therefore, providing opportunities for adult education includes all subsystems of education and training, and it has many forms and a strong nonformal dimension. For the abovementioned reasons, a policy that ensures quality in adult education should not be constructed on the basis of uniformity, standardization or a positivist framework for

determining quality (through various indicators) to consider improvements in the so-called cross-sectoral nature of adult education.

While pondering the quality of adult education, we can ask ourselves what its ultimate goal is. Is it its main goal to ultimately transform society into a *knowledge society* and develop the quality of an individual's life or entirely something else? The purpose of social development in modern societies, i.e., the *knowledge society*, should be to improve quality of life (Kušić et al., 2015). Recently, numerous strategies (UNESCO, 2005) have discussed *knowledge societies* that project the development of (adult) education and associated policies with the aim of social development. Nevertheless, the (mis)use of the *knowledge society* syntagm is becoming increasingly apparent as political and economic discourse prevails (Kušić et al., 2015), which in turn casts doubt on this type of *society*, especially because economically and politically colored criteria of quality are being included. However, one should not necessarily think of countries with high national incomes as developed but of those that have high quality of life (Sirgy, 1986). In accordance with the above-defined understanding of a *knowledge society*, it can be concluded that the purpose of adult education is to contribute to an individual's quality of life. Thus, this should represent the basis of a system that ensures quality in adult education.

However, when discussing the concept of quality in adult education, it is important to raise awareness about the value bases of any framework used for the quality of education. In that context, Sayed (1997) pointed out that the concept of quality in education is, even though it is frequently used, unreachable and undefined where its multiple meanings reflect diverse ideological, economic, social and political values.

UNDERSTANDING QUALITY IN ADULT EDUCATION

The quality of adult education is a *slippery* term that enables various definitions or criteria to be used as dominant. To understand the complete process of quality assurance in adult education, the terms quality and quality assurance must be defined. The term quality implies "all entity features that cover its ability to satisfy listed and implied needs" (CEDEFOP, 2011, p. 132). On the other hand, quality assurance in (adult) education implies "activities that include planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting and improving of quality which are implemented in order to ensure that education and training (program content, curriculum, assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes etc.) meet the expected requirements of quality requested by the participants" (CEDEFOP, 2011, p. 134).

When we discuss quality assurance in adult education, we are actually discussing quality education where adult learners must be at the very center of that process. Moreover, quality adult education has to have a strong focus on enabling equitable access, especially for vulnerable groups, through informing, guiding and other stimulating measures that will respect the needs of adult learners as well as previous learning experiences. Along with the mentioned components, quality implies the creation of flexible forms for learning, guidance and support for adult learners as well as empowerment to achieve learning outcomes and use their time, effort and financial resources. The mentioned elements of quality, which will derive flexible forms of adult learners' achievements evaluation, yield realistic assumptions for easier advancement in education, inclusion in the labor market and/or community (TWG, 2013) and ultimately enable higher quality of life.

In most countries, adult education represents an undefined sector without an explicit strategy and is often interpreted as the weakest link in national educational systems. Adult education represents an educational system area that is difficult to define and classify. The different organizations of educational and school systems across Europe and the fact that adult education theory was developed on different *Andragogy* conceptions (Kušić et al., 2016) resulted in a lack of a single, universally accepted definition of adult education. Therefore, the conceptual and organizational differentiation of the adult education system has resulted in various definitions that more or less try to acknowledge the contextual characteristics of individual country in retrospective and perspective. The high level of differentiation significantly contributed to the low level of regulation, which is manifested in the fact that the responsibility for adult education in most cases lies not only on one ministry but also on a number of coresponsible ones (e.g., the Ministry of Education, Science, Labor and Employment, Social Affairs and Culture). Therefore, adult education has become "everyone and no one's child" (Kušić et al., 2016, p. 11), which is negatively reflected in the adult education system, although interdisciplinarity,

with the prerequisite of quality integration of adult education systems' various competencies, should and has to represent an advantage.

This state was reflected in the process of quality assurance in education that is defined by context; thus making, "quality is not just a technical issue but has strong political, social and cultural dimensions relating to the explicit and implicit economic, social, cultural, political and individual purposes of the learning of adults in a region or country at any given time" (GHK, 2010, as cited in TWG, 2013, p. 14). Despite the context that determines quality, in the late 1990s, requests to create a joint approach to quality assurance in adult education appeared, resulting in a number of documents, projects and instruments (Popović, 2011). Many European instruments for quality assurance that at their core do not acknowledge this system's specificity exist. These instruments are not directly oriented toward quality in adult education, but they can contribute because they encompass an area of vocational education (*EQAVET – European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training* (European Parliament & Council, 2009)), higher education (*ESG – The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ENQA, ESU, EUA & EURASHE, 2015)), and elementary education (European Parliament & Council, 2001), as well as instruments that refer to various possibilities for gaining qualifications (European Parliament & Council, 2008). The mentioned areas of education offer opportunities to include adult learning, which implicitly affects the quality of adult education. Although many high-quality systems and tools (Austrian National Agency for Lifelong Learning, 2011) have been created through transnational projects, when we talk about quality, it is important to note that the focus was primarily on vocational education as well as higher education (Popović, 2011). This type of focus is a result of a general neoliberal conception in education, which has consequently transferred to adult education in its entirety. In regards to highly emphasized market orientation, adult education systems are organized as a consistent part of the market society, understanding adult education as an industry, a source of profit, a place to develop competitiveness and exclusively as a tool for employment.

Despite pronounced relative diffusion in quality assurance, studies on this aspect of adult education (Faurschau, 2008) have identified three components: the quality of structure, which refers to broader frameworks and encompasses issues of organization and resources (education policy, legislative aspects, overall organization of the adult education system, curricula, etc.); the quality of processes, which refers to internal issues such as teaching and learning (standardized learning outcomes, teaching content, didactic-methodical approaches, learning materials, environment, teacher-adult learner relationships, etc.);
the quality of results with an emphasis on education outcomes (curriculum and subject-defined outcomes) (TWG, 2013; Popović, 2011).

The abovementioned components are connected because, even though the quality of results is the ultimate goal, the core of quality assurance consists of the quality of the process as well as the structure quality. High-quality adult education should be accessible to everyone and should be relevant, efficacious, efficient and sustainable, and emphasis should be placed on the quality of the structure and process.

As a starting point for the articulation of approaching quality in adult education on a global scale, UNESCO defined four fundamental dimensions of quality that are listed in numerous European documents (UIL, 2009, p. 79-94):

Equity – implies an equitable approach and participation in education and training;

Relevance – implies efficient way and support as well as the existence of adult learning to achieve individual and social goals;

Effectiveness – implies end results in terms of learning outcomes for adult learners. Moreover, the percentage of completion and the achievement level represent effectiveness indicators.

Efficiency – implies economical resource distribution needed to reach a certain goal while taking into consideration the cost–benefit ratio.

Recently, in addition to the abovementioned dimensions, the relevant literature has listed sustainability as the fifth dimension of quality in (adult) education (Broek & Buiskool, 2013; Barrent et al., 2006). Sustainability implies learning results that should be sustainable in the long-term and should not harm the environment or society as a whole. The implementation of the sustainability dimension or sustainability development in educational systems and practice is still at the very beginning, representing an area of numerous discussions. The idea of *sustainability* or *sustainable*

growth and development is closely connected with the ways of analyzing and solving problems within education policy frameworks. Today, it is becoming increasingly visible that a change in paradigm, purpose, policy and practice in adult education is needed to achieve sustainability. Furthermore, a switch from a dominant instructional and transmissional paradigm to a transformative and emancipatory paradigm in (adult) education is needed. In its key document that discusses the goals of education for sustainable development, UNESCO (2017) emphasizes that today's society has to address numerous challenges that it faces, including increasing complexity and certainty of conditions, individualization and an increase in social diversity, the expansion of economic and cultural uniformity, the degradation of ecosystems on which we depend, and increasingly greater vulnerability and exposure to natural and technological dangers. The abovementioned conditions require individuals' creative, adaptive and self-organized activities to learn to understand the complex world in which they live while simultaneously being able to act in the direction of positive changes (UNESCO, 2015). In recent literature, this group of individuals has been called *sustainability citizens* (Wals & Lenglet, 2016; Wals, 2015), while the main goal of education for sustainable development is cultivation of the previously described future *sustainably* responsible and active citizens (UNESCO, 2017). All of the above issues put in front of adult education the search for an answer on how to develop emancipated individuals.

Apart from determining the dimensions of quality, in the literature, two interconnected dominant approaches to quality in adult education can be identified—economic and humanistic (Broek & Buiskool, 2013; Barret et al., 2006). The economic approach refers mostly to efficiency and effectiveness as well as achieving learning outcomes at a reasonable cost where cost–benefit analysis is extremely important (cost–benefit analysis). This viewpoint on adult education uses qualitative results and *indicators* as a measure of quality (e.g., enrollment – drop-out ratio, return rates on education investment in terms of profit and cognitive achievements measured by national exams and/or international surveys such as the PIAAC or PISA study). In contrast, the humanistic/progressive approach is characterized by care about adult learners' development, human development and social changes. To summarize, it is not focused on a positivistic approach to measuring quality. As this approach emphasizes the learning process, it consists of principles acceptable in adult education.

Both approaches look upon large international organizations such as the OECD, World Bank and UNESCO, whose actions support and empower a particular approach of quality in (adult) education. In other words, the concept of quality in adult education is analyzed within a discursive practice framework, which implies that ideology and power relations hide behind it (Popović & Maksimović, 2014). As in every education, the concept of quality in education relies on various value systems, approaches and paradigms where political actors offer different perspectives on certain concepts to support their views of reality (Bacchi, 2000). This political power is recognized through *global power-wielders'* actions. Additionally, glaring examples include the World Bank and OECD, which, in terms of the development of quality in adult education, act according to banking and economic principles. They use different measurable *indicators* and statistical data as a main benchmark of quality, which often questions the purpose of quality and adult education in general. Although the goals of quality assurance in adult education should encompass a broader spectrum of individual and social learning outcomes, the assessment of quality in adult education is usually restricted exclusively to measurable outcomes. A quantitative approach and measurability became the *gold standard* of quality in adult education.

In contrast to those of the World Bank and OECD, UNESCO's understanding of the concept of quality is more comprehensive due to its holistic approach to education. Education, including adult education, is considered essential for human development because of the cultural and linguistic diversity of education, inclusive education, education for peace and human rights and education for sustainable development. These topics have gained importance in the UN Resolution *Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014* framework. Delors' report: *Learning: The treasure within* contains UNESCO's vision for global education in which four pillars of education are used as a base: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (Delors, 1996; 1998). Learning to *know, do, live together and be* should be understood as the foundation of adult education as well as its quality. It was Delors's report that influenced the development of life skills, which is elaborated in *The Dakar Framework for Action* (World Education Forum, 2000). The life skills concept is significantly broader than the concepts of professional and practical skills and knowledge, which view adults as economically productive individuals adapted to the labor market. We should see

individuals not only in the labor market context but also as *sustainability citizens*. However, today, changes in UNESCO's concept are occurring, resulting in a visible approach toward the World Bank and the OECD's understanding of the concept of quality.

Thinking critically about the concept of quality in adult education, it can be noted that dimensions of quality (equity, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) are often in mutual conflict because measures that improve one dimension negatively influence the others. We are witnessing situations in which not only equity is significantly neglected due to increased efficiency (Welch, 2000) but also other dimensions of quality, such as relevance and sustainability. This mutual conflict between dimensions of quality is a result of the dominant approach to it in adult education. Despite the efforts to *reconciliate* economic and humanistic approaches, it is apparent that concepts from the economy world and human capital theory are used to define quality in (adult) education. Consequently, a series of contemporary myths about adult education occur, whereas adult education increasingly becomes an instrument of adjustment, which is again reflected in the understanding of adult education quality, i.e., in defining the fundamental dimensions of quality as well as accepting the economic approach as dominant. The emancipatory role of adult education, seen as a process of liberation, empowerment, questioning and development of all individuals' abilities and interests, is neglected in economic approaches, which leads to an undermining of adult education purposes and goals. If the ultimate purpose and goal of adult education represent economic development in which the market concept dominates, an open question of whether adult education represents an emancipatory process remains.

CONTEMPORARY MYTHS ABOUT ADULT EDUCATION

In regard to social development, the belief that adult education is *conditio sine qua non* has been present since the times of enlightenment conception of adult education, when it was considered an activity that enables individuals' affirmation in broadly conceived curricula. More recent *trends* have refocused adult education by placing it in the lifelong education and learning conception where it became its focal point (Pastuović, 2008; Titmus, 1981) because it was considered not only every individual's right and need during their personal and professional development but also an important factor of social development. These perspectives contributed to the fact that, during the second half of the 20th century, adult education moved from the margins of social events (and interventions by creators of education policies) to the center of education policies in all countries, no matter its development level. Numerous countries understand that adult education plays an important role in social and individual development (Reischmann, 2004), consequently defining it as a basic element of the education system and recognizing it as an equal subsystem in all *policy* documents. However, practice indicates that adult education has recently lost its essence, which is reflected in understanding quality in adult education. At the same time, a certain understanding of quality in adult education undoubtedly affects the understanding of the purpose and goals of adult education as well as the further development of the adult education system.

More recently, adult education has evolved, at least on a declarative level, in social, political and economic contexts. Moreover, adult education is conceptualized as an "individual task rather than collective project" (Biesta, 2006, p. 169). Lifelong learning became dominant as well as a fundamental approach in education policy discourse within the EU, conceiving of adult education as a tool for competitiveness and economic growth in the EU. Biesta (2006) pointed out that adult education was reconceptualized around policies and practices that consolidate the liberal-productive model and the utilitarian-instrumental model of organizing educational relations, processes and institutions. One of the outcomes of reconceptualization is the complete neglection of humanistic goals in adult education, which is increasingly becoming a myth. According to Maslow's hierarchy, an individual's self-actualization, a need on the pyramid's very top, became an illusion in adult education. In reality, adult education is becoming increasingly less connected to individuals' self-actualization and free time but rather to economic goals and education in the labor market. Reflecting on the dimensions of the quality of adult education, relevance, as one of the mentioned dimensions, raises numerous questions about the current stability of adult education. In that context, the relevance of adult education as a means of self-actualization and emancipation represents one of the contemporary myths formed within various reconceptualizations and reorganizations of adult education (system).

The market model of adult education and the issue of human resource management occupied the central role in adult education in terms of the role given to them during the development of the European Union's economic competitiveness. Adult education system reforms, as well as entire education systems, curricula and education policies, are becoming increasingly coordinated with the totalizing imperatives of the discourse on the global economy. Additionally, economic and market parameters impose universally accepted values such as productivity, effectiveness, quality control, standards, competitiveness, and competencies. These parameters imbue education reforms in almost every country, which in turn demands that practices in educational institutions show results in line with economic value criteria. Mijatović (2002, p. 117) labels this approach a "lack of scientific compass" and "playing reformation games as well as creating illusions of changes". Under these conditions, "knowledge and education… do not represent a goal, but rather a mean that does not require additional examination as long as it can be justified just as a mean: for prosperous markets, workplace qualifications, service mobility, economy growth" (Liessmann, 2008, p. 129). The dominance of the economy model in adult education systems is visible from the fact that, lately, the responsibility for adult education has shifted from the ministry of education to the ministry of economy.

Due to the highly pronounced market orientation, adult education systems are reorganized as a consistent part of the market society, treating adult education as an industry, a source of profit, a place to develop competitiveness and an employment tool. This fact is visible in the overemphasizing of vocational adult education, where liberal, general adult education is being almost completely neglected. Kušić et al. (2016) note that a number of theoretical and practical discourses, such as defining adult education, which is often equated exclusively with vocational adult education; financing adult education because state financial resources are exclusively directed toward the development of vocational adult education; changing the mission and areas of activity of certain traditionally – andragogical oriented educational institutions, which are increasingly including vocational adult education courses in their offer to stay competitive on the market; and andragogue's education because, in most countries, those who work in the field of vocational adult education have to, in compliance with laws and policies, gain certain andragogical competencies, while andragogues working in liberal adult education are, in general, not required to possess them, testifying to the abovementioned statement.

This type of discourse, along with the reorganization of the adult education system, has caused significant changes in adult education curricula. The changes are primarily visible in the types of educational courses that are offered, which are exclusively oriented toward market requirements. This offers adults only *technical* equipment for battling in the neoliberal arena, which is insufficient for life in modern society, i.e., for an individual's quality of life. Additionally, due to international financial institutions' pressure, contents that develop entrepreneurial competencies are forcibly *pushed* into elementary and high school adult education curricula to support the abovementioned claim. On the other hand, content that meets today's standards is *worthless* and is being removed because a large part of social and humanistic education is considered unpopular because it holds insignificant market relevance (Kušić et al., 2015). Instead of learning about culture, art, history, interpersonal relations and numerous social competencies, in the context of a hidden curriculum, adults must learn not only how to become efficient workers and employers but also how to become as large consumers as possible. A market orientation in adult education contributed to the strong development of the commercialization of adult education. A significant number of businesspeople and corporations are founding their own educational institutions (private educational institutions, corporate universities, etc.) where they offer various forms of education, despite the questionable quality of the educational process. In this way, every pseudoeducational course is acceptable if demand exists and if buyers will pay for that particular educational course, regardless of its scientific foundations or validity based on generational knowledge (Standing, 2011).

Although adult education is mentioned in numerous European and national documents as a key factor in employment, adult education is being sold as an investment that has no economic return for the majority of customers. As Standing (2011) noted, this represents simple treachery because we testify to a high number of highly educated individuals who are unemployed, working low-skill jobs or not possessing the life skills needed in the 21st century. This claim is supported by the results obtained in

the PIACC study[1], which indicate a high percentage of adults who have a low level of literacy skills (from 4.9% to 27.7% of adults) and numeracy skills (from 8.1% to 31.7% of adults). A high percentage of adults (from 7% to 23%) do not even possess basic competencies needed to use ICT (computers, modern means of communication) in the modern technological environment. Only a small number of adults (from 2.9% to 8.8%) possess a higher level of competencies needed to solve problems in the modern technological environment. Although the results significantly vary from country to country, they have shown that generational differences (older adults are generally less trained than young adults) as well as sex differences (men possess more competencies in the fields of literacy, numeracy and solving problems in technological environments than women do, even though these differences are negligible in younger generations) (OECD, 2013).

The effectiveness and efficiency of adult education thus become another myth present in today's adult education. Economical discourse in (adult) education resulted in *infatuation* with the competency approach. The fact is that the term competency and competency approach to education appeared in the field of management, resulting from Taylorism and the cult of efficiency, while transfer into the field of adult education represents a consequence arising from the comparisons between economic efficiency and achieving standards. The only acceptable evaluation of the entire educational process and educational systems is the evaluation of learning outcomes based on educational standards. At the core of introducing the concept of educational standards lies an attempt to apply an economic model of ensuring quality in education that is approved by education policy as unquestionable and firmly supported by international organizations (Palekčić, 2007). As highlighted by Ratke (2003, as cited in Palekčić, 2007), it is about the economization and technologization of education, i.e., about the OECD's educational sciences, whose primary goal is global competitiveness in the world market. The introduction of educational standards as well as associated learning outcomes resulted in a reduction in education on measurable knowledge. One of the main criticisms of Taylorism, the management theoretician Mintzberg (1989), points out that an obsession with efficiency leads to a situation where measurable outcomes entirely overshadow social outcomes and values, which is believed to be one of the key disadvantages of the competency approach to education. In that way, the judgments of quality are connected with the situation in educational institutions where emphasis is exclusively placed on a set of knowledge and skills in a narrow sense, while attitudes and values become significantly neglected.

By unquestionably accepting the competency approach, adult education practice is led by an instrumental approach, which implies the idea that an individual is the manager of his or her own competencies and that his or her employment depends on the ability to adapt his or her own competencies to the labor market, which can be understood as an "instrument of adaptation, rather than emancipation" (Biesta, 2012, p. 8). This approach mainly understands adult education as a means of adapting to the needs and demands of the political and economic context. At the same time, knowledge is viewed as something that is outside of the adult learner as well as something that will be acquired during the learning process. Even though adult education should contribute to individuals' emancipation and empowerment, by accepting the economic discourse, adult education plays an entirely different role—the role of individuals submitting and taming to the existing system. Instead of adult education encouraging a critical questioning of reality, it is increasingly becoming a tool for uncritical acceptance of the established hegemony.

Critical thinkers such as Freire (1970), Giroux (1985), Foucault (1991), Cunningham (1993), Schied (1995) and Orwell (2016) agree that the above-described type of education is responsible for individuals' submission, where emphasis is placed on their economic efficiency and labor productivity. In accordance with that, Standing (2011) points out that globalization is not the age of deregulation but reregulation in which most new rules and standards represent directives that tell people what they can(not) do. Political pressure and supervision by the state are strongly expressed in education with the

[1] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) conducted the first study with the aim of evaluating adult's knowledge and skills as a part of *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC). The study was conducted from August 2011 to March 2013. Approximately 166 000 participants, from the age of 16 to 65, in 24 countries, participated in the study – of which 22 represent Member States of OECD-a (Australia, Austria, Belgium/Flanders, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Canada, South Korea, The Netherlands, Norway, Germany, Poland, Republic of Ireland, the USA, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, the UK/England and Northern Ireland) as well as Cyprus and Russian Federation.

aim of forming the *ideal individual* according to the understanding of the political and corporate elites. For this reason, in educational policies, as Clabaugh and Rozycki (1990) point out, the *discipline of form* prevails, not the *discipline of cause*. The ideas of George Orwell about the control of people (*Nineteen Eighty-Four, 1949)* as well as Michel Foucault's notions about Panopticon (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, 1975*) seemed unimaginable a few years ago. These ideas can be seen as a concept of today's disciplinary power as well as a metaphor for modern *disciplinary* societies and their ubiquitous tendency to observe, control and normalize. Foucault (1991) states that the Panopticon creates awareness of permanent surveillance as a type of power and control, where chains, bars and heavy locks are not needed for domination. This form of power can also be placed in the context of (adult) education by connecting economic growth of power with standards, competency profiles and learning outcomes to increase the *obedience*, efficiency and effectiveness of all elements of the adult education system. Institutional (adult) education is characterized as an ideological state apparatus for reproducing elite people's values and creating conditions where human needs are presented as consumer goods (Giroux, 1985).

Illich's critique of the institutionalization of human needs is still relevant and will become even more relevant with the acceptance of the rapid commercialization of all segments of life (Vrcelj & Mušanović, 2013), including adult education. In accordance with that, adult education institutions have become accreditation agencies. According to Meyer and Rowan (1983, p. 73), education, including adult education, is understood as "school rule: Education is a certified teacher teaching a standardized curricular topic to a registered student in an accredited school". Illich (1980) claims that the inversion of needs is occurring in the newly emerging historical situation in a way where society offers services instead of values, while at the same time, today's (adult) education, along with educational institutions, encourages the development of inversions. Thus, in educational institutions, process and essence, teaching process and learning, fluent expression with the ability to say something new, transition to higher class with education, and diploma with professionalism is being equated. Diplomas and certificates have become education's main products, which should ensure employment opportunities instead of holistic development. Moreover, the sustainability of such an adult education system is also in question as one of significant dimensions of the quality of modern adult education.

In 1972, UNESCO published a report on education where education was viewed as a means of an individual's self-development, that is, as a means to *learn to be* (Faure et al., 1972), which represented a turning point in how education was perceived. According to the abovementioned viewpoint, the (adult) education process should follow people during their life cycle, in which the individual is the subject (Biesta, 2006), instead of an object in the education process. In other words, education was perceived as a toll for integral human development that bears vital significance for both individual and social emancipation. However, today's trend in adult education is the perception of adult individuals, which conflicts with the holistic concept[2] of understanding human beings.

There are numerous reasons why we can believe that adult education institutions, or more precisely, the whole society, have failed to encourage a holistic approach to adults by reducing them only to their competence and competitiveness in the labor market. Moreover, by observing ingrained education policies and discussions about adult education, it can be concluded that numerous communities, under globalization conditions, need competent workers to ensure their nation's competitiveness in the world market. Additionally, goals such as "subject's autonomy, individual's sovereignty, one's responsibility… self-conscience, spiritual permeation of the world… vitality, social competencies and the joy of learning" are in question, while the secret goal of today's adult education, or rather training, is to "not thinking for oneself" (Liessmann, 2008, p. 61-78). Following only the market concept in adult education, the absence of a vision of adult education as a means to raise autonomy and social awareness as well as a tool for conscientization (Freire, 1970), empowerment and emancipation is emphasized.

[2] In holistic concept, the individual is viewed as a "unique, complete and unrepeatable person – personality, rather than a unit or – even more pretentious – a system of positivistic, objective, discrete characteristics available for scientific observation" (Mušanović, 1998, p. 86). According to holistic principle, person cannot be reduced to any, no matter how complex, model (individual as rational, moral, working, etc., human being). It is known that modern complex models of human and human behavior abandon the idea of an isolated aggregate presentation of humans as a unit of characteristics which is used to explain the human world and humans.

Another contemporary myth in adult education is equity in terms of education participation, which is one of the dimensions of the quality of adult education. Although the democratization of education represents one of the characteristics of modern society, it is possible to rightfully point out segregation mechanisms in adult education. On the basis of Illich's critique of education's democracy, segregation mechanisms are subtly incorporated in adult education institutions through hidden curricula that are often in the service of oppressed, marginalized social groups that are unable to acquire education as public goods (Kušić et al., 2022; Vrcelj & Mušanović, 2010). Directing adult education exclusively for the needs of the labor market results in a paradox where less educated or uneducated individuals are being neglected in comparison to those who already possess a certain education. In this way, adult education is primarily directed toward those who are already educated rather than those who need education the most. Boeren (2009) points out that participation in adult education follows Matthew's principle: those who already have, gain even more. Thus, the concept of *second chance* in reality becomes a myth.

With the aim of a deeper understanding of various concepts and dimensions of quality in adult education, it is important to differentiate the terms *education* and *schooling* because these two terms, despite having significantly different meanings, are frequently equated. The aforementioned equating of the terms is increasingly present in ensuring a quality paradigm because institutional efficiency and effectiveness become synonymous with quality in adult education. Chitty (2002, as cited in Barrett et al., 2006) is critical of the abovementioned viewpoint on quality, emphasizing that the purpose of schooling can represent fulfilling all individuals' potential, preparing for the labor market as well as social development and changes, which could be considered quality. According to the humanistic paradigm, the main purpose of education is to fulfill all individuals' potential, where schooling encourages the development of self-confidence, independence and autonomy. In that way, education's social dimension is emphasized, where adult education represents a powerful tool for transformation. In contrast, by viewing schooling exclusively as a way of individual's preparation for labor market, its basic principles are based on a rational educational paradigm, that is, the theory of human capital (Baptiste, 2001). Consequently, education gains instrumental value, whereas educational institutions serve as adequate selection tools for individuals' professional careers. Thus, the term education has been reduced to the "functionalist-pragmatic dimension" (Palekčić, 2007, p. 100).

By equating education with schooling, which is in contrast with the lifelong learning concept, adult education is understood very narrowly and is reduced to a technical activity that is static because it does not take into consideration all the characteristics of a particular context (Holt, 2000, as cited in Barrett et al., 2006). Biesta (2012) points out that education, in regards to its purpose, has three domains: qualification, socialization and subjectivization. Through education, individuals learn and gain the ability to complete activities/tasks, thus gaining qualifications in a field of activity (qualification domain). Additionally, through integration, they become a part of social, political and professional settings (socialization domain), whereas through education, they can become independent as well as activity and responsibility subjects (subjectivization domain). As mentioned before, today, we live in a world of certificates and an idea in which the more you professionally develop, the more competitive you become while simultaneously receiving more tools for *protection* in *audit* culture. This kind of practice is being supported on a daily basis by (education) politicians, employers, teachers and EU documents on education, especially in the field of adult education where only the qualification domain is included, whereas the other two remain neglected. However, while qualification and socialization may promote an individual's empowerment, subjectivization is closely related to emancipation, i.e., critical thinking about the ways of their activity and essence.

Liessmann's reflections, which are based on the idea that we cannot talk about education but rather ignorance (a lack of education), support critical discourse about adult education in contemporary society. However, ignorance does not imply either "the absence of knowledge or even foolishness" (Liessmann, 2008, p. 60) or a "certain form of unculturedness, but rather entirely intensive acting with knowledge beyond every idea about education" as a consequence of "capitalization of the spirit" (Liessmann, 2008, p. 9-10). The rigid advocacy of economization, neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideology, commodification, commercialization, privatization, ranking and standardization, which represent the basis of today's education (Kušić et al., 2014), is in favor of contemporary myths about adult education.

CONCLUSION

Even though evidence exists that ensuring quality, when it is possible to ensure and prove it, stated in predominantly economic terms, *would pay off*, adult education, being an exceptionally heterogeneous, differentiated, multifunctional and changeable system, imposes the need to introduce other parameters. Most of the instruments that are specifically designed to ensure quality conditions in adult education are focused exclusively on measurable parameters and quantitative approaches, viewing them as the *gold standard* of quality. Consequently, numerous important aspects of adult education, which are not achievable in these approaches, are neglected.

The concept of quality in adult education reflects different ideological, economic, social and political values, thus making it important to approach this concept of quality from the critical pedagogy position. Today's adult education, i.e., the quality of adult education, is marked by the concept of efficiency and effectiveness, which is the result of the economic model's supremacy in adult education, equating adult education exclusively with education for the labor market and the rigid advocacy of a competency approach in education that neglects the equity, relevancy and sustainability of adult education. This perspective on quality in adult education that follows the competitiveness concept, which focuses exclusively on measurable indicators and continuous growth, is not only unsustainable in the long term but also harmful for adult education. In this way, the economic discourse of quality changes the very essence and practice of adult education and reduces human development and quality of life to economic parameters. Consequently, the question arises whether today we can talk about adult education as a process of an individual's emancipation and empowerment or as a process of their submission and taming with the goal of noncritical acceptance of established hegemony. Answering this question will determine the future of adult education.

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