



## ARTICLE

# Community Education and Resilience: Making Knowledge, Making Community

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### ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative study focuses on the importance of community education in fostering community resilience. The research is grounded in a conceptual framework that encompasses resilience, well-being, and community education. The data were collected in Slovenia between 2020 and 2022 through two cycles based on the principles of participatory qualitative research involving 18 community education actors. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were employed. A thematic content analysis of the interviews identified key themes and categories. Additional anecdotal data were gathered through participant observation in three selected community organizations and informal conversations with program providers, such as teachers. These anecdotal data served as a means of source triangulation and category validation. The findings indicated that community education enhances resilience and cohesion through knowledge co-creation, the development of social and emotional well-being, motivational programs, and emancipatory engagement. It empowers communities to build their capacity to respond to

unpredictable challenges. The participants emphasized the need to develop new forms of community education, characterized as a pedagogy of contingency.

**KEYWORDS**

community, adult education, knowledge co-creation, pedagogy of contingency

## Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing interest in community education, driven by increased insecurity stemming from the pandemic, natural disasters, precarious work, longevity, and evolving global–local dynamics. Community education practices focus on developing education related to health and environmentalism and enhancing social, emotional, and spiritual capabilities (Albanesi et al., 2019; Mayo, 2020). Innovations in community education seek participatory modalities of community activities that empower local populations. A key concept related to community education is a resilient community (Berkas & Ross, 2013; Chou & Huang, 2021; Ross & Berkas, 2014).

Community education is a practice conducted within a community for its benefit, resisting trends toward the marketization of adult education and the commodification of knowledge. It addresses a fundamental human need for belonging, connection, and transcendence. This approach is inclusive, fostering education within local environments and prioritizing the education of vulnerable groups (Javrh, 2012, 2021). In Slovenia, where this study was conducted, community-based adult education occurs in various societies, cultural institutions, nature parks, adult education centers, religious organizations, and universities for older adults (Furlan, 2021; Ličen et al., 2019, 2020; Valič, 2019).

Slovenia was selected as a case study for several reasons. Firstly, community education has a historical presence in Slovenia, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was linked to the development of national identity, as well as some practical skills, e.g., fire-fighting, agriculture, and beekeeping. This education occurred in associations, libraries, and museums (Govekar Okoliš, 2024, pp. 141–145). While the tradition has been maintained, new goals and content addressing contemporary challenges have emerged, similar to trends in other countries (Belete et al., 2022; White et al., 2023).

Secondly, compared to other contexts, such as community learning in Scotland (White et al., 2023) and Ireland (Smith & Jackson, 2025), Slovenia's linguistic and geographic compactness allows for the distinctive characteristics of community education to permeate the non-formal education system, including people's universities, counseling networks, and universities for older adults.

Thirdly, Slovenia is experiencing rapid aging, contributing to unpredictable changes and challenges for community education, particularly concerning the inclusion of older adults as a vulnerable target group.

Finally, Slovenia reports below-average outcomes in functional literacy among vulnerable groups, as indicated by The Survey of Adult Skills, a product of The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (OECD, 2016).

Community education must go beyond merely reproducing existing solutions; it must address uncertainties and new challenges, prompting the search for innovative strategies. The advancement of community education relies on knowledge from a variety of fields, including community psychology, health sciences, educational sciences, cultural studies, philosophy, and theology (Bezboruah, 2021; Dinham, 2020; Heagele, 2017; Riemer et al., 2020, p. 3). While the role of community education has been previously researched (Kroth & Cranton, 2014), new questions arise concerning practices that effectively respond to contemporary challenges.

This study examines how community education in local contexts relates to community resilience.

## **Resilience**

Resilience is commonly understood as the ability to recover from crises or stressful life changes, associated with endurance and self-organization amidst change. Research on resilience encompasses both individuals and communities. The World Health Organization defines resilience as the capacity of an individual to cope with stress, describing it as “the state in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community” (Herrman et al., 2005). This definition emphasizes individual resilience as the ability to manage normal stress, while other definitions highlight the capacity to navigate unexpected challenges (Allen et al., 2011; Barton et al., 2020). Thus, resilience encompasses the ability to cope with both predictable and unpredictable life transitions and stresses. In addition to individual resilience, community resilience is also defined, incorporating physical and socioeconomic factors that influence recovery from natural and other disasters (Koliou et al., 2020) and life transitions (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017).

Resilience represents the capability of individuals or communities to undergo transitions and transformations. It reflects the ability of people within a given environment to respond to challenges and losses stemming from accidents, risks, epidemics, and disruptions. Understanding resilience as a proactive approach to transitions is crucial for this study. Resilience is not merely a static quality; it is an ongoing process that develops through positive adaptation (Allen et al., 2011). Individuals cultivate resilience across physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, underscoring the vital role of education (Barton et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2016).

### **Community Resilience**

Research on community resilience has highlighted the significant roles of planners, community activists, and educators in actualizing resilient communities (Abramson et al., 2015; Chou & Huang, 2021). Community resilience has been examined across various disciplines, often in the context of natural disasters (Koliou et al., 2020; Patel

et al., 2017). Integrating insights from different studies has led to the identification of common characteristics shared by resilient communities (Patel et al., 2017; Pfefferbaum et al., 2015; von Kotze, 2023). One of the most critical elements is local knowledge, encompassing diverse types of knowledge, competencies, and experiences, including both general and specialized knowledge (e.g., first aid). Additionally, the mental perspectives of community members, including their viewpoints, values, and emotions, are vital for enhancing community resilience. In this regard, hope, the pedagogy of hope, and positive education play particularly important roles.

Alongside local knowledge, the following elements are essential:

- (a) community networks and relationships that help identify community strengths and assets;
- (b) communication and community narratives;
- (c) public health and the organization of health services, along with awareness of physical and mental health needs during crises;
- (d) collaborative governance and community self-organization;
- (e) resources necessary for survival (e.g., food and water) and those essential for a good quality of life (e.g., economic resources);
- (f) preparedness for uncertain situations.

Community resilience can be analyzed from two perspectives: one is based on socioecological systems, while the other focuses on developmental psychological characteristics and mental health concepts. Both approaches emphasize learning and education, along with memory, unpredictability, agency, values, and connections between people and places. Furthermore, community resilience is linked to the concept of well-being, which can be defined as either the outcome of resilience or its precursor (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230). Following the 2008 financial crisis, economic and environmental well-being were extensively studied. However, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable increase in health-related research. Well-being encompasses economic, living, and educational conditions.

Community resilience is also viewed as a component of social sustainability. It is understood as an integrative process within complex socioecological systems, such as local communities, involving both explicit social strengths and people–place connections, which are activated and developed through agency and effective organization (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Ross & Berkes, 2014). The fundamental premise of this study is that resilience serves as a personal and/or community resource, comprising a set of action-oriented characteristics and strategies that are protective and can be cultivated.

## Research Problem and Methodology

Given that community resilience is constantly evolving, the community education practices that shape it should be identified. The research aims to explore how community-based adult education actors connect community adult education to community resilience within their local environments.

Thus, the following research question was formulated: What are the key areas and elements that, according to the research participants, are important for fostering a positive link between community education in local environments during uncertain times and the development of community resilience? A qualitative research paradigm was employed to address this question (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Flick, 2019).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in Slovenia between 2020 and 2022 using two methods: semi-structured interviews and participant observation across three community-based organizations.

Interviews with each participant were conducted in a setting of their choice, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. These were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Interview preparation included a pilot interview (Interview 0 in Table 1), the findings of which informed the development of a set of guiding questions for the main interviews. The participants were not asked about resilience using the specific term, as the pilot interview indicated that the respondents did not fully understand it; instead, they were asked about resilience indirectly through descriptions. All the interviews were performed in Slovenian.

Data collection adhered to the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2000) and followed a cyclical process. The first phase involved six interviews (Interviews 1 to 6, Table 1) with individuals employed at adult education centers in various towns across Slovenia. The interviews were analyzed to develop initial themes. This was followed by an interview with an expert (Interview 7) from an institute focused on research and development in adult education. During the second phase, additional 11 interviews were conducted (Interviews 8 to 18, Table 1).

Additional anecdotal data were gathered through participant observations in three organizations (a university of the third age, an adult education center, and a society), which also included informal/unstructured interviews with educators.

Unstructured participant observations were conducted following the principles of ethnographic research in adult education (Pastuhov & Sivenius, 2020). A brief unstructured observation was carried out in October 2020 at the selected organization to develop the initial guiding questions for the interviews. After the interviews concluded, unstructured observations were conducted in three community education settings, guided by the four research themes developed in the study. Anecdotal notes were taken.

In each organization, participant observation occurred for one day between October and December 2022. The anecdotal data contributed to data source triangulation and the validation of categories derived from the interview analysis.

### **Research Participants**

The study involved 18 people who were selected through purposeful sampling. The selection criteria included being active in the field of community-based adult education, possessing a minimum of three years of experience in non-formal adult education, and voluntarily joining the study.

The participants were chosen from the most prevalent community education providers in Slovenia, including adult education centers, societies, libraries, consultancy services, and universities of the third age. This ensured diversity in the sample regarding the organizations represented and the roles of participants (head, mentor, expert, chair of a society).

Research ethics were upheld by obtaining informed consent from all participants. In addition, anonymity was guaranteed, and the participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. All data obtained were anonymized, with only the interview code appearing in the statements.

**Table 1**

*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Research Participants*

Interview code	Organization	Gender	Educational attainment, field of study	Field of activity, years of experience in adult education
0	Society Pilot interview	F	BA, Education	Society member, 5
1	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 20
2	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 19
3	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 15
4	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 33
5	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 30
6	Adult education center	M	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 10
7	Research institute	F	PhD, Education	Expert Follow-up interview after the first cycle
8	Adult education center	M	MSc, Technical Studies	Group mentor, 5 Retired secondary-school teacher
9	Society	M	BSc, Computer and Information Science	ICT literacy program provider in a local society, 7
10	Energy Efficiency Association	M	MSc, Technical Studies	Energy efficiency consultant (consultancy network), 20
11	U3A society	F	MA, Humanities	Self-employed in the field of culture Study circle mentor at a U3A, 7
12	U3A society	F	BA, Education	Unemployed Study circle mentor at a U3A, 9

Table 1 Continued

Interview code	Organization	Gender	Educational attainment, field of study	Field of activity, years of experience in adult education
13	U3A society	M	Secondary school, Computer Science	Self-employed Study circle mentor at a U3A, 20
14	Study circles network	F	MA, Humanities	Study circle mentor, 6
15	Library	F	MA, Tourism	Self-employed Study group mentor at a local library, 6
16	U3A society	F	MA, Education	Retired head of a society, 15
17	Educational institute	F	MA, Education	Head of an educational institute, 15
18	Society for religious education	F	PhD, Theology	Chair of a society for religious education, 3

*Note.* F = Female; M = Male; BA = Bachelor of Arts; MA = Master of Arts; PhD = Doctor of Philosophy; MSc = Master of Science; U3A = University of the Third Age.

**Data Processing**

The transcribed interviews and anecdotal notes from the field were processed according to the rules of thematic content analysis, which was conducted to describe the material in relation to the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Schreier, 2012). The transcript analysis involved the following stages: (a) detailed familiarization with the transcripts to gain insight into the whole; (b) uncovering key messages and meanings from the text through coding; (c) grouping codes into categories and themes. Following the thematic analysis of the transcripts, the data were organized into categories, which were finalized after considering the participant observation notes.

**Results**

The findings were categorized into four thematic units that characterize the impact of community education on the development of resilience in the local environment. Further, each theme is subcategorized.

**Theme 1: Social and Emotional Well-Being**

This theme comprises the following categories: hope, trust, relationships, identification with the environment, and a sense of belonging to the local community.

Each community enters the process of resilience development with specific characteristics. The interviewed respondents highlighted the importance of community education for developing social and emotional competencies, which are essential for social and emotional well-being. The quality of shared life depends on how people

manage their relationships and emotions. The respondents noted that, due to past events and political divides, there is significant division among the people in Slovenia, making it necessary to offer activities that foster connection.

Adult education center programs aimed at different target groups foster self-confidence and hope. The head of an adult education center mentioned a project titled *Priložnosti so!* [Opportunities Exist]<sup>1</sup>. In 2014, films for the project were produced as part of training programs for the unemployed. During times of uncertainty (unemployment, air pollution, the COVID-19 pandemic), both adult education centers and universities of the third age developed specific programs, such as those for migrants, which nurtured the art of hope and operated according to the principles of pedagogy of hope.

There are several programs aimed at bridging generational gaps within the local environment, such as *Festival Znanja in Kulture Starejših* [Festival of Older Adults' Culture and Knowledge], organized by the Slovenian Third Age University, which promotes positive feelings of belonging and connection (Festival Znanja in Kulture Starejših, n.d.). One respondent (Interview 5) mentioned a film festival with a similar purpose, entitled *Festivity in Play*, which brings people together in a shared sense of well-being. This is supported by the following statement:

*Interview 11:* People need to work together. It seems that they need this more and more, but *they don't know how to connect* [emphasis added]. There used to be many societies, but now other forms of social connections work better. For older adults, U3A education seems to be a good way of building connections. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, they took part in distance learning. (Trans. by Klara Kožar Rosulnik, Mojca Blažič, Petra Javrh, & Nives Ličen—K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

New forms of social connection are being developed, fostering a sense of belonging to the environment. The respondents stated that education allows people to get to know and understand one another, thereby building trust.

*Interview 2:* A programme for Albanian-speaking women was well received and evolved into a study circle, where the women started connecting with other women in the environment. As a result, trust was built among them. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

Trust and hope are nurtured as socio-emotional competencies through programs that use the arts to promote social change, as well as through basic literacy programs. The respondents highlighted the need to develop emotional literacy. Given the perceived positive impacts, they expressed a desire to involve more individuals in various programs within the local environment, particularly older adults (65+), who are seen as a group in need of social connections.

<sup>1</sup> Video in Slovenian available at <https://tvu.acs.si/paradaucenja/video1/>



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**Theme 2: Development of Programs and Strategies That Are Adaptive and Motivating**

This theme comprises the following categories: motivation, vulnerable groups, inclusion, and process-based and interactive planning.

According to the respondents, one characteristic of community education programs that impacts community resilience is the participants' positive shared experiences. Positive experiences are possible when appropriate strategies are employed to organize and deliver education. It is crucial to choose didactic strategies that lead to participant satisfaction, achievement, and engagement in the learning process. The respondents stressed that both adult education centers and universities of the third age pay attention to individuals from vulnerable groups and emphasized the need to further develop inclusive programs for these groups. They also highlighted the use of active and arts-based methods.

*Interview 14:* Adults want to be active. For us, research or project methods have always worked well, because people look for knowledge themselves. We've made films. And there's always an action goal we work towards. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

While organized programs are accessible, attendance is not as high as desired. Regarding the *Training for Success in Life* programs<sup>2</sup> (literacy programs), the participants believed that additional motivation should be cultivated, as supported by expert opinions (Javrh, 2012). Individuals from vulnerable groups often have negative experiences with education and only consider their educational needs during times of great scarcity, e.g., when facing energy poverty as mentioned in Interview 10. However, they may not know how to find information and often have unrealistic expectations, e.g., financial ones. Therefore, it is essential to develop outreach programs or offer one-to-one consultations.

A resilient community includes all target groups, with particular attention devoted to vulnerable individuals who often possess low basic skills (literacy and basic abilities). Programs must first address the perceived needs of these groups, for instance, advising them on more efficient use of water, wood, and forest resources. In Interview 10, there were mentioned programs aimed at addressing energy poverty that provide one-to-one consultations in people's homes.

People's experiences with education and consultancy must be positive, as this will encourage them to seek further consultations and necessary knowledge. New educational needs are emerging, and adult educators are encouraging and motivating individuals to engage in new educational programs, as highlighted by the interviewed expert (Interview 7).

In times of uncertainty, education requires different planning approaches. Process-based planning is becoming more important than predictable educational goals. The respondents emphasized that programs are continually adapted and exist

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<sup>2</sup> <https://pismenost.acs.si/en/programs/programs-for-adults/>

in a space between the known and the unknown (Interview 4). Such planning leads to unpredictable outcomes as knowledge is formed within the individual.

*Interview 17:* We used the theatre of the oppressed to raise awareness of sexism and ageism. At first, I was full of doubt about this method, but then I realised that by experiencing the theatre of the oppressed, you form a new ontological state. It is not just realising something; it is a new way of existing. And what is more: the invisible becomes visible. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

The interviewed respondents identified several strategies that promote education as a “practice of freedom” (Freire, 1968/2018) and contribute to a resilient community. These strategies include various creative methods, such as creative writing and photovoice; media-related approaches, e.g., local radio, websites, and gamification that encourages participation, particularly among those with low educational attainment; methods involving active engagement in public spaces, e.g., graffiti and filmmaking; reflective practices including life stories and storytelling; learning about biblical narratives (Interview 18). One respondent (Interview 3) discussed exploring the life stories of local migrant women who had traveled to Egypt and Argentina in the past, linking these narratives to those of migrant women currently arriving in the local area.

### ***Theme 3: Knowledge Co-Creation***

This theme encompasses the following categories: participation, dominant epistemology, narrative knowledge, and the interconnectedness of knowledge types.

The respondents highlighted that community education is grounded in scientific knowledge, which must be supplemented by other forms of knowledge. New divisions of experiences and knowledge are employed in relation to individuals’ activities within the community and the development of resilience: embodied, situated, and narrative knowledge.

In addition to considering different types of knowledge, the research participants believe it is crucial for individuals to engage actively in the knowledge creation process. People are more committed and engaged when they are co-creators of knowledge.

*Interview 2:* Things are no longer as simple as they once were. Everything is more complicated. In education, using reason alone is not enough; you have to consider emotions, wisdom, all kinds of knowledge and morals when making decisions. And religious beliefs as well. Imparting information is not enough. There is already too much information as it is. False information in particular is a problem ... It is difficult to reach people in the usual ways by providing information. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

The study circle system/network was cited as an effective example of participatory knowledge creation that incorporates local and narrative knowledge, among others (Interview 14). Respondents from adult education centers believe that study circles

foster shared knowledge and resist “epistemological hegemony,” referring to the dominance of knowledge linked to social power. Local knowledge has proven invaluable in addressing natural disasters, such as communities organizing to tackle glaze ice and flooding. Study circles are rooted in dialogical learning and participation, thus accounting for local knowledge.

In Interview 6, a respondent noted that knowledge is regulated similarly to corporate contexts and reflects marketplace demands, revealing the influence of market principles. However, most respondents felt that mechanization is not the appropriate approach to community development. They pointed to the hierarchical nature of knowledge based on marketplace needs and the authorities involved in knowledge hierarchy, namely financial organizations. Many community education actors believe that market-recognized knowledge is not the only valuable form of knowledge. In fact, local knowledge can be beneficial in environmentally friendly initiatives and in the pursuit of intangible commodities such as wisdom, rituals, spiritual practices, and memories.

Critical epistemological awareness should be a component of community education, as it encourages all participants to remain open to diverse ways of acquiring and constructing knowledge. Connective strategies in knowledge co-creation processes can also include participatory action research strategies (local projects) and citizen science, which have been utilized in climate change awareness programs.

Various inclusive knowledge-sharing platforms that unite local communities are also highly beneficial. One such platform mentioned by respondents is FACE<sup>3</sup>, which facilitates intergenerational knowledge sharing between older and younger individuals.

In the local context, people learn through problem-solving. The research participants identified two main challenges in knowledge co-creation: people and processes.

*Interview 5:* As adult educators, we need to be aware of this and organize (create, develop) programs that won't just reproduce/perpetuate social and knowledge differences. New educational strategies that will make it possible for people to create knowledge together need to be “*invented*” [emphasis added]. In our environment, it is difficult to bring together Roma and non-Roma people. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

Knowledge co-creation is also fostered through consultations on various topics, such as nutrition, energy, and health. Citizens choose to participate in consultancy processes for various reasons, including accessing state subsidies for low-cost energy solutions (Interview 10). However, engaging people in activities that offer no direct benefit proves more challenging, particularly for specific target groups, such as those with low functional literacy. For these groups, personalized strategies tailored to their needs should be employed. According to the research participants, education that actively involves a large number of individuals as co-creators of knowledge is crucial for community development.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mismoface.si>

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**Theme 4: Emancipatory Engagement**

This theme includes the following categories: environment, critical community education, empowerment, and contact with nature.

The research participants indicated that contemporary emancipatory practices are frequently linked to environmental issues.

*Interview 2:* I think that in this day and age, green programs are the best ones for empowering and encouraging everyone in the environment. At our adult education center, female farmers and also immigrants have been included in green programs. Water is important for all of us and everyone was really devoted to the cause. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

In local contexts, community education often enhances resilience concerning environmental challenges that people can face. Community-based environmental education emphasizes the dynamics of domination over nature and animals, as well as over human groups, and underscores the importance of cultivating a post-anthropocentric mindset. It highlights environmental and energy literacy as essential components (Interviews 3 and 10).

Community-based environmental education promotes empowerment and resilience by raising awareness of the significance of active citizenship for sustainable development. Community education actors assert that it is essential to comprehend the “repressive structures and practices” that lead to suffering for both humans and animals. Instead, they aim to develop emancipatory practices that engage local individuals and foster community partnerships, e.g., collaborations between faith-based organizations and educational institutions. The research participants emphasized the importance of individuals’ commitment and willingness to participate in local community engagement.

Local community engagement is a model not explicitly mentioned by the respondents; however, they did refer to its elements: volunteering in various areas, e.g., working with abandoned pets; participation in sports and tradition-related local events such as feast days and local festivals; local activism; and community care, e.g., environmental workshops, clean-up efforts, and protests against hazardous waste. Community education is linked to all these elements. This type of learning and knowledge ecology significantly impacts the development of community resilience.

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was to identify key areas and elements that are important for establishing a positive connection between community education and the development of community resilience. The research participants believe that community education and its characteristics (such as being part of the environment and participation) foster community resilience. These findings align with research conducted by Pfefferbaum et al. (2013), Pfefferbaum et al. (2015), and Shultz et al. (2017); however, they also highlight additional areas that have been less extensively researched.

Social and emotional well-being was identified as one of the most significant factors contributing to community resilience. Although the interviewed respondents did not explicitly mention the concept of well-being, their responses imply that community education supports the development of social and emotional well-being. This can be explained through the frameworks of the pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1992/2014), pedagogy of contingency (von Kotze, 2023), critical pedagogy, and positive education, all of which are associated with fostering social and emotional competencies and critical thinking. Social and emotional competence is foundational for positive social interactions that promote human development, as confirmed by Schneider et al. (2021) in their research on emotional intelligence and wise decision-making. Considering the elements characteristic of a resilient community, as outlined by Patel et al. (2017), it can be affirmed that community education contributes to local knowledge, social networks, communication, preparedness, and a sense of belonging.

The study revealed the need to develop programs that motivate individuals and prepare them for uncertainty, which is supported by other studies, e.g., Maksimović & Nišavić (2019), who particularly highlighted the potential of liminality. Liminality refers to transitional periods when a community exists between two worlds. During these times of transition, transitional learning occurs, fostering the development of new competencies for embracing the new and uncertain. Programs should prioritize interactivity and models of pedagogy that address the unknown, which include the transformative potential of experiences during transitions. Community education programs that promote resilience counter educational practices that shape individuals according to the dominant discourses of power, as these practices control and normalize individuals according to current social power dynamics.

Given the inherent uncertainties in future social practices, the pedagogy of the unknown is primarily linked to arts-based education, such as the theatre of the oppressed (Salini & Durand, 2020). Maksimović and Nišavić (2019, p. 43) cited Atkinson, who argues that learning is essentially the production of new subjectivities. Therefore, programs should focus on both the creation of new knowledge and innovative ways of thinking and feeling, which in community education can be associated with positive psychology and psychological well-being.

Research participants shared their experiences with community education, highlighting resilience through various practices. This aligns with findings by von Kotze (2023), who argues that resilience can be interpreted in multiple ways; thus, community education contributes to various types of resilience, including absorptive, restorative, adaptive, transformative, and equitable resilience. According to the interviewed expert (Interview 7), equitable resilience is particularly significant, as it addresses the challenges of social vulnerability.

An important element fostering community resilience through community education, as revealed by the research findings, is knowledge co-creation. When people co-create knowledge, they generate meaning and build community. Insights into the importance of knowledge co-creation are supported by various theoretical approaches. In recent years, knowledge-related discourse has included critical discussions about the hegemony of specific types of knowledge (de Sousa Santos,

2014, 2018; de Sousa Santos & Menses, 2020; Desmet, 2022). For resilience to develop, rational behavior alone is insufficient; building resilience also requires critical judgment and the capacity to challenge dominant views of knowledge, the world, and global relations. Darlaston-Jones (2015) argues that the dominant trend in adult education leans toward the commodification of knowledge, illustrating how the market influences knowledge value. However, the research participants do not prioritize marketability (only one respondent mentioned the need for education to align with market trends); instead, they believe that the value of knowledge created within community education is tied to its contributions to individual and community well-being and its ability to bring people together and empower them.

Emancipatory transformation through community education is predicated on co-creation and cannot rely solely on one type of knowledge or the knowledge of a single group. It encompasses experiences, traditional knowledge, narrative knowledge, vernacular knowledge, spiritual practices, beliefs, memories, daydreams, and local narratives.

The findings on the significance of participatory knowledge co-creation, based on interview analysis, can be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory and transformative projects (Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Law & Ramos, 2017), as well as participatory research and education methodologies. Participatory action research engages researchers and local residents as research participants, fostering innovative competencies. Participatory epistemology involves collaboration between practitioners and participants in various forms of action research with the aim of co-creating new practices. Participation is evident in cyclical evaluations of local projects conducted by various organizations and adult education centers, as well as in needs analyses and presentations (Pelacho et al., 2021) and the application of citizen science methods.

Research into the importance of community education for developing resilience revealed a dualism in the respondents' statements. Some emphasized learning's role in enabling individuals to adapt, accept uncertainty and change, and build resilience, all linked to their experiences and knowledge. The aim of learning should be adaptability to change, fostering absorptive and adaptive resilience. Other statements focused on counteraction and learning aimed at promoting activism, which cultivates transformative resilience. This perspective is particularly pronounced among respondents discussing environmental education, prevalent in adult education centers and various organizations. This aligns with research conducted by Orlović Lovren (2021), which explores engaged participatory education for sustainable development. Emancipatory engagement is a practice that encourages the development of informed and critical action. Integrating community education with environmental education, ecopsychology, and sustainable development promotes the development of sustainable practices (Law & Ramos, 2017, p. 61). Emancipatory engagement is rooted in critical community education, which critiques traditional views of hierarchical power systems, knowledge, and social power that contribute to "a wounded landscape" and "a wounded community." This study confirms the significance of critical community education for fostering a resilient community.

Engaged emancipatory community education broadens the traditional concept of community. While traditional definitions emphasize similarities in values and practices, emancipatory community education considers contemporary definitions that highlight tolerance, diversity, empathy, and acceptance of otherness. The concept of otherness (and its associated lesser worth) is a construct, as noted by post-colonial theories. In Slovenia, attitudes towards the “other” akin to those found in colonial contexts have not developed; however, there are attitudes towards groups labeled as different and potentially marginalized. Groups with social power often portray other groups as needing guidance and direction. Respondents from universities of the third age indicated that older adults belong to the “other” group, and therefore, universities of the third age are developing critical pedagogy and engaged education for older adults within the community.

Modern concepts of community also include groups that differ in various ways, advocating for an inclusive community through engaged education.

## Conclusion

The primary finding of the study is that, according to the research participants, community education fosters resilience and builds knowledge and skills within the local community, empowering it to respond to uncertainties and unpredictable challenges. This is partly achieved through the development of educational models such as the pedagogy of contingency.

The study provides the following insights:

- Community education is a vital practice in uncertain times for fostering a sense of belonging and local identity, which serves as the foundation for resilience.
- In an era of neoliberalism, where individuals are often reduced to consumers and the suffering of many is overlooked, community education serves as a practice for developing empowerment and emancipatory engagement, which are essential for resilience.
- Community education is grounded in an ethic of care and knowledge co-creation practices, necessitating well-organized innovative programs that include vulnerable and excluded groups.

Community resilience research aligns with what Barry (2002, p. 61) describes as contemporary radical uncertainty, relating to (a) understanding resilience, (b) fostering resilience through education and research, and (c) developing methods for resilience monitoring. This study focused on understanding the connection between community education and community resilience, based on the premise that community education is central to adult education centers, universities of the third age, and adult education in cultural institutions, and grounded in the definition that resilience is a dynamic and evolving process. Community resilience and community education can be enhanced through positive educational models.

The focus was not solely on the negative outcomes of transitions but also on comprehending transitions and related experiences in terms of transformation. Resilience is a multidimensional construct influenced by various factors, one of which

is community education that contributes protective and stabilizing attributes when knowledge is applied in stressful situations.

The key elements for building resilience through community education include developing socio-emotional well-being, creating innovative programs and strategies, co-creating knowledge, and fostering emancipatory engagement. The study revealed that participants support community education aimed at enhancing resilience by transforming it into a practice of freedom and engaging in the continuous co-creation of knowledge within the community.

The study's limitations are primarily methodological. All interviewed respondents were middle-class, highly educated individuals involved in community education as leaders, teachers, or researchers. Future research should include individuals with lower educational attainment and members from different generations. Additionally, community resilience requires further investigation, particularly through newer research approaches such as citizen science strategies.

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