

INTRODUCTION

“An economic crisis, a need for new skills and the consequences of demographic changes, which Europe has to face, emphasize a key role of adult education in the strategies of constant education as an element of policies of competitiveness and employment, social inclusion and active citizenship.¹” This opinion of the Council of Europe has its grounds in the data collected by the 2013 Growth Survey, which confirms “the key role of education as a major factor of development and competitiveness.”²

Adult education is a constantly expanding area of research, a developing theory with new fields of educational practices, and is one of the most dynamically developing disciplines in the area of educational sciences.

This book, which is the result of cooperation between the scientists of the University of Ljubljana and the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, presents selected examples of the current development of adult education as a scientific discipline. It encompasses not only significant issues from the standpoint of economy in the scope of key competences, but also concepts related to the social, cultural, scientific, artistic and common schooling, leading to more comprehensive personal development and raising the quality of life.

A presentation of texts by Slovenian and Polish authors was conducted on the three interrelated and complementing planes, which encompass new areas, institutional context and practices of lifelong learning.

The term “area” is associated with a relatively defined collection of issues that may constitute the current, or at least potential subject of research and pedagogical activities. A “new area” does not have to be a completely unknown area. Contemporary pedagogy deals with so many areas that it would be hard to find a blank space on the map presenting them. A “novelty” of some of these areas can be noticed only when we look at them from the perspective of lifelong learning.

Adult education, which is responsible for satisfying significant needs that occur in a fast changing reality, is frequently performed in an informal way as a result of spontaneous, social and individual learning. Its significance is

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/adult_en.htm

² Council Conclusions on investing in education and training – a response to ‘Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socioeconomic outcomes’ and the ‘2013 Annual Growth Survey’ Official Journal of the European Union, C 64/6/05.03.2013.

invaluable because in many situations only this kind of education can satisfy various, immediate human needs. However, informal education is unable to face all of the challenges which we deal with, both in the individual and social dimensions. Hence, the institutional context of this education, as well as of all strategies of lifelong learning, still maintains its key significance and is the focus of scientists' and practitioners' attention.

This plane of current issues in the field of lifelong learning is connected with the previous one. New, as well as "old," well known, areas of research and pedagogical activities ought to be discussed in their institutional context, which, as proven by the majority of articles in this book, constitutes the dominant context in these areas.

Moreover, these two perspectives are connected with the third one, which constitutes practices. Practices in the field of lifelong learning as well as in adult education might be both institutional (school) and extra institutional (family). They may also pertain to various areas of formal and informal education.

Interrelation between "areas," "contexts" and "practices" of lifelong learning in fact proves conventionality of the distinguished planes. Nevertheless, dividing into these planes helps to illustrate a reality of lifelong learning in its "spatial" dimensions.

The aim of this publication is to illustrate the contemporary state of development of research and practices in the area of lifelong learning through the presentation of current trends and interests in this field. The creation of a publication that would present a comprehensive, "photographic" image of the state of research and practices in the field of lifelong learning would be so laborious and long-term that it would not keep up with the constant changes which appear in reality. The image of the reality outlined in this book is very selective, but "spatial" to such an extent that it enables to grasp its size and dynamism of development.

A good example of it is the first part of the book presenting new areas of adult education. Although it consists of only three articles, it delineates much more than just three, quite thematically distinct areas of scientific interest. It is worth mentioning that each of these areas is interdisciplinary. In fact, it is not a coincidence resulting from pure chance or an intentional selection of examples, but a depiction of a certain regularity, pertaining to the creation of new areas of contemporary adult education developing within the framework of lifelong learning strategies. The authors of the articles from this part of book are Polish scientists from the Institute of Education at the Jagiellonian University.

The area of activity and research of contemporary adult education described in the article by Dorota Gierszewski may appear well known to many readers (especially to those coming from countries which, like Poland and Slovenia, have an experience of "the creation of a socialist society" in their not so distant history). The author proves that this impression is misleading. "Citizen education" has always been an element of school education, however, in a minimal and com-

pletely insufficient extent it is present in formal and informal adult education, in the area of lifelong learning. Thus, from the point of view of contemporary adult education, in the current social, economic and political context, it is an area that should be treated as a new one. Its novelty constitutes an even greater challenge because the actions taken in this field have to take into account the negative experience of the period preceding the transformation of the political system. In Poland, this challenge is faced more frequently by non-governmental organizations than governmental departments acting within the scope of their statutory obligations. According to the author, one of the main tasks in the area of education for the sake of participatory democracy, is the creation of the coherent and realistic model of citizen education that would help in shaping attitudes of increased initiative, creativity and social participation; a model that would effectively equip an individual with skills and knowledge indispensable to contemporary democracy.

The article “Human health as a context for andragogic discourse” by Anna Gawęł presents a completely new area of constant learning. Similarly to the previous area, “novelty” does not seem to be its obvious characteristic. Nevertheless, as the author points out, health education and the broadly understood, multifaceted human life in the periods of adulthood, growing old and old age, together with environmental, social and cultural conditioning, have only recently become areas of interest in the field of Andragogy. Taking into consideration the whole life, it is unquestionable that adult education plays an important role. However, due to the fact that a major part of the statistical life span takes place during a period not encompassed by a formal school education, and that with time, health is becoming a main factor determining the quality of life, a broadly understood health education turns into a key area of adult education.

Hence, also in this area, a need for theoretical reflections, empirical research and a search for adequate strategies, forms and methods of practical actions is manifested. This example constitutes an important argument supporting the thesis that the above mentioned interdisciplinary aspect is and will be one of the main conditions of the development of all educational fields within the framework of learning throughout life.

The second part of the book titled “Institutional context for lifelong learning” contains articles which are not simple illustrations of trends appearing in the current literature on adult education in the field of lifelong learning. Texts in this part were selected in such a way as to encourage further reflections on the issue, which has a crucial significance not only for the planning and realizing policies of Lifelong Learning programme, but also for the sake of the idea of lifelong learning itself. It is about a way of realizing this idea. It might be realized „top-down” (within the frames of top-down accepted strategies and programmes realized by institutions responsible for it) or at a grass-roots level (as a result of spontaneous initiatives which are a response to the needs recognized at an individual and local community level). However, indisputably, the most effec-

tive way of realising this idea would be to link a “grass-roots” movement with a “top-down” movement. The essence of this issue poses a problem similar to the one that appears in the learning as well as teaching process, and in a broader dimension, in all educational sciences, i.e. a basic requirement for any positive results of the educational effect is the learning of the students themselves. The process of students’ learning might be motivated, supported, organized and directed, but finally nothing can replace it. It is similar to the realization of the strategies and programmes of Lifelong Learning: the existence of appropriately shaped institutional context does not determine efficiency of the realization of strategies. On the other hand, does a lack of institutional solutions (a lack of appropriate strategies and programmes, including financial resources for their realization) signifying a lack of institutional possibilities nip grass-roots initiatives in the bud?

The first article of the second part of the book, “The place of adult education in education policy at the local level” by Beata Cyboran from Jagiellonian University, provokes reflections on this issue. The author claims that educational issues in Poland are strongly emphasized at the regional level (a voivodship), where individual planning documents in the form of regional strategies of educational development are created, whereas at the local level such documents rarely appear, and when they are present, they almost always pertain only to children and youth education and there is no place for those adults that are learning or would like to.

On the other hand, in the local communities educational needs and the connected “grass-roots” initiatives are revealed. A great example of this regularity is provided by research of Slovenian scientists from the Department of Educational Sciences at the Faculty of Arts University of Ljubljana. Nives Ličen, in her article “Education in non-governmental organizations and formation of a local identity,” describes research on the formation of local identity and a sense of belonging. The results of this research confirm the effectiveness of informal education in area of preserving cultural legacy. It is worth emphasizing here that in this specific example, “grass-roots” initiatives were in some way institutionalized in appropriate non-governmental organizations. The research reveals that members of the research groups have kept many artefacts and social practices belonging to their cultural legacy thanks to the combination of expertise with volunteer work. Those facts can be regarded as an effect of strong support given to social initiatives in the institutional context.

However, this example does not mean that social needs are always provided with solutions to satisfy them in the institutional context. An article by Klara Skubic Ermenc and Andreja Hočevár, „Students with an immigrant background in the Slovenian education system,” presents a situation in which suppressing “grass-roots” initiatives as a result of a lack of institutional support can be noticed. The authors reveal negligence in the scope of state assistance in enculturation of immigrants in Slovenia as well as considerable gaps in creating an

effective policy of supporting the national culture of children and adults with immigration backgrounds.

Reflections over the relationship between grass-root needs and initiatives and possibilities of acting in the institutional context acquire a new dimension thanks to the article written by Monika Govekar-Okoliš, „Practical training of students and the realisation of lifelong learning.” The author delineates an original concept of practical students’ teaching, which has been devised and applied at the University of Ljubljana. A significant aspect of this concept is, on the one hand, regarding practical learning as a situation in which knowledge and skills acquired during studies are verified as well as a situation of gaining experience under the supervision of highly qualified tutors, and on the other hand, as an initial phase of lifelong learning. This phase constitutes a significant introduction into LL practices leading to professional development and improvement. This conclusion points to the aforementioned new aspect of the discussion conducted in this part of the book. A continuity of learning in all periods of life constitutes the essence of lifelong learning. Hence, it is necessary that each stage of this education is preparatory for the next one. However, it does not pertain only to the creation of institutional possibilities but also to such support and the development of initiatives and motivation during each type of activity, which has been successful and will in turn pave the way for subsequent actions.

The third part of the book contains articles describing interesting examples of educational practices in family and school environments. The first of these environments is a basic area of research on informal education processes, hence it is invaluable for the theory and practices of lifelong learning.

As it is emphasized by Sabina Jelenc Krašovec and Sonja Kump, the authors of the article „Intergenerational cooperation and learning in families in Slovenia,” family environment is a very dynamic research area because it reflects in a special way social changes that have been taking place lately. On the basis of the conducted analysis of the case study, the authors claim that social learning taking place in a family is mainly linked with the interaction, communication and quality of relations in the family. It means that we learn more willingly from those family members with whom we have greater contact, speak more frequently and have better interpersonal relations, and not necessarily from those with whom we have close blood ties. Hence, in informal education, that can be called “formal family structures” loses its significance for factors of more emotional character. Researchers of a relationship between teachers and parents have observed similar regularities. Barbara Šteh and Jana Kalin from the University of Ljubljana, who are investigating suggestions that could lead to an improvement of cooperation between parents and teachers, state that parents emphasize in their statements issues connected with interpersonal relations, trust and an ability to listen to a partner. Suggestions gathered in the research enable to notice basic factors of creating school culture that promotes partnership between teachers, students and parents.

The field of lifelong learning encompasses adult education as well as family, pre-school and school education, the education of the maturing generation as well as seniors' education, and formal and informal as well as social and professional education. Developing acquired knowledge and skills, improving qualifications and getting new ones, are the basic tasks of each human being participating in the contemporary social, economic and political reality. An article by Jasna Mažgon, "Why research at all? The possibilities for improving teaching practice," touches upon the issue of the development of teachers' professional qualifications, pointing to the possibility of improving the quality of educational work and teaching through the development of research competences. The author focuses on the action research method, however, she also provides arguments for a general thesis pertaining to teachers' restricted methodological experience. Thus, it is an example of such an area of lifelong learning in which a lack of engaging in the process of learning done on one's own initiative, despite an objective need for such study, is present.

An article by Petra Gregorčič Mrvar and Metod Resman can be regarded as a response to the suggestion coming from Jasna Mažgon's article. This text concerns the role and significance of team work in the school environment. Although the authors' reflections refer to students' teamwork, the advice given by them could be successfully used for organising teams composed of teachers, for example teams aiming at professional development. School practice of teamwork has a great significance in the perspective of lifelong learning. The ability to work as a team member is one of the main requirements that people applying for a job at various companies and institutions have to meet.

The aim of the authors and editors of this book was not to create a compendium of knowledge about the current state of the development of education in the field of lifelong learning, but to present a compilation of examples illustrating areas worth considering, contexts and practices, as well as certain problems and dilemmas. We hope to extend this compilation in the next publication. Positive experience gained from the cooperation between our institutions – the Department of Educational Sciences of the University of Ljubljana and the Institute of Education of Jagiellonian University – makes it probable to expect that the next book will also prove the special value of the thought exchange between Slovenian and Polish educationalists.

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