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Tasks and social functions of adult education in the perspective of learning in adulthood

ABSTRACT: The subject of the study are contemporary social functions of adult education included in the context of lifelong learning. I presented their determinants and consequences. These functions are significantly different from those set out by historical socio-economic and cultural circumstances. I present a proposition of a proprietary view of the typology and content range of these functions.

KEYWORDS: Lifelong learning, adult education tasks, participants and excluded from adult education, social functions of adult education.

Introduction

The aim of the study is to (re)define tasks and to determine a new quality of functions of adult education.

The variability of the modern world requires individuals and wider social organisms to flexibly adapt to the changes taking place. Their pace is a challenge even for well-educated people who belong to the social or labour elite. Therefore, (self-)educational investments, enabling free functioning in the surrounding reality, become necessary, even more, so given the fact that in the case of adults, their key competences are low (Burski et al. 2013; Chłoń-Domińczak, Pałczyńska 2015). According to the catalogue of new competences defined in 2018 by the European Commission, the society of

the future will require preparation in the field of literacy, multilingualism, mathematical competence and competence in science, technology, engineering. It would expect digital, personal, social and learning to learn, citizenship, entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression competences (*Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018*). Lifelong learning, any cognitive and socio-cultural activities of adults have to be a component of public policies, defining the potential of human capital, confirming the recognition of education and culture in labour market policies, social cohesion and justice policies, active citizenship and the recognition and respect of cultural identity (cf. *ibid.*).

Today, adult education is not inscribed in the Polish educational policy system. It is an element of the free market services sector and the creation of careers and socio-professional identity of individuals. In the modern world it is understood as difficult to measure and describe category of cognitive and socio-cultural activity of adult learners. A similarly vague category is life-long learning, as the *moorland* metaphor introduced by Richard Edwards (2006, p. VIII; cf. Malewski 2013, pp. 34–35) and analysed by Marcin Muszyński (2014, p. 83) persuades: it is a learning that has open borders allowing for the delineation of new routes of research exploration and having many owners. Learning as a moorland is ubiquitous and scattered. It is not easy to measure, as there is a large area of unplanned activity that can be expressed in formal, non-formal and informal learning situations [*original citation: otwarte granice pozwalające na wytyczenie nowych szlaków eksploracji badawczych oraz posiadające wielu właścicieli. Uczenie się jako wrzosowisko jest wszechobecne i rozproszone. Nie poddaje się łatwo pomiarowi, bowiem przynależy do niego znaczna sfera aktywności nieplanowanej, która może mieć swój wyraz w sytuacji uczenia się formalnego, pozaformalnego i nieformalnego*]. Educational participation of adults contributes to raising the standard of individual and social life. It takes different organizational forms and covers different content ranges. It is an immanent part of lifelong learning.

In the post-industrial economy based on knowledge, services and neo-liberalism (Michałowska 2013), the social functions of adult education have changed significantly. Demographic and globalization processes de- and re-construct existing theories, induce to generate new classifications of known phenomena.

Adult education in a learning society, selected indicators and problems

In 2017, Poland ranked 33rd in the HDI (*Human Development Index*) ranking, with the result of 0.865. Greece, Cyprus, United Arab Emirates,

Andorra and Lithuania were ranked similarly. The HDI leaders are Norway (0.953), Switzerland, Australia, Ireland, Germany and Iceland (UNDP 2018).

One of the variables determining the position in the ranking is the employment rate. In the group of people aged 20–64 it amounted to 70.9% in Poland, while in the EU-28 – 72.2%, with Sweden having the highest employment rate (81.8%) and Greece the lowest (57.8%). However, contract-based employment, understood as a contract of limited duration, concerned 20.6% of the 20–64 age group (in the EU-28: 11.3%) (Eurostat 2018 b). The Polish labour market preferred short-term, temporary forms of employment much more often than the EU-28 average. In this situation, it is difficult to talk about financial or social security of more than one fifth of employees – cf. Table 1.

Table 1. Employment under a fixed-term contract, data for 2017

Age groups	Poland	UE-28
Age 20–64	20.6%	11.3%
Age 15–74	27.5%	14.2%
Age 15–24	60.9%	41.3%
Age 55–64	12.5%	5.4%

Source: own study based on Eurostat (2018).

In 2015, 21% of Poles aged 25–64 had higher education. A much lower rate was achieved, for example, by Germans and Britons – 11% each of them. These facts seem to testify well to the educational commitment of Poles. However, data for 2016 published by the Central Statistical Office prove that 57.6% of people aged 25–64 in Poland were not educationally active. Among those learning in any way, 30.3% declared informal activity, 22.9% were participants in non-formal education, 4.2% studied in adult schools (the survey participants could indicate participation in several types of education) (Central Statistical Office [GUS] 2018b, p. 6).

The compilations of European statistics should also be taken into account. Surveys conducted in 2017, which asked people aged 25–64 about learning or participation in training in the last 4 weeks preceding the survey, showed that the most educationally active were the Swiss (31.2%), Swedes (30.4%), Finns (27.4%) and Danes (26.8%). The least educationally active were the citizens of Romania (1.1%), Bulgaria, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2.3% each), Montenegro (2.8%) and Slovakia (3.4%) (Eurostat 2017). Poland in this case had a ratio of 4.0%.

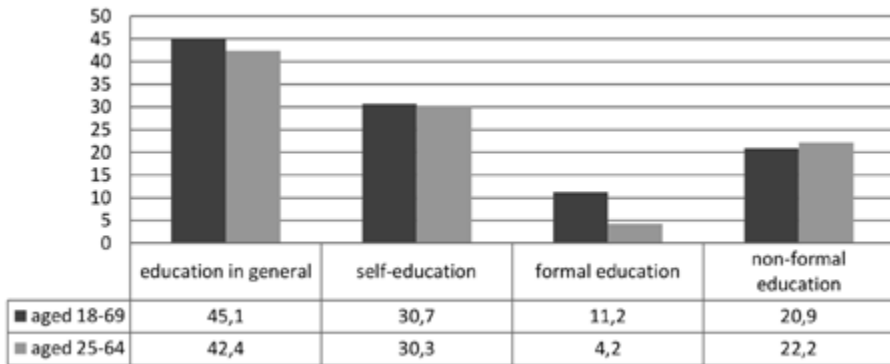


Fig. 1. Educational participation of persons aged 18–69 and 25–64, 2016, percentages
 Source: own study based on Central Statistical Office GUS 2018b.

Is there and what is the relationship between education level and employment? I have illustrated the answer to this question in Fig. 2. Data refers to 2016.

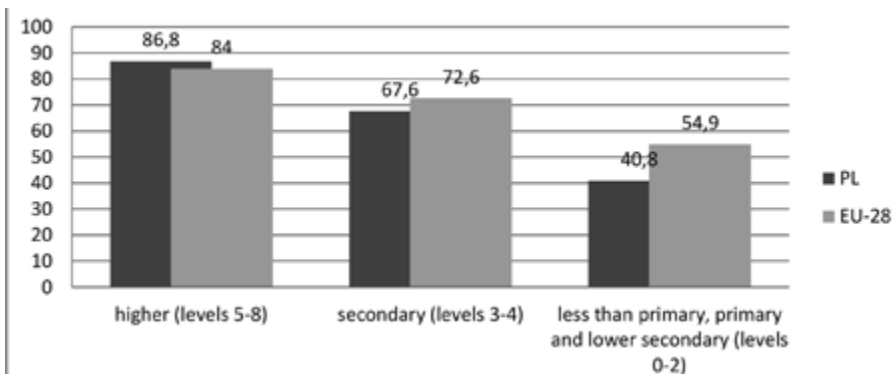


Fig. 2. Employment rate by educational level, percentages
 Source: own study based on Eurostat 2018a.

Higher education is a credential that increases the chances of getting and keeping a job. It is rather the free market policy that sets educational priorities, directions and types of education than the recommendations of UNESCO (2015) or the Council of Europe. In the post-school period, competence upgrading takes place through non-formal and informal learning. The participation rate in education and training of people aged 18–64 amounted to 17.4% for all European countries (women 17.7%, men 15.8%). The creation of an individual educational portfolio concerns every tenth Pole – 10.3% (women 11.2%, men 9.4%) (Eurostat 2019) and decreases with age, the older one is, the less one learns.

Access to adult education is sometimes difficult and not equal or fair. For example, people with low qualifications are four times less likely to be educationally active compared to those with higher education (*Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016*). This translates into their unfavourable situation on the labour market and faulty social functioning. It is also the cause of social disadvantage and even marginalisation. Educational absenteeism in adulthood is still a cause of secondary and functional illiteracy today (cf. Przybylska 2014).

Tasks of adult learning and education: challenges and absenteeism

It is necessary to distinguish between these concepts. Education refers to a process that “aims to achieve the intended results” (*original citation: prowadzić ma do osiągnięcia zamierzonych efektów*) (Muszyński 2014, p. 86), while learning is treated as an incidental, unplanned, situational action in everyday life (Solarczyk-Szwec 2011, p. 257–266).

The learning environment is everything that is involved in constructing, structuring and restructuring knowledge about the world. An adult learner is an “architect”, constructor of his or her own “building”, knowledge system. In the process of cognition he or she takes into account, modifies and changes the knowledge, skills and competences acquired from everyday life and formal education (schools). The teacher, trainer, instructor is a laissez-faire rather than an educator in this process. Through the analysis of the scope of contemporary educational interactions the semantic fields of three categories relevant to the theory of adult education can be specified. The concepts of “school” for adults, “adult learner”, “adult educator” form the basis thereof. The identity of an adult learner is definitely different today than it was even a decade ago. A change of identity affects the redefinition of the activities of a person formerly known as an adult educator. The same applies to the term “school”, it should be treated metaphorically, recognizing that “school” is everyday life and life immersed in it, environments of formal, non-formal and informal, systematic and incidental, occasional education. It is necessary to see a multitude of variants of possible intellectual, cultural, social activities and multitude of environments in which lifelong learning processes take place. When analysing educational processes, one should be aware of the evolution of forms of work and the specificity of adult learning. A coherent picture of the educational interaction of adult learners can be achieved by associating and locating identifiers, the list of which is obviously incomplete. Striving for maximum synthesis, I present the essence of considerations in a graphical form (Table 2).

Table 2. Semantic fields of terms Learner – “Schools” – Adult Educators

Learners	addressee, adept, advisee, apprentice, auditor, coachee, correspondent, discussant, instructed, member, novice, observed, observer, panellist, participant, pupil, reader, recipient, self-educator, seminarist, student, trainee, traveller, tyro, user, viewer, visitor...
Teachers	animator, author, coach, consultant, counsellor, curator, educator, expert, facilitator, form-master, guardian, guide, inspector, instructor, lector, lecturer, librarian, manager, master, mentor, orator, populariser, speaker, teacher, trainer, tutor...
Schools	academy, advice centre, audiences, circle, cinema, club, coaching, community, community centre, conference, conservatorium, course, cultural and educational institution, cultural centre, debate, educational blog, e-learning platform, event, exhibition, fair, gallery, higher education institution, home, institute, internet portal, internship, learning organization, library, media, mentoring, museum, reading room, seminar, study, study visit, symposium, tutoring, university...

Source: own study.

According to the UNESCO position of 2016 (Webb et al. 2017, pp. 509–511) and the Council position, adult learning and education serves to equip them with the necessary skills to exercise their rights and take control over their own destiny. It promotes personal and professional development by supporting more active involvement of adults in environmental, community and social issues. It strengthens sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work conditions. It is a key tool in reducing poverty, improving health and well being, as well as contributes to the development of sustainable learning communities (Milana et al. 2017, pp. 625–628) (Fig. 3).

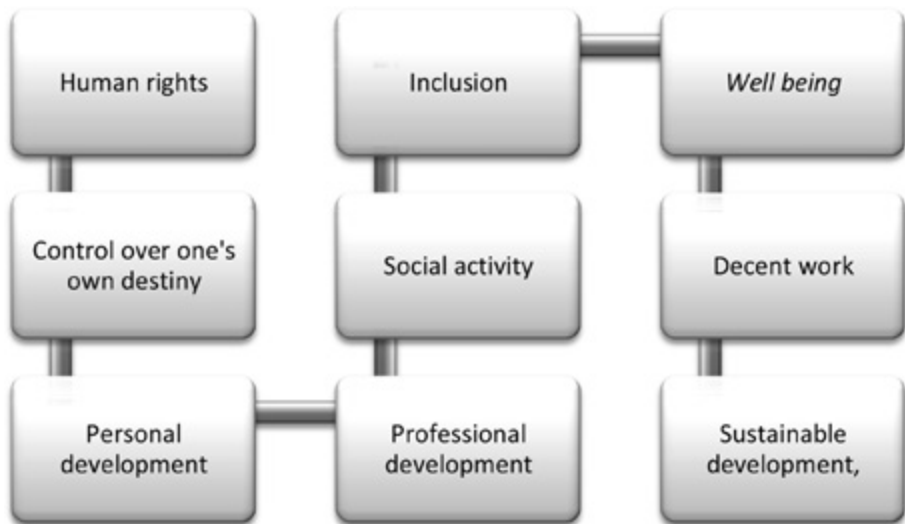


Fig. 3. Tasks and content of adult education
Source: own study.

Adults, supported by education, should be able to realise their potential, develop their professional career, systematically participate in continuing education (understood as further education, vocational training, continuing adult education) and lifelong learning, play an active role in society, fulfil professional, social and civic duties. In doing so, they should be supported by educational and professional career guidance and a coherent system of adult education, covered by substantive and financial support from state institutions (Solarczyk-Ambrozik, Barańska 2018).

World documents and reports indicate a high risk of social exclusion of a number of social groups. These include women and girls, people from sensitive locations, people with disabilities, old people, LGBT people, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees. The barriers to their development are poor representation and, therefore, the inability to create a lobby, to free up the strength and voice necessary to negotiate improvements in their situation. Another problem is the policy of narrow identity, closed patriotism, intolerance and exclusion, discriminatory laws, social norms and violence (UNDP 2018).

In line with the recommendations of the Sustainable Development Objectives Agenda 2030, by 2030 all women and men are to have equal access to affordable and quality vocational and higher education, including university education. The number of young people and adults having appropriate skills, including technical and vocational skills, to find employment and to obtain decent working conditions, is to increase (UNESCO 2015, p. 18). Among the 781 million illiterate, 2/3 of those over 15 years of age are women (United Nations 2015b, p. 59). By 2030, all young people and most adults are to acquire reading and numeracy skills (United Nations 2015a, Objective 4.3, 4.4, 4.6.).

Changes – challenges – unknown

The volatility of modernity, the uncertainty of the future, labour mobility and the change of qualifications – in the USA every five years on average (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018) – force us to continue learning. Both the labour market and employee identities are subject to intensive changes. As subsequent generations of young people enter adulthood, the relationship between employers and employees evolves. The pre-war “Silent Generation” replaced the baby boomers born after 1946, and it is now slowly replaced by the X generation (born after 1964), which will compete with the Y generation (born after 1980), while the Z generation (born after 1995) entering the labour market will redefine the established order of things. Following this line of

reasoning, one can distinguish old and new employee identities, somehow convergent with the class structure of society.

In Table 3 I tried to grasp their essence, albeit simplified, resulting from the colloquialism of terms.

Table 3. "Old" and "new" employee identities/class structures

Interwar period	People's Poland (1944/52–1989)	Nowadays
Peasants	Worker	Global professional elite
Working class	Farmer	Salariat (permanent job, salary with additional benefits)
Petit bourgeois	Farmer-worker	
Intelligentsia, white-collar workers	Working Intelligentsia	Precariat (temporary contracts, precarious employment)
Bourgeoisie	Blue-collar worker	
Great landowners	White-collar worker	Digital nomad (remote work)
<i>Derailed elements</i> (Central Statistical Office 2018 a): <i>beggars, prostitutes, thieves</i> (Głos Polski 1928)	Hired worker <i>Private trader</i> <i>Greengrocer</i> Free occupations	<i>Sarariman</i> (warrior loyal to the corporation) a.k.a. <i>Corporate rat</i> Trendsetter, influencer, etc. Freelancer

* Medical services cards, sports cards, food vouchers, company mobile phones, tablets, laptops and cars, paid holidays, employment security; ** „Sarariman not only works, but above all serves his company and his customers. In order to carry out these tasks in the best possible way, he or she has to continuously develop his or her professional skills and take care of his or her good name and credibility” (original citation: Sarariman nie tylko pracuje, ale przede wszystkim pełni służbę na rzecz swojego przedsiębiorstwa i swoich klientów. Żeby możliwie najlepiej wywiązać się z tych zadań musi nieprzerwanie rozwijać swoje umiejętności zawodowe oraz dbać o dobre imię i wiarygodność) <https://www.sarariman.pl/>

Source: own study based on literature query.

It is important to identify new phenomena occurring in the Polish labour market and develop tools to optimise the state of affairs (Solarczyk-Ambrozik 2018, pp. 19–35). The Precariat class is in particularly difficult situation (Standing 2014). The Precariat is characterised by job insecurity, ‘junk contracts’, underemployment, unstable working conditions, unclear employer identity, frequent self-employment, absence from social dialogue due to poor or no worker representation – the absence of trade unions and, consequently, the inability to benefit from workers’ rights and benefits. The Precariat, as an employee category, is not homogeneous, and can be broken down into three categories. The first includes people from poor families, from small towns and villages, with little chance of education and development, sometimes people who have lost their jobs due to structural or age-related reasons. The second one includes educated young adults, born in the end of the 20th century, called millennials, generation Y. They work under unpaid or low-paid trainee contracts. They know foreign languages and are fluent in the digital world, but do not find a satisfactory permanent job. This category also includes specialists, professionals, performing casual work, based on contracts

of mandate, temporary contracts or self-employment. The third group consists of people with limited opportunities, for example people with disabilities, migrants, former prisoners (Standing 2014).

Another category are individuals with immature personality, suffering from Peter Pan or Puella syndrome (Kargul 2017, pp. 21–32; Kargul 2018a, pp. 83–98), remaining mentally in the adolescence phase, postponing the decision to enter the labour market, to found a family, or about parenthood. They often do not want to move away from their parents, despite their actual adulthood. They are also sometimes called *bambooccione*.

An important problem of the labour market is the NEET (*Not in employment, education or training*) category. These are young people, sometimes referred to as the “generation neither – nor”, aged 15–24/35 (in Poland 15–29), who – often after leaving school – do not study, do not participate in training, are not economically active, do not seek employment. They are not motivated to change their position. They are characterised by wasting (excess) time. Their inactivity provides measurable losses to national economies and contributes to negative changes in attitudes towards work (Tomczyk et al. 2017, pp. 61–92).

Their opposite are employees, high-class specialists, being headhunting targets. This group, belonging to the category of meritocracy (Szarota 2012), has different, sophisticated educational expectations and ways of satisfying their, often sublime, needs.

All these people are potential participants in adult education, lifelong learning.

Evolution of adult education functions

Following the history of socio-cultural and economic development of European societies, a change in the quality of social needs in the micro, meso and macro dimensions can be clearly seen, and thus a change in the setting of personal objectives and functions as well as of social adult education objectives and functions.

Rationalism, utilitarianism, physiocracy, explanation of the progress that characterized the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, turned into the pursuit of political, national and subjective independence and a reconstructed identity. In the 19th century the slogans of national liberation struggle were implemented, followed by equality of states and gender, access to knowledge, as a prerequisite for social and economic progress. In the interwar period a large-scale alphabetisation campaign was undertaken, in 1919 compulsory schooling for children aged 7–14 years was introduced, and agricultural counselling was

carried out. The reconstruction of the country's economy from agricultural to industrial was initiated, the Central Industrial District and the seaport in Gdynia were built. The years of People's Poland, including the so-called People's Republic of Poland (1952–1989), contributed to the elimination of school delays caused by the World War II, general alphabetisation, introduction of compulsory schooling and educational paths enabling social advancement. It is important to emphasise social security and a very strong compensatory, but also political function, expressed in propaganda and indoctrination. The indoctrinatory nature of this function is indicated by Józef Kargul (2018b, pp. 278–280). Society was dominated by collectivism and, by no means democratic, equality beyond a narrow career-oriented elite.

Referring to the turn of the 21st century, we can see a shift from formal education, which once provided a strong basis for erudition, towards voluntary engagement, educational participation, serving the society and the individual, whose personalised career plan is not always compatible with professional career and identity capital. The turn of the century, the era of postmodernism and neoliberalism, was characterized by the birth of technological elites, digitization/meritocracy, corporate careers and social partnerships. The preferences of individualism appeared, careers took the form of a non-linear progression. Free time began to be treated as a consumer good, and the entire *leisure industry* developed around this phenomenon, which also absorbed some of the non-formal and, of course, informal educational services. An example is the participation of adults in the amateur artistic movement (cf. Litawa 2016). In the free market of educational services, personalised education, tailor-made offer of corporeity, good health and wellbeing is important. The offer is aimed at satisfying the most original interests, but also concerns human and civil rights, gender equality, decent and satisfactory employment conditions, responsible consumption and production, green thinking and acting, climate protection.

Due to the need to reduce the text to a standard volume, the historical aspect of the social functions of adult education will be presented by cataloguing them and indicating the source literature (Nowak 1986, pp. 207–210; Aleksander 2009, pp. 339–347).

Modernity demands recoding and reconceptualising the content of the lecture on social functions of adult education, treated in the systemic category. Many of the traditionally interpreted functions are still relevant, but they change their meaning. The proposal concerns our part of the world, the region where compulsory schooling eliminates the problem of illiteracy and where development in adulthood is possible thanks to personalised, voluntary, non-

professional education, distant from school teaching, taking place in informal spaces and non-formal learning environments.

Table 4. Social functions of adult education

Times of Enlightenment and the turn of the 19th century.	Transformation period, beginning of the 21st century
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rationalisation/enlightenment, culture of reason and cognition, - emancipatory (physiocracy, peasantry, lower social strata), - progressive (agricultural economy, maintenance of machinery and mechanical equipment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - economic (greater investment in adult learning results in higher development of individuals and society, better productivity), - popularisation (dissemination of the latest general knowledge, e.g. in the field of medicine, technology, politics, culture, etc.), - integration (merging different social groups, strengthening ties), - adaptation (adaptation to new living, working, community and group conditions), - political (raising political and ideological awareness), - constructive or civilisation (optimisation of living conditions, raising the standard of living of individuals and groups), - elimination (removing from consciousness and behaviour views, ideas, beliefs, which constitute a barrier to rational life and work),
19th century. – 1st half of the 20th century	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintaining national identity and cultural continuity, - equality (women, lower states), - popularisation (lower social strata) - alphabetisation, - integration (mitigation of conflicts and social inequalities), - adaptive, - political (shaping ideological beliefs), - stimulating intellectual aspirations - pedagogical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conservation or transmission (preservation of cultural and national distinctiveness and identity, dissemination of tradition, history, rituals), - preventive (preventing undesirable states and phenomena, e.g. loss of qualifications, arrangement of free time, managing interests), - separating (differencing): deepening differences between individuals and groups constituting a given community and the emergence of new social and intellectual categories, - compensation (compensating for educational deficiencies, e.g. in the face of the risk of losing one's job or position), - therapeutic (help in crisis, e.g. illness) - improvement (raising the level of professional and general qualifications), - democratising / compensatory (the less educated can equal those with a better social situation)
People's Poland	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ideological/propaganda – building a new class consciousness, - political – reproduction of the elites, the ruling class - education (adult education), - general development, cultural-artistic and recreational, related to the dissemination of culture and art as well as other fields, - adaptation (changes in the labour market, production, technology, culture of everyday life), - integration (recovered territories), - compensation (alphabetisation and compensation/substitution), - innovative (technical progress, scientific development), - modernization (concerning education, supplementary education and professional training), - stratification (social advancement) 	

Source: own study based on literature review.

The typology presented below is of an original nature, and I submit it to critical review and discussion by the Readers.

Table 5. New typology of social functions of adult education – postulative level

Function	Nature
Adaptive	Its nature consists in preparing oneself for confrontation with the uncertainty of tomorrow; cognition facilitates entry into a new social group, a new environment, solving a new problem, „tames“ a difficult reality, helps to find a way out of situations caused by unfavourable circumstances, through learning the realities of the world, norms guiding communities; tones down or removes tensions accompanying the individual.
Humanising, axiological	It consists in building a field for dialogue, cognitive bridges, pointing the way towards mentors, overthrowing stereotypes and prejudices. It makes it easier to see authorities in the world that seems to have lost them, helps to establish a hierarchy of values, helps to shape moral character, helps to solve ethical dilemmas, enriches reflectiveness and shapes attitudes. It is extremely important in times of anthropological and world-view crises, ethical dilemmas.
Emancipatory	Responsible for the knowledge and skills that make an individual autonomous and free from the outside of controllability and ignorance, from the stress of difficult decisions that require flexibility, responsibility and efficiency, and actions that enable each of us to follow the economic, cultural and social changes. The effect of the cognitive emancipation of an individual interpreted in this way will be the independence of its thinking, independence of judgments, maturity of interpretation, criticism and courage, empowerment, freedom.
Hedonistic, „sybaritic“	It is expressed in enjoying fun, entertainment, adventures, culinary experiences, aesthetic impressions, sophisticated savouring of life, being a client of the leisure industry.
Inclusive	Inclusive – is expressed in helping individuals and minority groups that are disadvantaged through positive discrimination programmes, state protectionism and social protection; it mitigates the risk of social exclusion through e.g. support groups, skills training and shaping attitudes (e.g. economic training, staying in a supervised apartment, learning to live according to the rules of everyday life).
Innovative	Creation of conditions for obtaining tools for understanding (post)modernity, popularization of science and technological novelties, enabling acquisition of necessary competences, e.g. digital, economic, entrepreneurship, modernization of existing knowledge and skills, including professional ones.
Competence	Competence alphabetisation, broadening the existing knowledge, modelling new skills; acquiring knowledge in the field of personalised education: civic, legal, multicultural, equality (e.g. gender and equals), economic, ecological, health, IT, etc.
Conservative	It is performed in museums and open-air museums, sites of worship and national memory; tradition, memory and rituals are preserved. In times of pressure from globalization, unification and import of foreign formats to the native culture, it is essential in order to save identity, cultural continuity, respect for the native language and history.
Critical and explanatory	It is becoming one of the most important because – in the era when the Internet, Google, posts on social networks shape attitudes of ignorance, incomprehensible rebellion against rational scientific arguments, it is useful in the understanding of phenomena, things and events (for example, factual answers to questions: what is gender, GMO, LGBT, whether and why vaccinate children, who is a refugee and who is an immigrant?)
Cultural and development	General education consists in constructing and supporting individual and group cultural and educational micro-worlds, concerns resources of available time, personal interests, passions, art, participation in culture, creative activity, recreation, leisure.
Preventive	It concerns the prevention of potentially unfavourable states and crises, actions in the field of preventive healthcare, prevention of violence, addictions, etc., and preventive measures taken, for example, in situations where there is a risk of losing one's job

Source: own study, contents originally published in: Szarota 2019

Idee fixe of adult education of the 21st century

Education, vocational training and lifelong learning, including adult education, are increasingly important in counteracting harmful pseudo-scientific myths, stereotypes, exclusions, discrimination, and are irreplaceable in meeting basic and liberating individual and social development needs. Ewa Przybylska rightly states that “knowledge about globalisation is scarce, as is the knowledge of society in matters of broadly understood citizenship, global interdependencies, the interpenetration of cultures and the consequences of these phenomena for the daily functioning of individuals and society” (*original citation: [...] wiedza na temat globalizacji jest deficytowa, podobnie jak wiedza społeczeństwa w kwestiach szeroko rozumianego obywatelstwa, współzależności globalnych, wzajemnego przenikania się kultur i konsekwencji tych zjawisk dla codziennego funkcjonowania jednostek i społeczeństwa*) (Przybylska 2018, p. 68).

The International Conferences on Adult Education, the recommendations and objectives for sustainable development (SDG) formulated in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly (United Nations 2015a), the GRALE 3 Report (UNESCO 2016), set the directions for cooperation between countries and transnational partnerships until 2030. These are, contained in the objectives of sustainable development (SDG) 3, 4, 5, 8, 12 and 13, efforts to achieve: good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13) (UNESCO 2015), caring for people – to end poverty and hunger and ensure dignity and equality, caring for the planet – to protect our planet’s natural resources and climate for future generations, ensuring prosperity – to ensure prosperous and satisfying life for all, social, economic and technological progress in harmony with nature, efforts for peace – to foster peace, just and inclusive societies, strong partnerships – a global partnership based on solidarity and sustainable development (Milana et al. 2017).

Adult education, i.e. practical proposals for extracurricular education, has moved away from the compensatory and replacement function, which was dominant in the past. Adults undertake organized education guided by pragmatic, instrumental and, less frequently, intellectual motivation. Its essence is determined by development, change, rivalry, goals defined individually. In the case of learning in adulthood, there is a self-education programme, the learner discovers himself or herself, making himself or herself the subject of cognitive activity.

Lifelong learning, with its strong potential for adult education, may lead to social success in the 21st century society through sustainable development, a flourishing 'green' economy, cultural dialogue, social cohesion and integration, individual and collective well-being. Perhaps it will contribute to what is most valuable, peace for the world.

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