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## Women in European adult education in 1860–1910s

As its title highlights, this special issue of “Pedagogika Społeczna” focuses on women in the history of adult education. Today, similarly as in other domains of knowledge or activity, historians are returning to the past to re-visit some of its insufficiently studied areas (Duby, Perrot, Fraisse, 1994). In numerous European countries the place occupied by women in the development of adult education used to be one of research topics attracting least attention. An examination of female adult educators’ contributions will help to cast new light on the diversity of adult education as a whole, as well as on the variety of its audience, contents, methods, and purposes. Assorted recent publications reveal this topical interest and a wide range of findings. However, such works are rarely transnational. The presented issue of “Pedagogika Społeczna” intends to accept the challenge to pursue the theme upon a European level in order to seek similarities, but also to emphasize differences determined by historical contexts, cultural backgrounds, and, naturally, social roles assigned to women. All these conditions could vary greatly depending on a given country.

Considering the adopted biographical approach, we are dealing with a great challenge. What is less general and comparable than individual lives embedded in times and places? Nonetheless, we suggest that such a jigsaw puzzle may produce general ideas. The presented issue includes vignettes of twelve women, whose declarations or concrete contributions to the field of adult education marked their time.

Person	Date	Country	Author
Eugénie Hautier	1822–1909	France	Renaud d'Enfert
Élise Luquin	1832–1898	France	Marianne Thivend
Isabelle Gatti de Gamond	1839–1905	Belgium	Elsa Rolland
Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa	1864–1910	Poland	Michał Bron Jr
Izabela Moszczeńska	1864–1941	Poland	Agnieszka Stopińska-Pająk
Stefania Sempołowska	1869–1944	Poland	Eugenia Karcz-Taranowicz
Vilma Glücklich and Rózsa Schwimmer	1872–1927 1877–1948	Hungary	Balázs Németh
Magdalene Lauridsen	1873–1957	Denmark	Anette Rasmussen & Karen E. Andreasen
Josephine Levy-Rathenau	1877–1921	Germany	Bernd Käßlinger
Anna Celli and Sibilla Aleramo	1878–1958 1876–1960	Italy	Simonetta Soldani

Despite several similarities, the pioneering adult educators discussed in this special issue came from various backgrounds, represented assorted fields of knowledge, and participated in sundry organisations; their lives followed different courses. Yet, despite all those divergencies, they had much in common. Just as other women at the time, they enjoyed *few opportunities since their roles were so stringently prescribed by their families and society at large* (Nowak 2001, p. 198). Unlike others, though, they decided to refuse to accept roles imposed by existing bonds. Their convictions and belief in the possibilities, and necessity, of learning unrestricted by age, social status or gender, rendered them “defiant”. They were not only committed advocates of this principle, but also gave others an example.

The presented issue ends with Barry Hake’s outline of a meta-analysis suggesting a further elaboration of the discussed topic in future publications.

Brief biographical sketches contained in the special issue demonstrate that the titular women led eventful lives. According to *Cambridge English Dictionary* “eventful” means: “full of interesting or important events”. A more extensive description of an eventful life is to be found in *Oxford English Dictionary*: “marked by interesting or exciting events, action-packed, lively, active, hectic, strenuous, momentous, significant, noteworthy, notable, remarkable, outstanding, crucial, historic, consequential, fateful, decisive”. All these adjectives are suitable for portraying the lives (and deeds) of female adult education pioneers.

It is our firm conviction that we can learn from those eventful lives. Research into the titular event-making women may change our knowledge about the past and perceiving them as active agents of history may lead us to a better understanding of that past. Obviously, exploring the origins of adult edu-

cation would be incomplete and invalid if the female agency involved in creating history was ignored.

Biographical studies, conceived as a research area, belong to history treated as an academic discipline. The prime question, which a biographer must answer, is: *does our knowledge of the personal life of a certain individual add anything to the understanding of his [her] public achievements?* (Renders 2013, p. 337). Research findings and conclusions attained by means of a biographical approach can, we believe, still be representative for mezzo- as well as macro-level statements.

However, we are concerned not only with presence, but rather with the way in which the roles of women in adult education history have been described. Were they attributed an agency, or not, and were they were seen as agents or merely as silent witnesses?

## References

- Duby, G., Perrot, Michelle & Fraisse, Geneviève (Ed.) (1994). *History of Women in the West*, Vol. IV: *Emerging Feminism from Revolution to the World War*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Nowak, B. (2001). Women in Poland: society, education, politics, and culture. *Journal of Women's History* 13,1, 196–206.
- Renders, H. (2013), The biographical method. In. *Theoretical discussions of biography. Approaches from history, microhistory and life writing*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen press, pp. 335–342.