

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

What is adult education today?

It is primarily a multidimensional and diverse mosaic of discourses, approaches and interpretations that reflects the phenomenon of learning in and through life, at work and for work, in leisure time and while fully engaged. It is a patchwork of theories, models and organisational forms, with three key areas of educational practice: formal, non-formal and informal learning processes. The present publication is an investigation of these three areas of adult learning, as well as the spaces that are found within these areas. What do we mean by adult-learning spaces? They are the various dimensions at which contemporary adult learning functions. In liquid postmodern reality it is difficult to refer to a single direction, model or structure of adult education, with the latter clearly more reminiscent of a diverse mosaic of approaches, theories, practical applications and solutions in formal, non-formal and informal areas, and we attempt a holistic view of the state of contemporary adult education in Central and Eastern European countries. Small areas found within contemporary adult-learning spaces are crucial parts of this monograph, with its focus on a range of key issues in the development of theory and practice in the adult-education field.

Adult education as a field of science and practice has been developing dynamically in recent decades. Current international discussions on this topic have been collected in publication including the one edited by Andreas Fejes and Erik Nylander (2019), along with previous studies published in the *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA)*, vol. 6/2, 2015: *Cartographies of Research on Adult Education and Learning*, which provides an overview of international research on adult education and learning in journals, conferences, adult-education associations and unskilled-worker programmes. These discussions are also raised during community congresses of ESREA (the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults), the international association of researchers andragogues (most recently organised by the University of Belgrade in

2019). All analyses (quantitative, qualitative) of issues related to the discipline's functioning indicate that in Central and Eastern Europe, the research, publishing and environmental activity of adult-education researchers remains low compared to such centres as Sweden and Portugal. The present publication, therefore, may serve as an important element, with its inclusion of discourses and research results from Polish, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian and Russian universities, in the awareness of a wider audience, along with conveying messages about research topics, developing andragogical theories and scientific activities of local andragogical communities in this region of Europe. Our publication is also an attempt to establish a critical dialogue with the publications mentioned above – while they are from the West, we will show perspectives from our part of Europe, perhaps still little known and underrecognised among other research circles.

This publication's aim is to reflect theoretically on contemporary forms of life-long educational activity among adults, groups and communities, and to present research results concerning the areas, models, goals and functions of adult education, teacher and educator competences, and adult-learning processes in Central and Eastern European countries.

In the pages that follow, the reader will find the results of research related to contemporary adult-learning spaces, presented from different methodological perspectives and introducing different points of view.

The editors' aim has been to create a space for discussion, an opportunity to present the latest research findings, thoughts and ways of interpreting educational reality. We seek to explore conditions shaping contemporary adult-learning spaces, including a comprehensive comparative perspective which holds great cognitive value, further enriched by the publication's international form. Readers are introduced to trends in developing andragogical theory and practice, and to informal learning areas as well. Attention is paid to (auto)reflection, whether shaped through knowledge or by individual experience and even common knowledge. The turn towards positively evaluating the idea of localism and social commitment has brought significant changes in many areas of contemporary adult education. Problems that adult educators face are also raised here, both in terms of their key competences and challenges they must contend with today. Institutional education is a space that researchers have abandoned in recent decades, yet it merits in-depth reflection, exploration and reflection. Activities carried out by associations and foundations, the dissemination of knowledge, activities of open-educational institutions, the sector of non-public educational services: these important topics can all inspire contemporary researchers and practitioners in the adult-education field. We invite the reader to treat this publication as an inspiring, comprehensive,

multidimensional, fresh and contemporary overview of the issues of adult learning. The necessity to learn continuously, to redefine both our experiences and the knowledge that comes from experiencing, to form new relationships on different principles and in different forms through the use of new technical means, are particularly fresh, important and necessary topics for reflection.

This monograph collects texts written by researchers, theoreticians and practitioners of adult education from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine and Russia. In these countries, the tradition marked by sociocultural and historical determinants calls for the recognition that the term andragogy defines an academic discipline reflecting the state of research on education and lifelong learning of adults in the intentional and institutional (formal and non-formal) and informal dimensions – sometimes even subconscious, occurring casually. Thus, adult education is a practice space, while andragogy is a scientific approach, based on a chosen paradigm and creating and utilising its own language of scientific discourse. The term comes from the Greek *anēr*, *andrōs* (άνηρ, άνδρος), or a brave person and *agō* (αγω), or I lead. Andragogy was used by Alexander Kapp (1799–1869) in the treatise *Platon's Erziehungslehre* ((Plato's Educational Ideas) of 1833 (meaning: male education) (Henschke, 2016). In Poland, the term andragogy was first used by Helena Radlińska (1879–1954), synonymous with social pedagogy and adult pedagogy, in *Stosunek wychowawcy do środowiska społecznego* [The Educator's Attitude to the Social Environment] (Radlińska, 1935). Andragogy then became popular in Eastern Bloc countries. Before 1989, this science had been focused on instrumental support for the development of elements in the institutional system of adult education; nowadays, it is subject-oriented, i.e. it researches adults learning in various contexts: familial, professional and in social life (EPALE 2020).

The chapters in the book are organised in five sections, each of which addresses pertinent issues of adult learning and teaching in the postmodern world.

The first section concerns contemporary problems related to the developing theory and practice of adult education and andragogy from the regional perspective of Central and Eastern Europe. This section provides an overview of Polish research in various areas of adult education presented in recent years, highlighting leading problems of Polish andragogical discourse. Considerations are included about adult-learning spaces as a phenomenon of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and as an element within the concept of lifelong learning. Various contexts of the intertwining of adult learning in sociocultural space are explored as well. Furthermore, in this part of the book readers will find a chapter about globalising educational security threats, including such important issues as the ability to assess risk, threats and safety, and a specific educational strategy for safety, built

on the basis of knowledge about the impact of various groups of factors. Other authors have sought to evaluate current and prospective possibilities of the life-long-learning system as an element in Ukraine's social and economic development, along with trends in adult-education development there. This section concludes with considerations on shaping attitudes about vocational retraining among Russians before retirement age.

In the second section, the focus is on the competences of contemporary adult educators. This part of the book opens with considerations of a topic that has been neglected in recent years, as emphasis has fallen primarily on informal education, with an increasing depreciation in the value of formal education. Universities, as centres of formal education for adults and academic teachers, constitute an important source of knowledge in the recent context of dynamic changes and draw our attention to transformations taking place in formal education. Two research projects are presented, embedded in different research paradigms, each relating to this topic. The first discusses the results of quantitative research about professional identity and quality of university teachers in the context of andragogical competence, with analyses of the current state of and prospects for andragogical competences among academic staff and their development. The second research project is qualitative; in seeking to explore the university as a learning space for teacher educators, it reveals three spaces within university life: space for actions, cultural practice and in relations with others. We then turn to the issue of mutual learning among teachers in the school space, which means, first of all, gaining practical knowledge and self-knowledge. Issues considered here include the mutual transfer of knowledge, skills and professional and personal experiences through active, conscious participation in a team cooperating on the basis of partnership and open communication. This topic is directly related to the issue of competence experience in teachers of adults. This problem is explored in phenomenographic research on competence experience based on individual interviews of twenty adult educators. The aim of this part is to reflect individual concepts and their consequences in the context of expected learning outcomes or that of the learning process. We also raise the issue of EU key competences for lifelong learning and the attendant four categories (the educator is someone who...). Considerations of key competences lead to conclusions related to pre-employment teacher training. This section ends with considerations on co-teaching, its advantages and disadvantages, with didactic and methodological aspects as well as theoretical and practical implications.

The next section examines different forms of adult-learning processes and various forms of educational support for learning adults. Subjects receiving critical reflection in this area of inquiry are designed to improve the competences of adults

with low literacy skills, allowing them to participate more effectively in public life, and are among the key factors influencing social development. Also with regard to adults with lower levels of basic skills, we take up the topic of designing and piloting support models, with reference to selected applications being implemented in various Polish regions. These considerations appear closely related to the topic of shaping students' professional and personal qualities, specifically those of future specialists in social work, qualities presented in the context of conditions in a non-profit organisation. We also present research related to this topic and to the Phenomenological Diamond Competency Model, which indicates that personality is indeed an important element of competence. The phenomenon of submission or docility, also related to personality determinants, is discussed from the perspective of neuroscience. Reflexivity also appears to play an important role nowadays, as a key element in adult functions in every area of life. In the personal context, this can be understood as an individual cognitive style and as a competence used in constructing one's own biography, while in the professional space it is treated as reflection leading to development, and in the educational context as an element providing a foundation for theoretical concepts of learning. The category of reflexivity allows us to consider important areas influencing adult learning outside of work.

In the fourth section, the focus turns to informal learning derived from life and experience. Informal learning means learning through daily activities, at work, in the family, in one's free time. Life is taken not only as a form of passive energy exchange or the reception of impressions, but also as creative human activity. An important category in this area of adult learning is self-creation and its impact on an adult's ability to manage their life, to learn biographically and to self-reflect on meaning within the context of their own life, as well as on the broad range of human choices and actions. This section considers what is meant by the learner as an enthusiast: how learning inspired by passion enriches a person's individual development while enriching the andragogical discourse. The Polish provinces are considered, and stereotypical assumptions are refuted that dynamic social and cultural change bypasses inhabitants of the provinces and the countryside. We show how townspeople and villagers, by learning from life, have educated themselves on the use of contemporary technology in their work and many areas of life, and show the "reverse" learning process, in which older generations learn from the younger. Faced with actions currently being undertaken in countries including Poland, implemented in the area of so-called active policy of memory, research into commemoration can help in discovering the specific nature of and developmental directions in collective (non)memory frameworks, within which individual memory – the basis for creating one's own identities – is being constructed, as

well. Also shown is a very interesting issue in this context: the problematisation of the issue of subject maturity in thinking about development, time and passing. In the context of the informal space of learning from life, the experience of disease, especially cancer, is an extremely important human experience. In this section, we also show how spouses of chronically ill people take on the role of informal caregivers. When they aren't being adequately prepared to fulfil these new duties, however, these become burdens, with attendant experiences of emotional and psychosomatic problems. Caregivers become "second-level patients," rarely receiving professional support, which means they are revealing examples of how learning from life processes actually works in an individual's life. In the context of difficult experiences determining the transformation of an individual's entire life structure, we also consider perspective taking: the ability to perceive and understand a situation from the viewpoint of another person. This is crucial in social interactions between individuals and social groups including the elderly and the disabled. Perspective-adoption processes are used in educational strategies aiming for improved understanding the needs of and circumstances among elderly and disabled people.

The fifth and final section takes up topics of citizenship, social movements and learning cities and regions. The interlinked terms "education" and "region" are gaining importance in European andragogical discourse. A growing belief maintains that neither sustainably developmental education nor societies' lifelong-learning processes can be effectively implemented without regional authorities' participation and the engagement of local communities. Also explored here are issues of neighbourly relations in the context of informal civic education for adults. Referring to the idea of social capital, the educational potential of neighbourly relations is shown in the context of contemporary concepts of informal adult education. From the provincial perspective, we then move to cities. The popularisation of the idea of lifelong learning, in tandem with the growing importance of cultural education, has prompted some Polish cities to prepare programmes that develop cultural education, which may provide a pertinent and inspiring local example of atypical solutions in civic education. We also highlight non-governmental organisations as places of formal, non-formal and informal civic education for adults. And we close this section of the book with considerations on active citizenship, including participation, involvement in public affairs, tolerance, critical thinking and other key attributes of citizenship.

*Learning Never Ends...* collects the latest theoretical reflections, empirical research and practical applications in contemporary adult education; it also presents a regional view of Central and Eastern Europe, which encapsulates its additional value, in our view. With its aim of presenting a comprehensive view of conditions

shaping the contemporary spaces of adult learning, the book contains a variety of research along with descriptions of their practical implications, as well as purely theoretical considerations. Its uniqueness is in the multidimensional picture it presents of contemporary adult-learning areas in selected Central and Eastern European countries: Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Russia.

We encourage you to read on,

*Zofia Szarota and Zuzanna Wojciechowska*

## REFERENCES

- European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*. (2015). Vol. 6, No. 2.
- Glosariusz EPALE (2020) *Pojęcia i terminy z zakresu edukacji dorosłych*. Warsaw 2020.
- Henschke, J. A. (2016). A History of Andragogy and Its Documents as They Pertain to Adult Basic and Literacy Education. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 25, 1–28.
- Mapping out the Research Field of Adult Education and Learning*. (2019). Fejes, A., Nylander, E. (eds.). Lifelong Learning Book Series, Vol. 24. Springer International Publishing; doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-10946-2.
- Radlińska, H. (1935). *Stosunek wychowawcy do środowiska społecznego: szkice z pedagogiki społecznej*. Warsaw: Nasza Drukarnia.