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ADULT LEARNING DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND IN THE 20th CENTURY

ABSTRACT

The article presents a retrospective analysis of adult learning development in Poland in the 20th century. Based on the study and analysis of historical and pedagogical literature, normative documents of the official bodies of Polish government, the periodical press of the 20th century, several stages of adult learning development, in the particular historical period, have been determined: 1905–1913 years were defined by the legalization of educational institutions for adults, the search for new forms and methods of education, the involvement of a wide range of people; 1914–1945 was the stage of world wars that had led to the destruction of the adult learning system, which led to the decline of educational institutions; 1950–1960 years were characterized by the restoration of adult learning institutions, the adaptation to the new political system, a new approach to formulating the goals and objectives of adult learning; in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, there was the cardinal rethinking of the goals and objectives of adult learning, educational institutions practiced new forms and methods of teaching, the idea of lifelong education was widespread in the society; the period of the end of the 20th century had initiated the integration of adult learning in Poland into the Common Educational Space, which contributed to the intensification of the theoretical substantiation and practical implementation of the international concepts of adult learning. Among the criteria for determining the stages, there were socio-political, socio-economic, organizational and pedagogical factors that led to the change of subjects, goals, objectives, content, principles, forms, methods of organizing adult learning in Poland in the 20th century. The historical and pedagogical features of each stage are shown, the influence of historical events on the formation and development of adult education in Poland is taken into account and analyzed. In accordance with each stage, the leading forms and methods of adult learning are determined. The peculiarities of the activity of adult learning institutions at all stages have been demonstrated. The disadvantages of the adult learning system, as well as the difficulties of its development, have been identified.

Keywords: *adult learning, lifelong education, the goal of adult learning, forms and methods of adult learning, adult learning institutions.*

INTRODUCTION

The advance of science, technology, global, regional and local transformations make people continually develop, increase their knowledge, skills and acquire new ones. The idea of adult learning is important for the socio-economic progress. Undoubtedly, it is important that the general intellectual level of the society determines people's living standards. Adult education is based on the principles of humanism and social lifelong education in the process of organizing education in all its dimensions and at all levels, the continuity of experience, needs, aspirations, messages and opportunities to create permanent



conditions for its improvement, modernization, the attachment to the logical and essential use in different new life situations.

During the implementation of such a concept, it is important to study the experience of organizing adult learning in the leading countries of the world, in particular, in Europe. Therefore, the historical and pedagogical analysis of the formation and development of adult learning in Poland will promote the awareness of the process of organizing adult learning, will encourage the rethinking of the pedagogical heritage of the past, will allow to structure and reconsider the process of developing a fundamental adult learning system for today.

But besides, today the issues of the formation and development of adult learning in Poland in the broad historical retrospective remain insufficiently elucidated. The issues related to the study of the impact of political, social and economic changes on the peculiarities of the adult learning system in Poland need to be analyzed.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the article is a comprehensive historical and pedagogical analysis of the organization of adult learning in the educational system of Poland in the 20th century.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Some aspects of the organization of adult learning in Poland, the process of its formation and development have been revealed in the works of P. Błędowski and M. Nowakowska (2010), J. Draus and R. Terlecki (2006), J. Pólturzycki and A. Wesołowska (2000), K. Przyszczypkowski (1990), E. Sapia-Drewniak (2014), K. Wereszczyński (2006). Theoretical issues were studied by W. Okon (1998). Statistical data have been revealed in information editions “The Information Database on Educational Systems In Europe” (2009) and on the official page of “Towarzystwo Wiedzy Powszechnej” (2014). “Ustawa o systemie oświaty” (2004) includes legal framework.

The problem of adult learning development in Poland in the 20th century has been studied based on a comprehensive historical and pedagogical analysis.

RESULTS

At the beginning of the 20th century the adult learning system in Poland was at a rather low level, only a few educational institutions (Uniwersytet Latający, Uniwersytet Ludowy im Adama Mickiewicza) were officially allowed to teach adults. At large, adult learning was carried out secretly at special meetings, where patriotic education and the slogan “Education through freedom” prevailed.

Such a situation did not satisfy the Poles and there were strikes and demonstrations against the authorities and the czarist regime in 1905. The government suppressed the revolution, but at the same time it was forced to make concessions to Polish society, reforming the system of education and training. As a result, some secret and illegal Polish educational institutions were legalized, the establishment of new educational institutions was allowed, but this was only possible under strict control of the officials (Draus & Terlecki, 2006).

In 1906, educational institutions got the official license, which allowed the education of all classes and categories of people, regardless of age, social status and material wealth. The main purpose of the activity of such educational institutions was to change the condition of illiteracy and low level of knowledge of Polish workers. As a result, the idea of education and self-education as a form of acquiring of knowledge was extended among the working class of the society.

When Poland had got its sovereignty back (1918), the organization of education and training of the population, including adults, became one of the most difficult problems



for the Polish authorities. The division period had a negative impact on the level of education of the Poles, whereas the restructuring of the Polish state required the presence of skilled workers in various industries. At that time, extra-curricular forms of education were carried out by the Association of the University of Labour (TUR), established in Warsaw in 1923. The activity of the Association focused mainly on workers training and the promotion of their self-education. The activity of the association activists included organizing various courses, internships and further education for adults. Currently, the vast majority of educational activities, aimed at adult learning was in creating conditions for the development of cooperation with other national and social groups in order to mitigate the confusion in the society and the conflict between classes, their adaptation to life in the changed society (Okoń, 1998).

After the First World War, much attention was paid to the formation of adults' sense of the direct involvement in the modern social system and the conviction of the need for the approval of new political alliances. But, unfortunately, the Second World War again negatively affected the existing adult learning system. So, the work of the Association of the University of Labour was suspended. During the occupation, the activity of such educational institutions as the Free University of Poland (Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej), the Adult Learning University (Instytutu Oświaty Dorosłych), the Public Institute of Education, Culture and Self-Education Instytutu Oświaty i Kultury oraz działalność samokształceniową) was reorganized (Wereszczyński, 2006).

The German authorities fully controlled education and training activities. In the regions that were a part of the Reich, Polish education was completely abolished, all schools were exclusively German. Adult learning was virtually eliminated, basic and vocational schools were allowed to work, but their program was largely limited. The situation in the areas occupied by the USSR was similar: primary and vocational schools were not closed, but their curricula were changed (Błędowski & Nowakowska, 2010).

Under these conditions, the Poles began to secretly organize a system of education that covered all teaching levels. Classes were often held in private apartments or well-hidden rooms. In addition, the decisions taken by the German and Soviet authorities had been taken into account, which allowed ensuring the functioning of vocational schools. Adult education courses were conducted in the premises and workshops of these schools. During the war, the classes secretly organized by universities were popular among the Polish youth and adults. Thus, Warsaw University, Lviv Polytechnic University, Jagiellonian University and AGH University of Science and Technology secretly conducted lectures and seminars for acquiring knowledge and higher education by adult Poles (Draus & Terlecki, 2006).

At the end of the Second World War, the Ministry of Education realized a series of initiatives that included the creation and maintenance of adult learning schools. After the war, the government began rebuilding the system of Polish adult learning, but education began to openly propagandize the communist ideology. All educational institutions were strictly subordinated to the guidelines of the central administration. After 1948, the whole adult learning system was nationalized and involved in the system of the communist ideologization of the society. The purpose of adult learning was to train educated staff, which had to quickly master the necessary knowledge and skills, for the national economy. All forms of adult learning had to be formed according to the Soviet decisions. Thus, the autonomy of adult learning was eliminated (Andragogika, 2014).

In 1949 the Law "On the Elimination of Illiteracy" was adopted, which facilitated the establishment of schools for adults which provided knowledge in the field of elementary, secondary and vocational education, open public halls, national universities and adult



education courses (Andragogika, 2014). The programs and curricula for such schools were developed, the textbooks were published. In addition, new adult learning institutions were established: the Association of the University of Labour (Towarzystwo Uniwersytetu Robotniczego), the Association of Public Universities (Towarzystwo Uniwersytetów Ludowych), Public University of Education and Arts (Ludowy Instytut Oświaty i Kultury Dorosłych). Most of these educational institutions provided education for adults in absentia (Wereszczyński, 2006).

But there are a number of shortcomings in the results of the activity of these institutions. Thus, the authority's campaign against illiteracy was purely propaganda, as graduates of adult learning institutions were not able to continue their education. Unfortunately, the system of schools for the working people had not provided training for adults in the fields of cultural and educational activity and self-education. The absence of any institution coordinating the activities of schools for work, the research and creation of a methodological base was a clear indication of the neglect of the authority of this educational branch (Wereszczyński, 2006). In view of this, the establishment of the Association of Labour and Public Universities in the field of adult learning and training was initiated. However, the communist authorities felt the Association's activities threatening their interests, which resulted in the establishment of the Association of General Knowledge (Towarzystwo Wiedzy Powszechnej) on May 5, 1950, based on the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland. It became one of the most important adult learning platforms. The Association of General Knowledge achieved its statutory goals, disseminating the achievements of science, technology, arts, education and culture (Historia i współczesność TWP, 2014).

In 1956 and 1957, the revival of political life and changes in social relations were initiated. As a result, new trends in the organization of training in the field of adults learning were introduced. At that time, the theory of adult learning began to be actively developed, and the publication of a number of pedagogical magazines dealing with issues of lifelong education was started. In particular, the magazine "Education for Adults" (Oświata Dorosłych) revealed the issues relevant at that time, for example, articles "Knowledge for Everyone", "Culture", "Worker", "Education and Culture", "Educational work" promoted the benefits of lifelong education and showed its peculiarities in Poland (Sapia-Drewniak, 2014).

Between 1957 and 1961 years, there were positive changes in the adult learning system, in particular, the purpose of adult learning was changed, which was to meet the various needs of the society and the acquaintance with the basics of business. In the field of adult learning, educational initiatives and experiments, the advancement of the idea of vocational education and ensuring appropriate conditions for learning started to be revived. As a result, education became more accessible to the rural population (Andragogika, 2014).

Thus, in the second half of the 20th century out-of-school forms of adult learning got dynamic development and for the most part they were aimed at providing vocational education. Among others, it is worthwhile to mark courses at the Labour Institutes (Instytutów Naukowych Rzemiosła (INR), which since 1962 continued their activities under the name of vocational training centers (Zakładów Doskonalenia Zawodowego) headed by the central governing body – the Association of Professional Education (Związku Zakładów Doskonalenia Zawodowego) (Błędowski & Nowakowska, 2010).

It should be noted that before 1989, vocational training and advanced training were also carried out by laboratories and educational institutions in-person.



According to statistics, in the 1960s of the 20th century almost 1 million adults got professional education. At the same time, more than 40,000 adult Poles finished elementary education course (elementary school curriculum) (Eurybase, 2009).

Among the main disadvantages of adult education of that time there was the politicization of adult learning system. Because of political convictions many talented and educated teachers were retired. It is also worth noting that educational institutions limited their educational activities by providing only the most necessary knowledge and skills for performing professional duties (Andragogika, 2014).

It has been stated that in the 1970s there were attempts to intensify didactic activity in the field of adult learning. It was based on the creation of lifelong education centers and the development of didactics with the help of radio and television in provincial cities. At that time, the adult education system was intended to change many training courses and forms of political education, party, trade union, school and youth courses (Przyszczypkowski, 1998).

After 1980, there was a sharp emphasis of schools on the working people. This situation can be explained by the fact that young people acquired the necessary knowledge and skills in the framework of secondary vocational education, which reduced the interest of the adult population in such forms of knowledge acquisition. The lack of support of these institutions by the central authorities also had negative impact. Another important factor was the lowering of the level of education and training in the schools for workers. As a result, almost half of these objects had been eliminated, and the number of adults who visited them decreased three times (Eurybase, 2009).

In 1989, there were significant changes in the field of adult education and training in Poland. The collapse of the communist system and numerous economic and social processes (privatization, rising unemployment, democratization of the principles of social life) that took place at that time led to a change in the mentality of the Poles. They began to realize the need and the benefits of raising their own level of education and acquiring a new improved professional qualification. In addition, more and more educational institutions started offering their services to adults and thus allowed them to continue their education at different educational levels (Błędowski & Nowakowska, 2009).

The political breakthrough in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to further positive changes in the main goals of adult education in Poland. Thus, they began to reopen Christian and patriotic values, transmit the history of Poland and develop the individual needs of educated people (Półturzycki & Wesołowska, 2000).

As a result of these events since 1990, there was not only the rapid dynamic development of educational services, but also the integration of the Polish educational system into the structure of the European Union. At the end of the 20th century the theory of adult learning in Poland was substantiated, the approaches and definitions were reconsidered in accordance with generally accepted European norms, the actions and concepts in the field of adult learning were reconciled with the relevant EU institutions (Okoń, 1998). Thus, in 1991 the Law "On the Educational System" was adopted, in which lifelong education was defined as "adult education" and as the acquisition and completion of general knowledge, skills and professional qualification in extracurricular forms by those who had finished their studying at a secondary school (Ustawa o systemie oświaty, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the formation of adult learning in Poland in the 20th century had several stages: the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by the legalization of the



institutions for adults, by the search for new forms and methods of education, involving a wide range of people; the stage of the two world wars led to the actual destruction of the adult learning system, and to the demise of educational institutions; the post-war period was characterized by the restoration of adult learning institutions, the adaptation to the new political system, by a new approach to formulating the goals and objectives of adult learning; the 70s and 80s of the 20th century were characterized by reconsidering the purpose of adult learning, the application of new forms and methods, and by a widespread popularization of the idea of lifelong education; the end of the 20th century had initiated the integration of adult learning in Poland into the European space, which contributed to the intensification of the theoretical substantiation and practical implementation of the international concepts of adult learning.

Among the prospects for further research, one can identify a more detailed study of the principles, forms and methods of adult learning in Poland at each of the specified stages.

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