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The Role of Education in Lifelong Learning Programme in the Polish Higher Education Institutions

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME IN THE POLISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS¹

ABSTRACT

The article constitutes an attempt to present aspects chosen by the author conditioning the construction and realization of educational offer outside tertiary education and an attempt to forecast the use of already existing and implemented solutions concerning the quality of education, in order to exhibit its usefulness in raising attractiveness and effectiveness of such an education, mainly concerning adult people.

Keywords:

Bologna Process, quality of education, lifelong learning programme, polish higher education area.

I. OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

The disintegration of a bipolar world after the end of the cold war after 1990 is mainly associated with geopolitical changes, victory of market economy over centrally planned economy, beginning of democratization of Central-Western European countries and new problems in the fields of safety, such as: proliferation of mass destruction weapons, escalation of terrorism or, in later years, financial and economical crisis, as political and social results.

¹ The article was delivered as a lecture at the conference Trends and Issues in Adult Education, which was held on 2 September 2013 at the Masaryk University in Brno. Conference was organized by the Centre Inovace andragogických Studií Ústav pedagogických Vedas, Filozofická facultative, Masarykova univerzita. Despite sending reminders there is no publication-conference.

It is important to notice that disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and gaining sovereignty by countries satellite to Moscow in Europe brought many other challenges and changes. Along with cultural, social and economical changes, also those in the area of education and science, which are often omitted in political discourse although they constitute an important element of social education. In this domain, problems of national identity, attitude to democracy and to the dominant economical movement, culture, history, relation to events on the international arena and finally, education for the purpose of the current and next economies constitute primordial elements for long-term politics of the country, frequently underestimated because of current political problems. These questions remain distant from our discussion and are not the purpose of this article. The author intends to concentrate on structural and systemic questions in the topic above.

Challenges in education on the higher level touched Poland at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, similarly to other Central and Eastern European countries as well as countries of the European Union. It resulted from the process of globalization, widely understood and frequently mentioned when explaining phenomena on an international level. As a result, Polish higher education had to find its new place on the European market, and the latter — on the global scale. The current situation of Polish higher education institutions, changes they undergo and their future are shaped by a group of factors, among which the most important are: the potential left from disintegration of the Eastern Bloc (among others: scientific potential, supply network and management), changes occurring in Europe (Bologna Process), inner legislation, demography, financing and socio-economical changes, being the result of reorienting Polish foreign politics to European and Atlantic directions as well as striving for integration with European institutions. The current situation of Polish higher education institutions is undoubtedly oriented at implementing regulations of the amendment to the Act Law of Higher Education², including reorienting the vision of studies programmes with a particular attention to effects of teaching described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and to the implementation of systems ensuring a high quality of teaching, being the main measure of precision of actions for the whole system at the level of a higher education institution. Additionally, the situation in Polish polytechnic institutes, universities, academies, state and private institutions is complemented by a highly unfavorable demograph-

² Ustawa z dnia 27 lipca 2005 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym (Dz. U. Nr 164, poz. 1365, z późn. zm.).

ic situation and further financial consequences. The result of such facts is the creation of a wider offer of continuous education for people outside student age (18–24 years old). Institutions pay a greater attention to postgraduate studies, perfectioning courses, but also create an offer for the youngest students and for people of 50+ years old. A question follows about the cohesion of the system, in other words, of connection between education at kindergarten, elementary school, grammar school, secondary school and higher education, following by professional improvement and rebranching, which reflect requirements imposed indirectly by the job market. At the moment, too little attention is paid to the complexity of this problem, although discussions on this topic continue. Regardless of wholesome solutions for all levels of education, higher education institutions may freely create their educational offer not only on the first, second or tertiary level, but also in the case of continuous education.

In this article, three factors will be presented, which should provide an answer to the question from topic. They will be: the demographic situation in Poland, Bologna Process with its assumptions concerning continuous education, as well as legal and institutional solutions operating in Poland concerning the quality of education.

II. PRESENTATION OF DETERMINANTS

II. 1. Demography

The declining number of births observed during the last few years is becoming a burning issue of the retirement system (more and more burdened) and of the visible fall of the number of candidates to schools on all levels of education. Also higher education institutions are alarmed, as they face the downfall of candidates for studies. The situation is more dramatic because during the last years, the number of private schools has risen and the didactic offer of state schools was enhanced, in response to a growing demand of the educational market. The period of prosperity, lasting from the end of the 1990s, was caused by two factors: on the one hand, interest in education grew considerably, enabling a better start at the job market in a free-market system; but on the other hand, some cultural patterns from Western countries were taken over, causing in effect the equation of professional success with higher education. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, it resulted in a diminishing interest in professional schools and technical colleges, which caused in consequence the closure of some of them. The educational market,

wanting to fulfill the social need for higher education, has created an offer providing supply capable of fulfilling the demand. The number of places for studies in state and private institutions was created at a level adapted to demographic situation at the time. Changes in this area must cause consequences in the sector of higher education in Poland.

One of the researches seeking causes and results of this state was the report of the Ernst & Young Business Advisory consortium and of the Instytut Badan nad Gospodarka Rynkowa (Institute for Market Economics) published in 2009³. It presented determinants of the future of higher education in Poland in three areas. The first area was the globalization process and the resulting internationalization of education, visible among others in students and academic staff mobility. The next was socio-economical area, where the main role is played by direct investments and innovative economy based on knowledge. The last one was the economic area, which presented in a pessimistic way previous research of the Central Statistical Office and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Their research showed that in the perspective from 2008 to 2020, the total number of population will drop by approximately 280 thousand people, which is about 0,7 percent of the population. Data concerning the decline in the amount of people in each cohort were much more disturbing. In the case of people aged under 17, the fall will be of around 400 thousand, which means 5,1 percent, and in the case of people aged between 18 and 24 (age usually considered as the period of studies), the decline will be of 1,5 million people, in other words of around 36 percent. The last group comprised people older than 24 and it will note a rise of population of 1,6 million, which means around 6 percent⁴.

The problem of population decline does not concern solely the sector of higher education. It touched elementary and high schools in the first place, as between school years of 2000/2001 and 2009/2010 the average amount of pupils declined by 1,5 million⁵, then the phenomenon started to concern higher education institutions, and finally, the job market will have to deal with it. Questions concerning “ageing of the job market”, appropriate social policy, as well as planning retirement systems were some of the topics dis-

³ *Uwarunkowania przyszłego rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce: globalizacja, demografia i zmiany społeczno-gospodarcze w Polsce*, Ernst & Young Business Advisory, Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową, listopad 2009.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁵ W. Wojciechowski, L. Kalina, A. Łaszek, *Szkołę mą widzę kosztowną*, Forum Obywatelskiego Rozwoju, Warszawa 2010, p. 1.

cussed in 2013 in the report *Demographic transition and an ageing society — Implications for local labour markets in Poland*⁶, where one solution is implementing management of demographic changes. A similar tone was set by lecturers of the II Demographical Congress “Poland in Europe — Demographical future”⁷, who presented among others the results of the National List of Population and Apartments of 2011 and pointed to the necessity of paying greater attention to the problem of ageing society and adapting the functioning of countries to the new situation.

The problem of a declining number of candidates for studies is a fact and higher education institutions must face two inevitable consequences. The first is the change of financing system. It means lower didactic subventions for state schools, and in the case of private schools — lower income from tuition. Technical institutions and the ones leading in gaining funds for their academic, patent and implementation activities have a large chance to balance their budgets with the activity mentioned above, but institutions centered on education will have greater financial problems. The second consequence is the necessity to rebuild didactic offer, not only its attractiveness, adequacy and quality of studies (of I, II and III level) but also paying more attention to postgraduate studies, perfectioning courses and other forms of didactic offer, such as Universities of the Third Age. Focusing on these forms of teaching requires research of the job market needs, knowledge of regional specifications, engagement of practitioners to teach, performing research in areas commissioned or desired by economy, as well as changes in education itself, such as: perfectioning e-learning or gerontology (science about ageing processes), as forms more adequate to people professionally active and seniors. The scale of challenges is very big and following the same rules as in the case of designing didactic programmes for I, II and III level studies seems risky.

II. 2. Bologna Process

The Bologna Process, initiated in 1999 by the Bologna Declaration aimed at rising mobility of students and academic staff, comparability of titles and degrees, possibility to accumulate and transfer achievements and

⁶ *Przemiany demograficzne i starzenie się społeczeństwa: konsekwencje dla lokalnych rynków pracy w Polsce*, Organizacja Współpracy Gospodarczej i Rozwoju (OECD), 2013.

⁷ Z. Strzelecki, A. Potrykowska, *Polska w Europie — przyszłość demograficzna*, sesja inauguracyjna, tom I, Warszawa 2012.

cooperation in the area of ensuring quality. These actions were supposed to create the European Higher Education Area, confirmed as a goal on the conference in Prague on 19 May 2001⁸, where previous postulates were complemented by new ones, among others: promotion of European higher education area attractiveness among students in Europe and other parts of the world, as well as lifelong learning (LLL) in order to rise economic competitiveness. Recommendation of the role of continuous education for people at different ages, with different professional needs and possessing or not studies at a given level and in a certain domain, gave a clear signal that if countries taking part in Bologna Process want to be competitive with the rest of the world on an educational and economic ground, they must prepare an offer for their citizens not at a precise age, but for people in a pre-productive, productive and post-productive age. The question of continuous education was raised again during conferences in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve⁹, where, after the conference on 28–29 April 2009, it was stated that expanding participation in lifelong learning should guarantee access, quality and transparency of information, whereas politics should be implemented along with national frameworks of qualifications and through creating strong partnerships associating all parties involved¹⁰. After complementing this postulate only with the impact institutions should put on raising the quality of education on every level, it became clear that continuous education is a challenge on the one hand, but on the other, an opportunity for higher education institutions to meet economical needs and to raise their participation in educational market, which, in the case of Poland and its demographical situation discussed above may mean outlasting demographical decline in financial terms and modifying their offer to tie it more closely to economy and increasing its impact on the whole country.

In 2006, Andrzej Krasniewski noted that continuous education is a chance for demographic changes occurring in Europe, by giving the example of Great Britain, France and Scandinavian countries, where this type of

⁸ *W kierunku Europejskiego Obszaru Szkolnictwa Wyższego*, Komunikat ze spotkania europejskich ministrów ds. szkolnictwa wyższego, które odbyło się w Pradze dnia 19 maja 2001 r.

⁹ *Proces Boloński 2020 — Europejski Obszar Szkolnictwa Wyższego w nowej dekadzie*, Komunikat z konferencji europejskich ministrów odpowiedzialnych za szkolnictwo wyższe, Leuven i Louvain-la-Neuve, 28–29 kwietnia 2009 r.

¹⁰ Web site: *Europa — streszczenie prawodawstwa UE*, [2.08.2013], http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lif-long_learning/c11088_pl.htm

education is offered by 49 percent of higher education institutions. He points additionally to the fact that recognition of such an education poses a problem, and in consequence, causes the fall of its attractiveness¹¹. However, it modifies the mentioned message from Louvain-la-Neuve from 2009, which allows for transparent comparison of continuous education effects.

Andrzej Krasniewski, in the document published in 2009, in which he presents the assessment of implementing the idea of lifelong learning process in Poland, notes that both European Commission and OECD rated in a very negative way the implementation of this element in Poland, pointing to the fact that it was lower by almost a half than in other countries. The author claims however that the situation is not as bad as would suggest an external opinion, and that rising the offer of part-time studies and the growing popularity of postgraduate studies are its proof¹². Such an opinion seems legitimate, but it is important to notice that there is still lack of a definite orientation at education adapted to needs of professionally active people and those requiring special education, not necessarily in the frame of three-level studies, but for example courses or modules chosen individually. It is where Krasniewski raises the question of recognition of informal education, which is still treated with distance by Polish schools¹³.

In conclusion of Bologna Process importance for the development of Polish higher education, it is possible to risk the statement that imposing the goal of lifelong learning as contribution of institutions in education for every age is a big opportunity for academic centers, which face a demographical decline. It is difficult to predict whether the situation of Polish education would be better or the same if it didn't participate in the process, but the fact of participation in building European Higher Education Area has undoubtedly helped it to prepare for this problem by enforcing some changes.

II. 3. Quality of education

With reference to changes imposed by Bologna Process, internal legislation concerning higher education was adjusted in Poland by passing the Bill of 27 July 2005 — Law of Higher Education. Its latest amendment came into effect on 1 January 2013 and was linked to implementation of Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. Simultaneously, it brought chang-

¹¹ A. Kraśniewski, *Proces Boloński — dokąd zmierza europejskie szkolnictwo wyższe?*, Warszawa 2006, p. 28.

¹² A. Kraśniewski, *Proces Boloński — to już 10 lat*, Warszawa 2009, p. 87.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

es and increased the meaning of certain elements which functioned in the document from 2005. Apart from institutional changes, the most important ones are: creation of didactic programmes according to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, assessment (accreditation) through internal system of education quality activity, obligation to follow students lives after graduation and others, which integrate the Polish and the European areas of higher education. They also bring a series of changes which are not accepted with enthusiasm by Polish academic environment. It is not a popular phenomenon, but, for example: allowing students into collegial bodies or taking into account students' surveys while assessing academic teachers frequently met resistance. It is similar nowadays, when higher education institutions create and modify didactic offers, by adapting them to the Bill regulations and guidelines from the Decree of Science and Higher Education Minister from 5 October 2001 about conditions of performing studies in a given major and level of education¹⁴.

The decree mentioned above describes conditions which must be fulfilled in order to conduct studies, along with formal constraints, guidelines for describing programmes and an appropriate staff and supply network. It also mentions that the basic organization unit must "implement an internal system of ensuring quality of education, taking into account actions aimed at perfecting education programme in a field of studies"¹⁵. Such a system must embrace education of I, II and III level, as well as postgraduate studies, which may be conducted by a higher education institution like perfectionning courses and trainings, according to the Bill Law of Higher Education¹⁶. There is a stipulation which makes rules of conducting postgraduate studies more precise: "a higher education institution may conduct postgraduate studies in the area of teaching linked to at least one degree course in this school"¹⁷. There are no further restrictions concerning courses and trainings.

Higher education institutions with their obligation to implement an internal system of ensuring quality of education, which role considerably rose

¹⁴ Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 5 października 2011 r. w sprawie warunków prowadzenia studiów na określonym kierunku i poziomie kształcenia (Dziennik Ustaw Nr 243, poz. 1445).

¹⁵ Ibidem, par. 9 ust. 1, pkt. 9.

¹⁶ Art. 6. ust. 1. pkt. 5. Ustawa z dnia 27 lipca 2005 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym (Dz. U. Nr 164, poz. 1365, z późn. zm.).

¹⁷ Ibidem, art. 8. Ust. 1. pkt. 7.

after the amendment to the bill¹⁸, must concentrate on a systemic approach to assessing and ensuring quality of didactic offer, conducting classes, choosing teachers, infrastructure and didactic-scientific base as well as on matters concerning management, flow of information and other. Unfortunately, this obligation is frequently treated as a formal requirement, not as real action, and reflected in elaborate descriptions of the system, but not in the expression of its functioning¹⁹. It also affects negatively the quality of postgraduate studies, courses and trainings, because regulations specify their assessment only in the case of an institutional accreditation, which evaluates the institution through the prism of the system, not studies programme, as in the case of a programme accreditation. Because of this solution, Polish higher education institutions passing the accreditation of the Polish Accreditation Committee²⁰ are submitted to evaluation of quality of studies and courses only to a minimal extent. It implicates questions about the way and range in which higher education institutions will use the internal system of quality of education in the field of postgraduate studies.

III. CONCLUSION

Taking into account the three conditions presented in this article, the first being an undisputed fact influencing the number of candidates for studies and financing of higher education institutions, the second — international constraints proposing implementation of Bologna Process postulates, and the third one concerning inner legislation in the aspect of quality of education, it is important to notice that the notion of continuous education, especially of the adults, is a serious challenge in Poland.

The form of education addressed primarily to this target group is above all part-time studies, supposed to enable reconciliation of professional work with education. However, many institutions observe a decline in the number of candidates because of the demographic fall. Moreover, part-time

¹⁸ M. Lisiński, *Wewnętrzne systemy zapewnienia jakości kształcenia w szkołach wyższych z perspektywy oceny Państwowej/Polskiej Komisji Akredytacyjnej w III kadencji*, Działalność Państwowej Komisji Akredytacyjnej w latach 2008–2011, p. 111.

¹⁹ Ibidem, s. 115.

²⁰ Polish Accreditation Committee (until 30.09.2011 State Accreditation Committee) — is a statutory organ of higher education, created by the minister responsible for higher education and functioning independently for the quality of education. Polish Accreditation Committee evaluates the level of degree courses in every higher education institution in Poland, state and private.

studies must meet the same standards and quality procedures to the same extent as full-time studies, and it concerns all three levels of education. Postgraduate studies, courses and trainings require procedures and a systemic approach in caring for quality, as a result of one factor — recognition of competences acquired in this form. When seeking employees, employers must know that a certificate after completing a course, training or postgraduate studies is a proof of having gained competences from the area of knowledge, skills and social competences. It implies differences in awareness of people making use of these forms of education. Firstly, they are aware of shortages in their competences, secondly, they usually pay for their classes, so they strive for a better location of their resources, finally, as they work professionally, they know what to expect from teachers to a bigger extent than students whose only comparison is with high school. It creates opportunities for greater expectations than in the case of I or II level studies, which should be stated in the agreement and executed. A system of ensuring quality of education is legitimate, as well as making efforts to build “a culture of quality” by auditors and participants.

It is important to answer the question posed in the introduction and point to those elements of the system of ensuring quality of education in use with reference to continuous teaching. They are mainly:

1. Gathering opinions of postgraduate studies auditors and participants of courses and trainings, enabling to gain feedback about the level of satisfaction of transferred information and the way of conducting classes. It is also a basic measure to evaluate programs and to better answer candidates' expectations.
2. Close cooperation with the external environment, by gathering information about current and forecasted needs in the aspect of required competences. The next element should be cooperation while creating postgraduate studies, courses and training programmes, and the last — activating practitioners into conducting classes, which would enable to use the human potential more effectively, both of the institution and its socio-economical environment.
3. External accreditation conducted not only by the Polish Accreditation Committee and brand commissions, but also Polish and foreign companies and private institutions, enabling a better match of didactic offer to economical needs and an authentication of such forms of education.
4. Choice of academic staff for their current knowledge, didactic skills adapted to auditors groups — transfer of knowledge from the first or second degree is not always appropriate, as well as for their practical expe-

rience in order to authenticate the teacher, but also confront knowledge with practice.

The above elements seem particularly useful in continuous education, especially of adult people, however in the case of an inner system of ensuring quality of education it is important to notice that it has to combine all factors and function in a systemic way. Otherwise, it will become a dead document, only formally fulfilling obligations of constant quality rise of education. It will result in a declining interest in such forms of education²¹ and will not fulfill the expectations of economy, participants and institution, as a chance to subsist demographic decline and to broaden the spectrum of its activity.

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²¹ Strona internetowa: ewdurada.pl [2.08.2013], <http://edurada.pl/artykuly/co-z-jakosci-edukacji-w-polsce-raport-o-stanie-edukacji-kontynuacja-przemian/>

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ROLA JAKOŚCI KSZTAŁCENIA W KSZTAŁCENIU USTAWICZNYM W POLSKICH SZKOŁACH WYŻSZYCH

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy tekst jest próbą przedstawienia wybranych zdaniem autora głównych uwarunkowań wpływających na budowanie i realizację oferty kształcenia poza studiami trzystopniowymi oraz próba prognozy zastosowania w nim istniejących i wdrażanych rozwiązań dotyczących jakości kształcenia, w celu wykazania jego przydatności w podniesieniu atrakcyjności i skuteczności takiej edukacji, głównie w odniesieniu do osób dorosłych. W tym celu zaprezentowane będą trzy czynniki, które powinny umożliwić odpowiedź na postawione pytanie. Będą nimi: sytuacja demograficzna Polski, Proces Boloński z założeniami dotyczącymi kształcenia ustawicznego oraz rozwiązania prawne i instytucjonalne funkcjonujące w Polsce, a dotyczące jakości kształcenia.

Słowa kluczowe:

Proces Boloński, jakość kształcenia, kształcenie ustawiczne, polskie szkolnictwo wyższe.