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Development of non-formal adult education in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

This paper deals with the development of adult education in the Czech Republic after 1989. In this regard it analyses the development of participation in adult education and its influencing factors. For this purpose the paper uses primary and secondary data from five research surveys. The paper shows that there has been a slight increase in the number of adult participants in education in the last 25 years but it also shows that there are still certain groups of people that are excluded from education. The paper also outlines the main phases of development in adult education in relation to government politics; namely the liberal politics of the 1990s and the partially-regulated politics after 2000.

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with the development of adult education in the Czech Republic (hereinafter CZ) in the last twenty-five years. We consider it important to deal with this phenomenon because without gaining insight into it, it is not possible to understand the current state of lifelong learning in CZ. It involves the transformation of the participants as well as of political and legislative framework changes that modify this phenomenon, which represents the basic macro-social characteristics of adult education.

The reason why we focus on the period after 1989 is because there is a transition from a communist to a democratic regime in CZ at this time. During this phase, adult education emerges from the state and political influence and becomes subject to economic competition and customer's choice. Therefore, the field of adult education also changes completely. Our aim is not only to describe this transformation, which happened mainly

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during the early 1990s, but also to outline the trends of adult education after 2000. Here we have to note that by adult education we mean mainly non-formal education (unless stated otherwise). By non-formal education we designate all organized education occurring outside the educational system (schools). This mostly involves various forms of leisure and vocational education (cf. e.g. Palán, 2002; European Commission, 2000, p. 8). We believe that by emphasising non-formal education we will be able to cover the main characteristics of that part of lifelong learning that are not under the direct patronage of the state, mainly leisure and vocational education, which is precisely the part of adult education that was most affected by the transformation of the communist regime and by the creation of an education market.

So far, there has been no comprehensive attempt at describing the development of adult education after 1989 in CZ in specialized literature. To date, the research has focused mainly on two basic issues. The first issue covers research surveys dealing with the number of participants in non-formal adult education (see e.g. Rabušicová & Rabušic, 2008; Kalenda, 2014a, 2014b). The second covers the studies dealing with government policy on adult education (see e.g. Veteška, 2009; Krystoň, 2013). However, we rarely see that: (1) researchers would focus on the development of adult education from a long-term perspective, i.e. the whole period after 1989, making individual researches atomized and lacking mutual interconnection as well as a wider socio-historical context; (2) the participation in adult education would be directly related to changes of government policy on adult education and to the changes in the level of state regulation.

In this study we will try to make up for the two main shortcomings of current research by focusing on the development of non-formal education since 1989 up to the present day and also by trying to outline the main relations between participation of adults in non-formal education and changes of government policy in this field. This is because we firmly believe that without a proper understanding of the socio-political background of adult education in a historical context, it is not possible to understand the contemporary aspect of this phenomenon. Both separated fields, i.e. research into participation of adults in education and research into the social framework in the form of educational policy, need to be connected again. This is also something that a number of adult education theorists already have been calling for (Green, 2002; Jarvis, 2005; Olesen, 2011; Tight, 1998, 2002). A similar trend can also be seen in some the empirical studies (Roberts, 1982; Rubenson, 2006, 2011; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

Of course, it is not possible to address all issues connected with the development of non-formal education in CZ in this short study. Therefore, we will limit our endeavour to outlining a socio-political framework which the data on adult participation in non-formal education can be related to. This will allow us to better explain the causes for an increase or decrease of adult participation in education, and for the inclusion of some social groups in education or the exclusion of others.

2. Theoretical foundations

There are two basic starting points for the conceptualization of a socio-political framework. The first is the concept by Andy Green which focuses on political models of adult education on the basis of the *scale of state regulation* and the second is Schutz and Casey's theory emphasising the goals of *educational policy*.[†] Green (2000, 2002) distinguishes between three "ideal types" (Weber, 1998) of adult education policy: (1) a state-led system, where the state steadily regulates the activities connected with lifelong learning on a long-term basis; (2) a market-led system, where the customer's demand for educational services is the leading principle; (3) a social partnership-led system, where the state and other participants of further education cooperate. Moreover, Schutz and Casey (2006: 282-283) advocate a four-model approach: (1) the emancipatory model (also sometimes called the social justice model), which stresses equal educational opportunities for all citizens; (2) the cultural model, focused on the individual needs of an adult; (3) the "open society" model, which is characterized by regarding lifelong learning as the most suitable system for educating citizens; (4) the human capital model, which focuses on the necessity for adult education as the best way to develop a qualified labour force.

[†] For a different take on these two concepts see (Kwon, Daeyon, 2011).

We are convinced that these two concepts do not oppose each other. They rather describe different dimensions of an educational policy and of professional, political and other discourses connected with educational policy because each of Green's models can include one or more of Schutz and Casey's models, even though co-occurrence of some is more probable than co-occurrence of others. Further (see Table 1 as well), we will use a theoretical framework composed of both concepts to better examine the changes in adult education policy in CZ.

Table 1 Ideal-typical models of adult education policy

Policy goals/ Method of regulation	Equal opportunities policy	Individual needs	Creation of a lifelong learning system	Human capital development
State-led	State-led system with an emphasis on equal opportunities	State-led system with an emphasis on individual needs	State-led system with an emphasis on the creation of a lifelong learning system	State-led with an emphasis on the development of human capital
Social partnership-led	Social partnership-led system with an emphasis on equal opportunities	Social partnership-led system with an emphasis on individual needs	Social partnership-led system with an emphasis on the creation of a lifelong learning system	Social partnership-led system with an emphasis on the development of human capital
Market-led	Market-led system with an emphasis on equal opportunities	Market-led system with an emphasis on individual needs	Market-led system with an emphasis on the creation of a lifelong learning system	Market-led system with an emphasis on the development of human capital

One thing to note is that our theoretical bases implicitly presume the existence of the field of adult education[‡] inside which all educational activities take place. The main actors involved in this field are educational companies/organizations/individuals offering educational services and customers/consumers demanding these services. But, as Pierre Bourdieu (1998, chap. no. 4) argues, this field does not exist on its own but always in relation to other social fields. In particular, it is the relation to the state and labour market which change their purely utilitarian logic by their demands and interventions. Inside this field it is possible to observe the strategies and tactics of individual participants – educational organizations, companies and also customers consisting of individuals or social groups – by which they attempt to improve their position in the field and to benefit more from it. Therefore, the role of the state is crucial in this case. The state enters the field of education by means of interventions, thereby creating advantages for certain market segments at the expense of others, and it also guarantees the existence of the educational field in its own right (Bourdieu, 1998, chap. no. 4). In the case of CZ, the main state bodies which guarantee and regulate the field of adult education are the following: the Government, the Research, Development and Innovation Council, the Ministry of Education, the Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. These organizations are responsible for carrying out most of the adult education policies, from defining their goals to establishing regulatory measures.

3. Methodology

In this study we combine two main areas of data. The first area consists of the results of the research focused on the participation of adults in education carried out by the author as well as of others surveys. The second area deals with an analysis of the sources containing information on government policy on adult education. More specifically, we mean the documents containing the direct goals of such policy and/or ways of directing the adult education system.

The data for the research on adult education in CZ were taken from the following sources: (1) the International Adult Literacy Survey research (IALS, 2000) carried out in CZ in the second half of the 1990s. It quite accurately depicts the situation of adult education in the first years after the transformation from a communist to a democratic

[‡] We use the term field in the same way as Pierre Bourdieu (1998).

regime; (2) the annual Eurostat research, taking place in CZ since 2002. Even though the data from this research is non-specific and combines various kinds of education (mainly formal and non-formal) into one category, they represent a main source of longitudinal data on the average participation in further education; (3) the Rabušic research from 2005 mapping the situation of adult education and covering the exclusion of the most prominent social groups (Rabušicová & Rabušic, 2008); (4) the research by Jan Kalenda (2014a, 2014b) from 2013, mapping the current situation and focusing on non-formal adult education.

Concerning the primary data on government politics and regulation of adult education, the sources used are mainly international treaties and agreements specifying the issue of adult education. In this regard, two treaties signed by CZ are essential. The first is the so-called Maastricht Treaty from 1993. The second is the Treaty of Lisbon from 2009. Both define, in different contexts, the need for adult education which should lead to the preparation of qualified workers and specialists. Strategic documents on adult education in CZ and the laws defining the field are further interconnected with international treaties. The following six documents specifically represent strategic documentation: Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (MCU, 2000), White Paper – National Programme for the Development of Education (BK, 2001), Human Resources Development Strategy (SRL, 2003), Lifelong Learning Strategy in the Czech Republic (SCU, 2007), Strategy Implementation Plan for Lifelong Learning (IPCU, 2008) and Guide to Further Education (PDV, 2010). Statutory regulations on adult education are mainly represented by: Education Act No. 435/2004 Coll., defining the requirements for application for the accreditation of educational programmes; Labour Code Act No. 262/2006 Coll., defining the rights and obligations of workers with regards to training in the workplace and professional studies; and last but not least Act No. 179/2006 Coll., defining the process of verification and recognition of results in further education and describing the issues of participants 'qualification, rights and obligations in further education..

4. First phase of transformation: 1989 – 2000

To understand the change that non-formal adult education underwent after 1989, it is important to name its main features before this date. Adult education in CZ was directly governed by state bodies from 1951 to 1989. A special committee of the Ministry of Education and Culture was authorised to coordinate and be responsible for its activities and development according to the Act No. 123/1963 Coll. State led adult education took place on several levels: (1) the level of formal education, functioning as a means to adopt certain working qualifications according to the requirements of the developing socialist economy; (2) the level of non-formal corporate education, regulated by two crucial Acts – Act No. 264/1966 Coll., emphasizing that corporate education should primarily serve as complementation and extension of work qualifications, and Act No. 42/1972 Coll., regulating cyclic executive education in all types of leading positions. Executives were then educated in the field of political culture in order to be able to subsequently spread it to their subordinates; (3) the level of non-formal leisure education, which would lead to self-fulfilment of individuals in accordance with the principles of the communist regime.

This overview shows that the state had direct control over the entire field of adult education. Its goals, content and forms then corresponded to the government's interests. The state dictated what part of non-formal education should deal with the development of human capital and what part should be concerned with "self-fulfilment" and relaxation.

The Velvet Revolution of November 1989 did not only end the communist reign in CZ, but it also started a whole new era in the development of adult education. The state policy towards further education fundamentally changed. The whole field had to be de-idealized and democratized, which meant that other participants beside the state were allowed to enter the field of adult education. And, at the same time, all references to ideologically-contaminated adult education needed to disappear. This is the reason why, for example, higher education study programmes called "education and upbringing of adults" were renamed to andragogy and any 'upbringing' elements were pushed to the background.

The emphasis on making non-formal education democratic led to the point where the state gave up all attempts to regulate this part of the social field generating the fast creation of a non-regulated education market with its main participants in CZ. On the one hand, private education companies and agencies were established offering various forms of educational workshops focused primarily on leisure education. On the other hand, individuals started to look for ways to satisfy their educational needs, mainly connected with vocational training.

So the state had completely withdrawn from the field of adult education, except the field of retraining programmes. This is even supported by the fact that, except for the Maastricht Treaty, there was no legislation in CZ

establishing the rules or conditions for running non-formal education activities in CZ. The first strategic documents in this area are from 2001, twelve years after the fall of the communist regime. That is why the only market regulator in the field of adult education became the “free hand of the market”, which led to the expansion of educational organizations with various levels of quality and range of services.

The changes in non-formal education occurred even in companies which started to create their own models and concepts of corporate education. However, due to the intense transformation of these companies, (Mlčoch, Machonin & Sojka, 2000) this dimension of corporate management was not emphasised much. If there was any corporate education, then it was focused on coping with the effects of company transformations, be it an already existing company or just in an emerging one.

Goals and reasons of adult education also underwent some changes. If we take the only binding document for the government from this era, the Maastricht Treaty, we discover that adult education had become a synonym for the preparation and extension of a qualified workforce. Then, if we examine the state education policy as a whole, we find that it transformed from a *state-led system* which emphasised mainly *the development of human capital* to a *market-led system* which, while still emphasising *the development of human capital*, also started to focus on *satisfying the needs of individual customers*.

All these changes were naturally reflected in the structure of participants in non-formal education in CZ. The IALS research (2000; cf. Desjardins et al., 2006; Desjardins, 2011) which was carried out in CZ in 1997 shows that the overall participation in any form of non-formal education of adults between 18 and 65 years was 26.4%. Where 19.8% of respondents stated that their educational activity was focused on work, i.e. aimed at the development of vocational knowledge and skills, and only 8% of adults maintained that they participated in education for reasons other than work. On average, adults spent 23.4 hours annually on educational activities focused on their work. Leisure education showed a much higher number – 83.2 hours annually. Therefore, it is possible to observe that only one quarter of the Czech adult population had some experience with non-formal education, of which 47% were graduates of higher education working as highly qualified personnel in the services (45%). On the other hand, elderly people (55 years and more) showed a much lower participation rate (8.8%) which is also true for pensioners (5%), unqualified manual workers (18.7%) and people with only primary education (17.7%). In the case of these social groups, around 85-95% of members did not participate in any kind of non-formal education.

5. Second phase of transformation: 2001 – 2013

In the late 1990s new problems began to emerge which adult education in CZ needed to face. First, unemployment appeared shortly after the switch of regimes as a consequence of the socio-economic changes – the transformation from a socialist to a market economy. The number of unemployed increased from 2.1% to 10.5% between 1990 and 2004 (ČSÚ, 2013). This led to the creation of a new educational policy agenda which was connected to an increase of employability of graduates on all levels as well as to an active employment policy and development of human capital. That was the reason why the state started to take adult education as one of the means to fight unemployment. Second, foreign capital appeared in CZ. More and more companies started to set up their branches in CZ or began buying shares in Czech companies. While in the middle of the 1990s only 5% of Czech companies had a foreign owner, ten years later about 30% of companies were already in foreign ownership (ČSÚ, 2013). This change led to a higher integration of CZ into the global structure of the capitalist economy (Holubec, 209, pp. 130-133) which in turn produced higher demands on competitiveness and the need for a qualified workforce.

In the face of all these changes, the state put an end to its *laissez faire* approach to adult education and once again started to affect the field of adult education by its policy and regulations. In other words, the state began to introduce new legislation which defined the rights and obligations of participants in the field of adult education. It also started to produce strategic documents which conceptualized the issue of adult education in a new way, by setting new goals, target groups and development tendencies for adult education.

The first socio-political measures that the state introduced were the “opening up” of higher education to a larger number of students. In this regard, CZ used the Bologna Process which sought to standardize higher education and make it universal (Pabián, 2008; Prudký, Pabián & Šíma, 2010). This process was important because it significantly

expanded adult participation in formal education and did not lead to any substantial increase of participants in non-formal education.[§] Therefore the number of students in higher education in CZ increased from 190,000 in 1999 to 381,000 in 2012. What is even more important is the fact that the number of students in distant education increased from 42,000 to 102,000 (RVVI, 2014). As a result, formal rather than non-formal education became the main domain of further education in CZ because it offered state guaranteed qualifications with the highest value.

The second domain of state policy was legislative activity through which the state started to partially regulate the field of adult education. Passing the Act No. 435/2004 Coll. can be considered the first action of its kind. It gave the state the power to approve accreditation even of those educational programmes which were not in the field of higher education. Thanks to this step, state bodies could determine which educational programmes would receive state sanctification and which would not. Two years later, Act No. 179/2006 Coll. was passed, introducing new processes of verification and recognition of the results in non-formal education which in addition led to the regulation of companies offering non-accredited educational workshops. This Act also practically applied the concept of a national qualification system. By means of this system, all types of working activity and their necessary skill sets would be determined resulting in the state starting to control indirectly even the existing possibilities for vocational education. The last legislative activity in the field of education in this period was Act No. 179/2006 Coll. which specified the rights and obligations of workers covering educational activities in the workplace. As a consequence, the field of corporate education was formalized and regulated.

The third domain of state policy is represented by the state's attempts to set new goals and plans for the development of adult education which had an impact on non-formal education. In this regard the state first passed the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (MCU, 2000), followed by a number of documents dealing with the issue (BK, 2001; SRL, 2003; SCU, 2007; IPCU, 2008; PDV, 2010). The documents show the gradual transition from a general definition of adult education as an important dimension for state intervention to support the concept of lifelong learning, which should become the main process of organized education. Last but not least, two recent documents – Strategy Implementation Plan for Lifelong Learning (IPCU, 2008) and Guide to Further Education (PDV, 2010) already fully emphasise the concept of further education. The reason why it should be the focus of state policy is because it represents the most suitable framework for improving the competitiveness of CZ. All the documents also define the target groups of non-formal education. The early documents emphasize the diversity of educational needs while the later ones highlight the financial resources which have become an obstacle for the development of further education – the higher participation of individuals. The documents emphasize that if this barrier was to be removed then non-formal education would become more inclusive.

Financial barriers are the reason why the state started to regulate the field of adult education not only directly but also indirectly through financial incentives from European Structural Funds. The Human Resources and Employment Operational Programme and The Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme were created for this purpose in 2004. Through these funds the resources were distributed to subjects in the education market by means of project competitions amounting to 65 billion Czech crowns between 2004 and 2013.** Because of these activities market mechanisms were disrupted. Demand in the education market was affected by customers looking only for those educational activities which were in some way supported by European Structural Funds since they were much more convenient. Educational companies and subjects also reacted to this fact by attempting to gain resources from the funds to become more competitive in the changing market. Thus, the education market then became more dependent on financial resources distributed by the state.

If we are to sum up the changes of state policy on adult education after 2000, it is important to note that the state started to regulate the field of adult education more directly by means of legislative actions and indirectly by economic incentives or by supporting formal adult education. The state also tried to define more in detail and to systematize the field of non-formal education by structuring it. Therefore, the state policy in this era could be described as a *social partnership-led system* where the state partially regulated the field of adult education and where *equal opportunities, creating a lifelong learning system and development of human capital* were emphasized in various contexts. The goals of state policy had differentiated and shifted from the issue of satisfying the market

[§] This is supported by a quite low participation of adults between 18 to 35 years in non-formal education (Kalenda, 2014a, 2014b).

** The amount is a sum from accessible markers on European Social Funds in CZ website relevant to The Human Resources and Employment Operational Programme and The Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme (ESF, 2014).

needs of individuals to the interests of the state and national economy.

When dealing with non-formal education in CZ after 2000 we can see a slight increase in the amount of participants. The number of participating adults had grown from around 25% in 1997 to 34% in 2005, out of which 6% participated in educational activities regularly (at least 3 times in the past year), 10% participated occasionally (twice in the last year) and 18% participated only rarely (no more than once in the past year). Thus, two thirds of adults did not participate in any form of non-formal education. The structure of the main participants did not change at all. The highest participation rate can be seen among persons with higher education (68% participate in some form of education) and among highly qualified personnel (77%). On the other hand, the elderly over 60 are largely excluded from further education (only 12% of them participate in education) as well as non-qualified manual workers (27% participants) and people with only primary education (12% participants). The differences in the participation rate between men and women had stabilised in comparison with the previous period. While in the 1990s men were the predominant group of participants, in the new decade women already showed the same participation rate as men (Rabušicová & Rabušic, 2008).

And this situation didn't change in the next eight years because, according to data from 2013, the adult participation rate in non-formal education was approximately 33%. But certain changes occurred in the frequency of participation in educational activities. 9.5% of adults started to participate regularly, 10.5% occasionally and 13% rarely. So the number of regular participants in non-formal education had increased. The pattern of participants and excluded groups had stayed the same. The highest participation rate in non-formal education was achieved by people with higher education working as highly qualified personnel (73%) or as senior managers (83%). The research from 2013 also showed an intense educational activity among "middle-sized" and "large" entrepreneurs. Up to 60% of them participated in education regularly. On the other hand, the elderly over 60 years of age, pensioners, manual workers and people with only primary education remained excluded. In their case, most members of these groups (85-95%) do not participate in education (Kalenda, 2014a, 2014b).

6. Conclusion

The answer to the question whether there is a close connection between adult participation in non-formal education and state policy in this field is, without a doubt, positive. In last twenty-five years, adult education policy has always reacted to socio-economic challenges. First, it was the collapse of the communist regime and then the involvement in a competitive global economy. This led the state to primarily withdraw from the field of adult education, leaving it to market regulation, and then, after about twelve years, it started once more to intensively regulate this field. But this regulation was based on different strategies than during the communist regime. Strategies of direct legislation and conceptual provisions as well as indirect regulations – economic incentives and support of formal education were implemented. When compared to formal education, the number of participants in non-formal education increased only slightly due to the above-mentioned state regulations. What is even more important, the profile of participants in educational activities has not changed despite the intensive state policy implemented during the last ten years. Therefore, many social groups are still excluded from participation in non-formal education.

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