



DOI 10.1515/ptse-2017-0006

PTSE 12 (2): 51-59

Socially Disadvantaged Social Groups and Adult Education: Chance for Integration?

Orsolya NYILAS

nyilaso@nyf.hu

(University of Nyíregyháza, Nyíregyháza, Hungary)

Mihály FÓNAI

fonai.mihaly@law.unideb.hu

(University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary)

Received: 04.07.2017; Accepted: 29.08.2017

Abstracts: *Nowadays, whether we discuss either adult education or continuing training we possess comprehensive knowledge of the input side of the trainings. We have detailed data of the accredited institutions, instructors, the structure, content and operational indicators of the trainings, still we know less of the drop-outs, absentees and the reasons for the low participation rate in adult education. We have minimal information even when we analyse the existing data concerning the outcome of the successfully finished adult educational programs.*

Keywords: adult education, integration, inclusion, people with disadvantages, socially disadvantaged groups

Introduction

We only get acquainted with the number of degree receiving people from the labour market impact assessments (Galasi & Nagy, 2012; Csoba & Nagy, 2011). We know little about whether something changed in the life path of the adult thanks to the training, or whether they managed to find a job or not. Furthermore the question arises which forms of adult education are the most successful, considering what age group, and what training program proves to be the most efficient.

A great number of factors are needed in order for adult education to fulfil its purpose in socially disadvantaged groups. We did our research among low-skilled individuals. In relation to getting into adult education we examined who are the ones that participate in the trainings, what socio-cultural background they have, their academic achievements, competencies, the educational path of their parents and their children. Our empirical study

focuses on the individual, searching for their external and internal motivations for participating in the trainings. We also analysed the characteristics of the involvement in the training, the advantages of the qualifications received in the training from the point of view of the participants. The area of the study is the Northern Great Plain region, which is the second most disadvantaged region in Hungary concerning the human development index.

Socially disadvantaged situation and adult education as an active labour market tool

In the labour market of the Northern Great Plain region the employment and unemployment indicators are much worse than in the rest of the country, and within the region there are numerous territorial and municipal differences. First of all in order for the catching up there is a need for a faster pace of regional development, especially in case of employment creation. The durable competitiveness may contribute to the regional economic growth; one field of competitiveness is the qualification of the workforce. Economic growth may cause the rising of living standards (Baranyi, 2013; Lengyel, 2012). *Judit Kerülő* (2000) highlights from the circumstances resulting in disadvantage the drawbacks of low qualifications, regional and labour market inequalities. The social effect of the so-called East-West slope- that is the existing differences between the country's eastern and western part on the fields of income, economic and development- is widely known (Kerülő, 2000). The Northern Great Plain region's unemployment rate exceeds the national average, and it is only somewhat more favourable than Northern Hungarian values. The indicators of these two regions are not only worse compared to the national average, but to the other regions as well (Baranyi, 2013; Központi..., 2013). The role of educational aimed activities for the disadvantaged is becoming more and more important. It is evident that in social advancement education and qualification are determining factors. However, the members of society are not equally able to get these opportunities. Certain social groups are naturally capable of receiving the necessary knowledge continuously; they can keep up with development, while other social groups need assistance to manage this. This difference separates people, and may lead to social differences disintegrating society. This undesirable stratification can be reduced with the extending of education and training (Farkas, 2013).

Table 1. Strategical objectives of the EUROPE 2020 and national commitments by 2020 (%)

	European Union's objectives by 2020	Hungarian reality in 2012	National commitments by 2020
Employment (with respect to 20-64 age group)	75%	63,1%	75,0%
Higher education (with respect to 30-34 age group)	40%	28,1%	30,3%
Early school leaving (with respect to 18-24 age group)	10%	11,2%	10,0%
Poverty (with respect to total population)	25% decrease	28,3%	23,5%

Source: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2011

The labour market position is highly influenced by educational attainment. Education and training, as the most important tools for creating social welfare in the knowledge based society, received a major role in the Lisbon Strategy, and appears in the next decade's strategic aim in the Europe 2020 (EUROSTAT, 2013). Amongst their plans is to reduce the ratio of premature school leaving to 10 percent, and to increase the ratio of people aged 30-34 having higher education or equivalent qualification to at least 40 percent (Figure 1. Központi..., 2011). In Hungary, for a long time the resources were missing for adult education to become common, but the motivation for learning as well, such as the opportunity to find a job, the chances of maintaining a job and the quality of wages (Csoba, 2010). Adult education is not able to adapt enough for the current training needs. This means that the ones most in need do not get into the training system to a sufficient degree, and that the offered trainings do not adapt flexibly enough to the changes of demand. Mostly those do not participate in adult education in Hungary, who would need their skill levels increased or their missing abilities complemented the most. The low level of education is not a disadvantage because of the "small" amount of knowledge acquired, but it can be detected in the lack of essential attitudes for further knowledge and communication skills that establish development. Nowadays it is not enough for occupying a position to have the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience. A need has arisen for a workforce capable of renewing, adapting quickly, and one that can be continuously retained and improved. They look for workers who are not only acquainted with the knowledge necessary for their field of work, but such attributes needed for efficient working, such as: good communication and problem-solving skills, convincing reasoning, quick grasp of a situation, ability to compromise, flexibility, mobility, strength, stress endurance, openness and creativity (Farkas, 2013).

Framework and methodology of the research

The Employment Centre of the Northern Great Plain Region announced a new public work programme in January 2010 (works for public spaces, street sweeping, park maintenance, snow shovelling). It was a condition for the applicants to participate in “View of life altering” training. The training took 80 hours. It was planned for 100 people and it was realized with 86 people, from which in January of 2010 40 people participated voluntarily in our interview-based survey - 32 men and 8 women. Except for one person all participants let us re-visit them in hope for a follow-up study. The result of this plan is the interview we made among 14 people who we managed to reach personally in the fall of 2015, and what we describe in this study. The organizers sought to compile a curriculum, which ensures the acquisition of elementary knowledge, skills and social competences, which are essential for reintegration into the labour market. Thus, the curriculum includes “Human services helping accommodation”; “Capability developmental, Self-awareness and motivational training”; “Employers relations in practice”; “Communication skills”; “Basic hygiene habits”; “Mental health education”; “Environmentally conscious lifestyle training”; “Ethical knowledge”. The teachers were entered to the program via invitation. The trainings were held by the members of the staff of College of Nyíregyháza, The Zay Anna Medical Vocational school and the Government Office for Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. They mainly used training methods or common frontal method - keeping in mind the efficient acquisition of the subject - but neither of them had prior andragogical studies or knowledge.

The aim of our research on the one hand was to learn about and analyse the andragogic aspects of trainings in connection with public work programs. On the other hand our aim was to see that after four years what the participants were able to do with the knowledge acquired in the training, how prepared the program made them, was re-employment successful, were they able to permanently take place in the labour market. The narrative interview consisted of two parts: the first considered the person’s previous educational life path- what level of education they have, what successes and failures they had in school, what positive and negative school experience they have, which subject they liked/disliked and why, and we were also curious in their parents’, siblings’, children’s level of education. In the second part we asked questions about the current training - how they got to the training, were they able to participate constantly in the classes, what causes hardships, which teaching method is the most/least favourable for them, do they receive regular feedback on classes about the success of their progress, or their deficiency of knowledge. In addition we asked the participants about their opinion of the contents of the training regarding the curriculum, we asked questions about the teachers, and we were also interested in the experiences about the organization, because the opinion of people with low level of education about adult training is extremely important. For the ones, who never participated in adult training before, the experience gained now crucially determines their attitude towards learning (Kerülő & Nyilas, 2014). The purpose of direct observation of the participants in classes was for us to be able to analyse the training’s operation from the point of view of andragogy (organizing, methods, teaching and learning, the effectiveness of the students’ learning strategies).

The results of the study

The strongest social correlation set out by the sociology of education is: the low level of education of the parents, and in relation with it their low social status has the most powerful effect on the child's low level of education. The parents of the children with low level of education are in a higher proportion than usual have low levels of education as well (Kerüló, 2013). To the mass which is forced out of the labour market we can classify mainly the groups with low levels of education, such as the people without a completed primary education, ones attending special schools, those who do not continue secondary education or drop out, and youngsters who participate in vocational training inadequate for the labour market needs (Farkas, 2013). Our research shows that among adults the initial resistance disappeared over time, and they went on with the training with growing enthusiasm, they developed kind of an inner motivation towards learning. Almost all interviewees stated that their children must finish school "properly", acquire a vocation or even a degree. For several respondents we found out that they blame their own parents for not having paid enough attention to their school performance:

"My father finished four years in school, my mother finished two. They did not care about me or my siblings- from the six siblings one is a professional driver, the others make a living from seasonal work. I learned from the bad example of my parents: all three of my elementary school children must go to school properly, so they will not have the same faith as their parents" (István, 36). "I still think so!" - says István after four years. "They are not outstanding students, but they already know more than I do. I would like them to learn a good profession. My big boy would like to be car mechanic, my daughter a hairdresser. In the meantime my wife finished elementary school; she would like to work at a dressmaker's. But they pay a very small amount of money. I make a living from occasional work right now, and only public work remains for me. There is no other prospect."

"I always expected my kids to finish what they started. I am ashamed, that I am going to be a road-sweeper, I am afraid that my acquaintances will recognize me. I really liked bricklaying works, and they told me if I finish this I will have a better chance to find another job" (Géza 43). Since then, Géza was unable to find work as a bricklayer. Although he did not face any uncomfortable moments as a road-sweeper, he does not like park maintenance work. "...but there is nothing else. In summer I mow the grass, in winter I sweep streets."

The teaching process for disadvantaged adults needs to be more complex, must include such complementary elements, which a regular training does not require. Without these the training cannot be successful, and it cannot comply with requirements of effectiveness (ability to find a job):

"My parents made a living making wooden troughs; they received wood from the forestry- with wood that had a mark on it they could do whatever they wanted. We made a good living out of it, but we had to work hard as well, even at night, we brought them to markets. Due to the commute I fell behind at school, I only learned how to read or write as an adult from my husband. I would like to go to night school, and finish elementary school." Flóra (53)"... I went as I promised, but it was very hard! -tells Flóra four years

later. *Arithmetic was especially difficult. I cannot have a baby, so it is very good that I can work at a school kitchen as a kitchen assistant. This does not pay much either, but it is enough for me. Some food is always left over, which I can take home, it is enough for the two of us. We must be in good health, and we will solve the rest somehow, because medicines are very expensive... I remember quite well the speaking subject (=communication), even though I thought it was silly back then. It is difficult for me to open up, and now at the kitchen I often think about what we did back then as tasks, those actually taught us about life.*"

In the case of most student's constructive feedback is the most helpful in strengthening learning motivation. It is important for people with learning disabilities that we pay attention to the shaping of their learning motives directly, making them the basis of their targeted learning. In order to enhance motives we should try to make learning an interesting and pleasant activity, in which they can feel good. Experiencing this pleasant feeling, this joy encourages them to learn, strengthens their motives, especially if learning happens for the sake of joy, with the vigorous activation of spontaneous attention (Kerülő, 2013). A student - be they a child or an adult - can learn not only to satisfy their desire for knowledge, but also to be acknowledged by others, especially by their teachers and environment. In case of most interviews the reason was the recognition of the family, and to be an example for their children. In particular those interviewees thought this, who participated in more trainings as adults:

"There is no such thing as unnecessary learning. A dumb Romany needs everything, and we are majority. I wanted to be a doctor as a child, but dancing took away too much time. I did not study enough. I won a national championship in modern dance, but I had to move back from Budapest, even though I liked living there. Now I do not know what I am supposed to do, this is why I am here. Instead of road-sweeping, it might be better to learn again, so that one day I could teach dancing." Ramóna (21). Ramóna was 21 years old at the time, now after four years she still does not teach dancing: *"I went to all kinds of local talent contests, performed at a couple of village festivals, hoping that someone would discover me, but that never happened. You are good, they said, but nobody started supporting me. I already gave up. I had one or two occasional jobs so far - selling in the market - and public work."* *"I went to music school, I had 14 siblings. My father studied music, and he was a recognized violinist, he was known in the Netherlands and Canada as well, then he got sick, and at home he only played at the Márka [a well-known pub in Nyíregyháza in the 1960-80s - the translator], but we lived quite well this way too. Some of the grandchildren also plan to learn music. I have five children, their section is English language, and we are members of the Faith Church, and they also say that rigor is important. Sadly, my children are not interested in the old gypsy musician profession. But they could take the example of their grandfather. At this training I was interested in the subject of self-awareness, structure is important in our lives, and Romany have to learn this as well. The film screening was also very good; I was emotionally touched by the little boy's story. I participated in more trainings before, so instead of what I have already learned, I would have preferred something else, but I am happy that it was useful for the others."* Béla (46). Béla is still a member of the public work system. *"...nothing has changed. Regardless of five years passing. I still have to do park maintenance, even though once I worked at a school building reconstruction. This is a kind of compulsion, because there are no other job options. It is a*

shame, how low wages we get are, while doing the same work as if we were proper employees. We are vulnerable. I know of several people who became derelict because of this. They cannot even pay overhead expenses, not to mention make a living by it."

It is important for highly disadvantaged learners to get feedback of their work consistently and in varied ways. They should face encouragement and positive impulses:

"Now this learning is a good experience for me. In those days I went to night school, because this would have been too much. I liked hygiene the best, though many people rebelled because they thought it was dumb. But it is very important, and I recounted everything I learned at home. I would even pay to get education, which helps me get a better job." Zsolt (28). "Sadly right now I cannot pay to learn a profession, we barely make ends meet- he says four years later, - nothing has changed. This public work is like benefits, I cannot move forward. "

According to András (36) *"... I liked the lecture the most in the training; I loved to listen to the teacher. I used to tell the others to be silent; I did not like it, when they spoke when the teacher was speaking. At home I rewrote the material to another booklet; this is how I learnt it again. He was one of the counterexamples regarding hygiene studies: "... only the hygiene class was unnecessary, but my children showed me on the internet that it is indeed important."* András (36).

In our experiences the evaluation given to students has a strong part in the formation of learning patterns. Not to mention the importance of using training systems which have flexible elements for individually differentiated progress regarding training the disadvantaged. Only this method can result in a reduction of social differences already during the training:

"I am a late bloomer. Although I did not have a favourite subject in this training, but the attitude of the teachers was very good, everybody should be like that. I may be simple-minded, but they do not make me feel like that. It feels good to be praised." Éva (24). "We actually had a lot of good teachers. The best part was that they treated us as humans; they did not make us feel that we were undereducated. I continued to be a public worker, I participated in a number of trainings, for which they paid as if I were working. I would not have the money to learn any other way, even today. It would be great to be a hairdresser, or to do a job that's clean. But I can only do park maintenance, cleaning and kitchen work. There is nothing else. We heard numerous times that we have to show examples for our children, but how, if there is not any other job?"

Another barrier in the learning of disadvantaged adults is anxiety. As the biggest enemy of adults learning anxiety can and must be reduced (Kerülő, 2013). If we consider the students' mistakes as a natural part of the learning process, then anxiety and the fear from failure reduces:

"Nobody told me in the centre already on the first day we are going to have to sit there and learn. I almost went home." - Recalls her first day one of my interviewees- "luckily the teacher was smart enough not to ask us a too many questions, rather, it was us who were talking, everybody could share their ideas. A few days later I was less scared, and I think everybody else too."

Magda (38). Three years later her opinion did not change, and she participated in a different training: *"the other training was bearable, we had to write more*

tests there, and as my writing skills are not too good, I was afraid that there was going to be trouble, but they did not mention it.”

This sentence proves that any emerging learning difficulties must be analysed, because continuous failure creates aversion in the learner, towards either learning in general, or the intellectual abilities in connection with the subject are blocked, adding further barriers to the already difficult learning career. A lack of self-confidence is usually associated with strong anxiety, low level of performance motivation and traces of learned helplessness (Farkas, 2013; Kerülő & Nyilas, 2014). As we could see from the answers given, in a vast number of participants the sensation of failure is too strong, anxiety becomes permanent, which reduces not only school performance. It is important to individually adjust the type and the difficulty of tasks, and to give positive evaluation instead of negative judgement. This type of evaluation can help the creation of need levels, the so called life program. There are always participants who want to stand out. In fortunate cases they want to stand out with their learning performance. Sadly in some cases this may result in anti-school sentiment, when success is not learning, but is a result of cheating and circumventing others.

Summary

Among tools for reducing the effects of the disadvantaged situation, training is still one of the most important factors, which is suitable not only for acquiring knowledge, but to improve workers' attitudes towards integration into society, which several of our interviewees confirmed. The feasibility of the expectations, experiencing success or failure, the possibility to arouse curiosity, the level of anxiety, the teachers' praise or criticism all play an important role in the performance of the student. The enrichment and development of the personality is not negligible from the point of view of the individuals, for them to achieve a smooth integration to society, even if this training is realized as an obligatory training of the public work program.

It can be observed, that the respondents' opinion is divided in the question whether they consider participation in the public work program as an opportunity or as a constraint.

One third of the respondents consider it as a constraint, another one third as an opportunity. The majority of the respondents consider public work as a temporary solution, not as a tool to a long-term solution of unemployment, even if they think most of the trainings in connection with it are useful.

The training analysed above found its potential target audience. In this case the one-sidedness of the motivation - *“it is part of the public work system and they even pay for it”* - attitude causes the bitter aftertaste. How much nicer it would be to say that the individuals participate in a program of their own accord, for their own sake.

References

- Baranyi B. (2013). *Integrált területfejlesztés*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem AGTC.
- Csoba J. (2010). *A tisztességes munka, A teljes foglalkoztatás: a 21. század esélye vagy utópiája?* Budapest: L'Hartman.
- Csoba J., & Nagy Z. É. (2011). A magyarországi képzési, bértámogatási és közfoglalkoztatási programok hatásvizsgálata. In Fazekas K., & Kézdi G. (Eds.), *Munkaerőpiaci tükör* (pp. 113-145). Budapest: MTA Közgazdaságtudományi Intézet; Országos Foglalkoztatási Közalapítvány.
- Farkas É. (2013). *A láthatatlan szakma. Tények és tendenciák a felnőttképzés 25 évéről*. Pécs: typiART Médiaműhely.
- Galasi P., & Nagy Gy. (2012). Aktív munkaerő-piaci eszközök. In Fazekas K., & Scharle Á. (Eds.), *Nyugdíj, segély, közmunka: A magyar foglalkoztatáspolitikát két évtizede, 1990-2010* (pp. 182-193). Budapest: Budapest Szakpolitikai Elemző Intézet; MTA KRTK Közgazdaság-tudományi Intézet.
- Kerülő J. (2000). Hátrányos helyzetű csoportok és a felnőttoktatás. Esély 2000 – konferencia. Retrieved from <http://ofi.hu/tudastar/esely-2000-konferencia/hatranynos-helyzetu> [10.03.2017].
- Kerülő J. (2013). A felnőttkori tanulás kudarcainak lehetséges okai. *Szakképzési Szemle*, 29 (3), 43-58.
- Kerülő J., & Nyilas O. (2014). A közfoglalkoztatásban résztvevők képzésének andragógiai konzekvenciái. In Tóth Z. (Ed.), *Új kutatások a neveléstudományokban, 2014: Oktatás és nevelés – Gyakorlat és tudomány* (pp. 182-197). Budapest: MTA Pedagógiai Tudományos Bizottság.
- Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (2011). *Észak-Alföld az Európai Unió régiói között, 2011*. Budapest: KSH. Retrieved from <http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/regiok/debreceneuregio.pdf> [10.03.2017].
- Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (2013). *2011. évi népszámlálás 3. Országos adatok*. Budapest: KSH. Retrieved from http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/nepsz2011/nepsz_03_00_2011.pdf [10.03.2017].
- Lengyel I. (2012). Regionális növekedés, fejlődés, területi tőke és versenyképesség. In Bajmócy Z., Lengyel I., & Málovics Gy. (Eds.), *Regionális innovációs képesség, versenyképesség és fenntarthatóság* (pp. 151-174). Szeged: JATEPress.
- EUROSTAT (2013). *EUROPE 2020 target: Tertiary education attainment*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/28_tertiary_education.pdf [14.05.2013].