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**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IDEA OF LIFELONG  
LEARNING IN NGOS ON THE POLISH-CZECH-GERMAN  
BORDERLAND**

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**Keywords:** lifelong learning, Polish-Czech-German borderland, NGOs.

The article addresses the issue of lifelong learning implemented by associations and foundations working in the spheres of education and culture on the Polish-Czech-German borderland and involving representatives of at least two of these neighbouring nations. The analysis involved eight such organizations. The authors indicated various theoretical conceptualizations of the idea of lifelong learning. The presented conceptualizations range from those linked to the performed profession, or the profession to which one should switch, to the latest conceptualizations, i.e., those in which lifelong learning encompasses various forms of education implemented throughout the individual's life, from childhood to the retirement. The analysis of the gathered

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materials concentrated on pointing to those activity forms that comply with the definition criteria of lifelong learning and provide the unofficial civic education that shapes civic attitudes related to the idea of unified Europe and the specificity of NGOs on the borderland. The latter consists in building better relations between neighbours, formulating and proliferating the 'put straight' version of history, particularly after WWII.

#### REALIZACJA IDEI LIFELONG LEARNING NA POGRANICZU POLSKO-CZESKO-NIEMIECKIM W ORGANIZACJACH POZARZĄDOWYCH (NGO)

**Słowa kluczowe:** Całozyciowe uczenie się, pogranicze polsko-czesko-niemieckie, organizacje NGO.

W artykule podjęta została problematyka całozyciowego uczenia się (Lifelong learning), realizowana w stowarzyszeniach i fundacjach działających na pograniczu polsko-czesko-niemieckim, działających w obszarze edukacji i kultury, angażujących przedstawicieli przynajmniej dwóch sąsiadujących z sobą narodów. Do analizy zakwalifikowano osiem organizacji. Autorki wskazały na różne teoretyczne ujęcia idei LLL, od takich które powiązane były z wykonywanym zawodem lub takim, na który dotychczasowy należało zmienić, do ujęć najnowszych, w których LLL obejmuje różnorodne formy edukacji, realizowane przez całe życie jednostki, od dzieciństwa po czas emerytury. Analiza zebranego materiału koncentrowała się na wskazaniu form działalności, spełniających definicyjne kryteria LLL, realizacji nieoficjalnej edukacji obywatelskiej, polegającej głównie na kształtowaniu postaw obywatelskich powiązanych z ideą zjednoczonej Europy oraz specyfiki organizacji pozarządowych na pograniczu. Ta ostatnia polega na budowaniu lepszych relacji między sąsiadami, formułowaniu i upowszechnianiu „odkłamanej” wersji historii (zwłaszcza od okresu II wojny światowej).

#### **The Idea of Lifelong Learning (LLL) and knowledge societies**

The idea of learning through the whole life, also known as lifelong learning or permanent education (Machlup 1962), was created between the 1930s and the 1960s. At first, it was treated as an opportunity to return to the formal educational path, after leaving it, in order to obtain certain competencies considered to be necessary on the labour market. This understanding of lifelong education was compatible with the model of societies

(mainly from highly developed countries) in which the classical pattern of life course prevailed: preparation for life, the phase of life activity, and the period of retirement (Kohli 1985), also known as: school – work – retirement (Hajduk 1996). The economist Fritz Machlup (1902-1983) was the first to write about knowledge acquired during education as the economic resource of societies, and was the first to study it by adopting such a definition. It was his writing that inspired thinking about the knowledge-based economy (Drucker 1999). He also inspired thinking about the 20th-century society as the information society, network society (Castels 2008a, 2008b), and knowledge society (Antonowicz 2004; Neave 1994; Witek 2006). Witek wrote that the term 'knowledge society' is a relatively new concept, but as a phenomenon, it has existed since ancient times thanks to such figures as Socrates and his student Plato (2006, p. 95).

To this day, modern societies are referred to as information societies or knowledge society/societies<sup>1</sup>. Thus, both ideas have a fairly long history. Their implementation has varied in different European countries, depending on their economic, social and cultural development. The pre-war Poland definitely differed in the level of development from rich countries such as Germany, Austria, France, Belgium and England<sup>2</sup>. The 1920s and 1930s were decades of modernism, with faith in progress and reason. The Second World War strongly shook this faith. However, after World War II, the idea of lifelong learning was implemented in many European countries. Youth, whose education was deferred during the war, went back to 'normal' schools. Adults of all ages could complete their education. The institutions that implemented this form of education were secondary schools and folk universities. They prepared, among others, for work in communal and municipal community centers (Ank 2017). Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway) have a rich tradition of running folk universities (Evenrud 2018).

From a European perspective, some of the LLL contexts may seem archaic today, e.g., the elimination of illiteracy<sup>3</sup>, education of rural residents to achieve the basic level of knowledge. Currently, more 'modern' reference systems focus on post-graduate studies (Lendzion 2015, pp. 107-120), innovative projects implemented either in companies, associations or schools

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<sup>1</sup>The context and subject of particular studies determine the use of the singular form 'society' or plural 'societies'.

<sup>2</sup>Much of this wealth came from the possession of colonies.

<sup>3</sup>countries such as Poland, with culturally uniform literacy, not reading skills, but verbal reasoning is an issue (see I. Białecki Functional Alphabet, "Res Publica Nowa", 1996, No. 6, pp. 68-76; Z. Kwieciński, Wykluczanie, Toruń 2002; U. Dmochowska Fighting reviving illiteracy – the task and challenge of adult education, "Discourses of Young Anragogues", No. 14, 2013, pp. 47-59).

and universities (Baran, Kłos, Strojny 2015), the labour market or self-creation (Michlak-Dawidziuk 2014). In recent years, LLL has been located in the context of the activity of older people, after the period of professional activity, in such institutions as U3As – Universities of the Third Age (Sobolewska-Poniedziałek, Zarębska 2015).

*Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna* (Eng: *Pedagogical Encyclopaedia*) defines lifelong learning in the following way: “Lifelong learning, interchangeably refers to permanent education (from French l’éducation permanente). The term has relatively recently entered the dictionary of pedagogical sciences and educational practice. This concept is used in studying the complex problems of modern education. Continuing education is seen as the main direction of transformations of contemporary educational systems, their orientation towards the conditions of variable civilization characterized by a fast pace of development and an accelerated rhythm of transformations. Generally speaking, it is education keeping pace with development and serving development needs” (*Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna*, p. 173, transl. by Niedbales and Hojny).

*Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna XXI wieku* (*The Encyclopaedia of Pedagogy of the 21st century*), defines lifelong/permanent education in the following way: “*lifelong education* (Eng.) or *permanente Bildung* (Ger.) is a contemporary model of education that consists in the continuous renewal and improvement of knowledge as well as professional and general competence throughout the individual’s life. The need for permanent education arises in the conditions of modern, constantly changing socio-cultural reality, to which the individual must adapt and which he/she must understand [...]. Although it is one of the basic terms of contemporary theory and practice of education, it is not understood in the same way. [...] Years ago, theoreticians used it to determine all adult-oriented educational activities, so they identified it with adult or extracurricular education [...]. Others considered that it refers only to educational activities aimed at updating and modernizing professional qualifications of adults, which was necessitated by progress in technique and technology [...]. Today, another scope of the definition is gaining popularity, namely the one putting focus on the whole system of teaching and all upbringing activities, pursued in the period **from a person’s early childhood to late adulthood** (emphasis by P.H. and E.N.N.). Therefore, the term is used to describe both education and upbringing of children and young people as well as education of adults. [...] It is an educational idea with a deeply humanistic character. It requires creating for every person optimal conditions for lifelong learning (LLL), i.e. possibly constant development of personality in all periods of life. In this under-

standing, education is considered to be an integral part, component, one of the strands of life. Thus, it rearranges educational goals: education is no longer regarded to be a preparation for life, but part of life” (*Encyclopedia Pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, volume 1 p. 985).

This definition of LLL clearly indicates that this form of education can be applied to the youngest, i.e. children, as well as the elderly who have finalised their professional activity. For several decades, the so-called Universities of the Third Age (U3As) have been developing in many European countries, (and also in some countries outside Europe) as educational institutions directing their offer to those outside the professional life, with clear cognitive needs, wanting to implement them in the form of group action (women are the predominate group here – 86 %, (Adamska et al. 2016, p. 3), while men with cognitive needs fulfil them in more individualized forms – through books, magazines, popular science programs). According to Statistics Poland, the 2015 statistical study shows that there were 575 U3As in the country (Adamska et al. 2016; Malec-Rawiński, Bartosz 2017). In 2018, this number increased to 649<sup>4</sup>. It is worth mentioning, that the largest number of U3As, where located in one region, i.e., Mazowieckie voivodship (55 according to the data from 2015), the lowest number was registered in the region of Podlasie (11). However, the highest activation rates for older people are in the Lubuskie voivodship (22), where per 10,000 inhabitants over 50 years of age, 113 “develop knowledge, skills and interests, while actively participating in social life” (Adamska et al. 2016, p. 6).

With the change in the scope of the concept of LLL and institutional changes in the sphere of education, culture, within almost half a century since the first U3A was established in France, the entities creating and running such universities have changed. In Poland, almost half of them were managed by associations and foundations in 2014/2015 (Adamska et al. 2016, p. 1). Moreover, lifelong learning is no longer closely related to professional work and training, and has started to fill a larger portion of free time remaining after retirement.

A German researcher of NGO activity on the Polish-Czech-German borderland, Peter Alheit (2002), reviewed the definition of LLL and showed the reasons for the different understanding of this concept in the last two decades of the 20th century. Hitherto, lifelong learning depended on training, change in qualifications – was closely related to professional life. Currently, the LLL process begins in early childhood, continues throughout education

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<sup>4</sup><https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/universytety-trzeciego-wieku-w-polsce-w-2018-r-,10,2.html>. (More recent data were not found either on the GUS website or in 2019 *Rocznik Statystyczny*).

and formal tuition, and continues during retirement. Alheit proposes to look at the concept of LLL as a theoretical construct, starting with an overview of the individual's biography, learning stage, and the (trans)formation of structures of experience, knowledge and activity in the context of their lives and lifeworlds, i.e., in the lifewide context. He advocates for the presentation of educational experience by structuring it within the frame of subsequent educational institutions and by its temporal location. Both dimensions are interconnected and influence the individual's place in the social structure (through education, occupation, gender) (Alheit 2011, pp. 7-11).

### **NGOs on the borderland**

As we pointed out above, some encyclopaedias treat contemporary LLL not as "preparation for life, but as part of life" (*Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna XXI wieku*). Secondly, since the mid-70s, institutions such as U3As have been rapidly developing in Poland. In addition to traditional culture centres (Dom Kultury), which offered their activities to children and young people, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to appear from the beginning of the 1990s, developing diversified offers for various categories of people, but predominantly for children and youth. These assumptions are most useful for our further considerations, which concern the manifestations of LLL in non-governmental organizations operating on the Polish-Czech-German border and establishing mutual cooperation. NGOs are institutions that started to develop in Poland after 1989. Previously, there were primarily national organizations, hierarchical, subject to state funding and control (Karpowicz 1975). Nearly thirty years of the existence of 'new' Poland have allowed some of these new non-governmental organizations to develop and consolidate.

Three more concepts are useful for determining the forms of activity undertaken by the surveyed organizations, and they are: civic education, informal civic education and service-learning. Considering the shaping of a new social order, Krzysztof Koseła wrote: "in the new conditions, tasks arise that require redesigning from scratch the acting rules of the social institutions. This has to be followed by the adoption of the law and the establishment of institutions consistent with ethical sensitivity shaped reluctantly by the collapsed political system. Ethical sensitivity, anchored in regulations and institutions, is no longer a feature of a few intellectuals, but is now a social capital. The new rules have to be explained to pupils, students and citizens" (Koseła 2003, pp. 154-155). Civic education has to deal with the explanation of the "new rules". The raising of civic competence is positively correlated by researchers with the increase of social capital, but

this issue is not addressed in this article. Experts dealing with the issue of civic education distinguish its three basic types:

- *formal civic education* - conducted as part of the education system (which, in addition to schools, often includes universities), and sometimes also as part of vocational training for certain categories of employees;
- *non-formal civic education* - conducted in an organized way, but outside the education system (for example, NGOs deal with this type of education); it can be implemented at all ages and in all socio-professional groups;
- *informal civic education* - defined as intentional, but not part of any system or not carried out as part of the statutory activities of specific entities. Informal civic education can be implemented, for example, as part of happenings or individual events, or carried out ad hoc by institutions for which this is not the mainstream activity (for example, social welfare centres, employment agencies, libraries, cultural centres, private companies) (Makowski, Pazderski 2011). Thus, following this typology, the organizations included in the sample, implement projects in the area of civic education of a non-formal nature, and this type of education falls within the scope of LLL.

Since the 1960s, the trend called *service-learning* has emerged as a teaching method at American universities (Angrosino 2009, pp. 144-145). Underlying this trend was the report '*Principles of good practice for combining service and learning*' that promoted student participation in the work of public institutions in the US, this type of work was supposed to be the most effective form of absorbing knowledge.

### **Methodological approach**

The first postulation adopted in this research project was to find organizations operating on the Polish-Czech-German borderland, which were focused on activities aimed at bringing representatives of the three neighbouring nationalities closer together through various activities, mostly in the spheres of culture and education.

The choice of organizations working on the Polish-Czech-German borderland created the opportunity to look at their international cooperation also in the field of education, which is discussed in this text. For the monographic research – a repetitive case study – several organizations were chosen, that had remained stable and active for many years. They have no

guaranteed financial support, thus every year, they have to apply to potential supporters. Since each of the surveyed organizations had to exist for at least a dozen years, it can be assumed that only those entities that adequately recognize social needs are able to raise funds from various sources, have a chance of survival and that they have gone from the solidification phase to stability and respond to real social needs. The basic material for the analysis was collected during several stays of one of the authors in each of the examined institutions in the years 2008-2014<sup>5</sup>; and the research methods used were: observation, free-form interviews with employees, and the analysis of paper publications and electronic documents (each organization runs a website and social media accounts). In the following years, the organization's activity was monitored on the basis of documents printed and published on their websites.

The basic research questions in this article are: 1) Do the organizations operating in the field of education and culture on the Polish-Czech-German borderland implement, and to what extent, the idea of LLL?, 2) Do they implement civic education – by definition – of a non-formal character?, 3) What is specific to the educational activities of NGOs on the studied borderland? In each organization, interviews with employees and volunteers were carried out, and documents such as statutes, protocols showing the history of establishing associations or foundations, and all other available documents were studied.

**The following organizations were included in the sample:**

**Internationales Begegnungszentrum St. Marienthal (IBZ)** (International Meeting Centre at the Cistercian Abbey Marienthal) near Ostritz (founded in 1993). Several associations on the Polish-Czech-German borderland declare in their statutes that they want to create a meeting ground for people living in the three neighbouring countries. For other organizations, we do not verbatim repeat the goals they set for themselves, but the goals are similar to those mentioned below:

- Supporting and initiating meetings of people regardless of their sex, age, origin, nationality and religion, especially people from Germany, Poland and the Czechia;

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<sup>5</sup>Paulina Hojny: during the implementation of the research project, documentation and research materials were collected for her doctoral dissertation, which was prepared under the supervision of Ewa Narkiewicz-Niedbalec Doctor of Science and defended on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Wrocław. By the decision of the Faculty Council from 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015, she obtained a PhD in social sciences in the field of sociology.



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- Activities supporting peace, reconciliation between religions and co-operation between European nations and ethnic groups through civic education and education for peace;
  - Supporting the cultural heritage of the region;
  - Promoting the most ecological solutions in the protection of natural resources and food production;
  - Supporting the health of children, adolescents, adults, families and people with disabilities<sup>6</sup>;
  - Conducting educational activities in the area of ecology, European programs on various topics addressed to seniors;

**Fundacja “Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego** (The Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe) – (1990) formulated its statutory goals as follows:

- Supporting Polish-German reconciliation;
- Shaping and strengthening the European understanding;
- Refraining from any political activity;
- Overcoming and refraining from favouring or discriminating against particular nationalities, ethnic groups, religious and ideological groups.

As a form of the implementation of the goals mentioned above, “Krzyżowa” implements historical education addressed to many different groups and teaching foreign languages by volunteers. An important part of the Foundation’s activity consists in supporting volunteering and encouraging volunteers to engage in a variety of activities. Other organizations also tried to attract volunteers, but only “Krzyżowa” had a volunteer offer for people over 50 years of age.

With 30 years of experience, the “Krzyżowa: Foundation considers engaging with youth and working with youth in Międzynarodowy Dom Spotkań Młodzieży (MDSM – an international centre for youth meetings) to be its main project. The aim of its activities is to raise curiosity and the will to become familiar with other people and the world, to shape openness to others and to create the ability to communicate with them, to teach how to perceive and understand differences and similarities. An international team of pedagogues works at MDSM. They organize about a hundred various meetings for youth, trainings for the teachers and tutors working on international exchange projects.

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<sup>6</sup>Apparently, supporting healthy behaviour is something that could be learned.

**Collegium Bohemicum** in Usti nad Labem (1999) – Czechia. A constant element in Collegium’s work is historical and political discourse, combining museology with modern cultural education, using the biographies of artists from Czechia and Germany for educational work. Collegium:

- creates and supports a professional information database focused on the subject of Germans in Czechia and the history of Czech-German and Czech-Austrian relations;
- promotes historical scientific work through public media;
- organizes teaching and education projects in the field of Czech-German and Czech-Austrian relations.

The organization supports historical scientific works that focus on the history of Germans and German culture in Czechia, the history of Czech-German and Czech-Austrian relations; Collegium publishes numerous scientific publications focused on the history of the above-mentioned relations. It invites guests, organizes lectures, debates, discussions, conferences and lectures as well as other similar events.

**Fundacja św. Jadwigi z Morawy** (St. Hedwig Foundation from Morawa) near Strzegom (1995) – in the field of education, this organization offers, e.g., post-graduate studies for coaches in the frames of LLL, music academy for talented youth from a few different countries, German language courses, meetings for students, and numerous courses for seniors. It also organized Montessori Kindergarten (The Montessori Method of Education) which is free of charge.

**Die Brücke/Most-Stiftung** (The Most-Brücke Foundation) in Dresden (1997) – the Foundation’s goal is, inter alia, adult education, including helping students organize youth exchanges to promote meetings between Germany and Czechia and exchange information about their countries, and between educational institutions to increase understanding between the German and Czech nations.

**Antikomplex** (association against xenophobia) (1998) – Liberec – preparing publications and exhibitions on Czech-German history (especially, on the flight and expulsion of civil inhabitants after World War II).

**Riesa Efau Kultur Forum Dresden (Riesa Efau Dresden Culture Forum)** (1990) – ensures extensive cooperation in adult education with other organizations, provided that their goals are in line with the Forum’s statutory goals. It runs an art kindergarten and many workshops for children and youth.

### **Analysis of the collected material**

When adopting the broadest definition of LLL, namely learning from childhood to late adulthood, it should be recognized that all of the NGOs surveyed implement the idea of LLL. The institutions selected for the study operate in the fields of education and culture, so by definition education is one of their basic goals, almost all of them have the goal of building better relations between their closest neighbours – Poles, Czechs and Germans. Achieving this goal often requires the presentation of a fake version of history, 'confessing' to own wines (destruction of villages in the Czech Sudetes, after the Germans left them after World War II), creating a communication platform and the possibility of establishing the dialogue between the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, which seems relatively easiest for the younger generation.

In the surveyed organizations, priority is given to the content related to European integration, civic education and a common, often difficult history between neighbouring countries. This content is directed to both younger and older generations. However, the period of functioning of the three socialist states side by side was marked by three different versions of history. The young generation of historians and culture scholars strives not to distort history and show it from the perspective of the three, or at least two countries involved. Organizations involved in the Czech-German and Polish-German cooperation are doing better than those involved in the Polish-Czech cooperation or in participation of partners from these three countries. Interviews with organization employees in Lower Silesia show that it was much easier to contact NGOs in Germany (quick response to e-mails, answering phone calls by the employed administrative staff) than in Czechia (no administrative staff, volunteer work). The situation in Polish organizations varied.

Thus, if we accept the broadest definition of LLL while referring to the first research question, it can be stated that the surveyed organizations, have an educational offer for all categories of people, from the youngest to the oldest ones, the content offered by these organizations is varied, but the topics related to European integration and civic education dominate (for example, by promoting volunteering, which is addressed below), as well as a new way of communicating a common history.

The second research question concerned non-formal civic education. Indeed, the researched NGOs implement this form of teaching the desired attitude. Economic and social changes, needs of individuals and many other reasons generate educational needs during adulthood. This form of education, on the one hand, proposes professional trainings to increase professional competence, and, on the other hand, offers education programs

whose task is to activate one's participation in social life, i.e., by fully using the status of a socially engaged citizen who has knowledge and consciously influences the reality that surrounds him/her. In this sense, being a citizen also involves taking social responsibility for oneself and for others. Non-governmental organizations are institutions where some educational needs can be met. Foundations and associations operating in the fields of culture and education on the Polish-Czech-German borderland conduct such activities. All of the surveyed organizations address the offer to volunteers, and if they undertake such work it takes the form of "learning to serve the society", and thus also a form of civic education.

When it comes the last question, the answers we were looking for in this text concern the specificity that characterizes the educational activity of NGOs on the studied borderland. The main significant feature are joint actions undertaken by representatives of at least two nations. Various education content – from language, through Christmas customs, to modern ecological solutions in cultivation and energy (St. Marienthal) are presented so that Poles, Czechs and Germans can learn about them as a tourist attraction. Some content requires more 'preparation' and engagement, e.g., reading the rewritten history, visiting large-format photography exhibitions.

### **Summary**

One of the functions that the NGOs operating in the area of culture, education and writing a new version of history on the Polish-Czech-German borderland have assumed for their statutory purposes (implemented functions) is an educational function, but not only the one related to researching and developing a new version of history which has been operating in these areas for centuries. It is also civic education, designed to prepare aware citizens who will undertake tasks important for the local communities they come from and in which they want to be active. The educational offer in this area is directed primarily to young people, but also to people after the period of professional work who want to use their life experience and skills for the common good and not just the individual needs of themselves and of their families. All these forms of education can be classified as forms of lifelong learning and non-formal civic education.

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