The self-perception of adult educators in Eastern Europe in the post-Soviet transitional period

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Abstract

This article addresses the self-images of adult educators in view of exercising their professional agency in contexts of social transformation after the fall of the communist regimes. It draws on research undertaken in Poland, Ukraine and Russia in 2009 which investigated the self-perception and self-evaluation of adult educators with regard to their own educational practice—vis-à-vis the challenges of transition in general and of the need of rethinking the dictatorial past in particular. The interviews with 91 adult educators in three countries illustrate the impact of socio-political change in the period of democratization on the concept of one's professional identity. They also demonstrate how transition policies create dilemmas for practice which adult educators accommodate or resist. The article discusses how different self-images are linked to socio-political challenges of society in the transition times. It analyses the possibilities, challenges, impacts and constraints of different perception and forms of educational practice in the light of the current situation in three countries.

Keywords: self-images of adult educators; education in the time of transition; identity crisis of adult educators; Eastern Europe

Introduction

An evaluation of the challenges of education in a society can begin with the question about the self-perception and self-understanding of educationists—how do they perceive their professional tasks, mission and function vis-à-vis a given socio-political situation. But within such a broad profession as adult education the questions posed above are anything but clear or even predictable. In times of social and political transition, the role and function of adult education becomes even more complicated, and adult educators must adapt to the current challenges and needs of adult learners, as well as review and redefine their role as facilitators of the on-going transition.

This paper illustrates the self-perception of adult educators in three Eastern European countries (Poland, Russia and Ukraine) in view of the on-going social

transformations started in the 1990s. It is based on interviews with adult educators from the field of political and civic education which were carried out in 2009. The results presented here are part of a bigger research project dealing with the topic 'Coming to Terms with the Past as a Problem of Adult Education: A Case Study in Eastern and Central Europe'. This project aims to define and describe the problem and phenomenon of dealing with a totalitarian past in educational institutions. As social actors whose positions are based on claims of knowledge and enlightenment, adult educators seem to be predestined to play an important role in the transitional period in Eastern Europe, in contemplation of new ideational trends as well as in discussion about past and actual political processes. When speaking about adult educators in Poland, Russia and Ukraine, I refer to a special group of adult educators, i.e. those who deal with questions about their particular country's past and its implications for present developments. At the beginning it can be noted that it was dealing with history that ushered in the modern nation-building process in the three countries under investigation. This process was largely influenced by the romanticized "re-discovery" of national history and identity which was developed in the struggle for political independence and national emancipation (especially in Poland and Ukraine). Peter Niedermüller described public debates about history in East Central Europe after 1989 as the 'discourse of the national issue' (1997, p. 267). In all three countries, memory culture is often in the service of catching up on the nation-building process. The emphasis has been laid on strengthening national and cultural self-consciousness as well as on the development of their own "true" identity. This public debate had a strong impact on education and on the self-perception and self-description of the professional issues of adult educators, as will be shown below.

Before discussing the role of adult educators during transition, the research focus, i.e. "coming to terms with the past", must be explained. I believe that this is an essential theme of education and public discussion during periods of transformation.

In his essay 'What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean' Dragović-Soso provides three arguments to justify dealing with the past: first, a psychological argument—confronting the past is indispensable for healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in various contexts; second, a political argument—confronting the past strengthens democracy and promotes respect for human rights, thereby preventing future conflicts and crimes; and third, an ethical and moral argument—the question of taking responsibility for the suffering of the victims by recognizing their trauma. (Dragović-Soso, 2010, p. 34). All three arguments are important for constructing a new system after the end of an authoritarian regime:

> Through the process of confronting the past, the *nation learns* to respect human rights and builds a culture of tolerance. And, finally […] it achieves a degree of social consensus about the past and recognises the abuses that have taken place, thus removing history as a point of contention, and counter-acting myth-making and the demonization of other groups. All of this together works to consolidate peace and contributes to future reconciliation. (ibid., p. 37, emphasis by T. K.)

Dealing with the past can be assumed as a tool of personal life management, social mobilization and democratic development, as it was depicted in the study 'Coming to Terms with the Past as a Problem of Adult Education' (Kloubert, 2014). The past can also serve as a tool to integrate or marginalize social and religious groups in society, to serve as a guide or to promote ethnic, national or group identity. Thus, the examination of the past belongs clearly to the field of education, and the educators are hence actors and initiators of these processes. The educators (in the broad sense of the word) can

thereby assume different tasks and influence by some means or other the personal and societal transformation, according to the specific understanding of their role. Theodor Adorno, the author of 'Education after Auschwitz' and 'Dealing with the past', discussed the actuality of adult education and saw its function in the "enlightenment" (Adorno, 1986, p. 329) and formation of the "vanguard" (ibid.):

> No one will expect from adult education [...] that it, directly by itself, would be able to decisive changes. But probably it can lighten the type of man who is attuned to it [...], so that they cope with the present conditions as the vanguard (ibid.)

Adorno speaks of the "human force[s]" of adult educators 'who are able to mediate between the forms of political democracy and the actual level of awareness of the population' (ibid., p. 330). In addition to a political, judicial, and historical examination of the past, adult education fulfils its social mission in the context of inclusion, reintegration, readjustment, ability to act, and orientation (or 're-orientation as a dimension of orientation') (Friedenthal-Haase, 2002, p. 76).

This paper will discuss how adult educators deal with the challenges of transition and what roles they intend to play in these processes. It will also discuss whether adult educators perceive themselves capable of promoting democratic change and how and why they intend on doing so. The relevance of the topic stems from the considerable information deficit about the educational praxis concerning this subject in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, few of the materials published on this topic are based on empirical research. Further research is needed to identify the relevant theoretical principles and fruitful research practices. It is also important to identify training practices and learning processes that will facilitate understanding of transition in discussions about the past—across groups, countries, cultures, and boundaries.

Data Collection and Methods

"Adult educator" is a broad category that includes people involved in the provision of adult education opportunities. However, the focus of this research was on those who are involved in direct contact with adult learners. Following the concept that a nation expresses and transmits its traditions and experiences through education, I have chosen the educators—the human agents of education—as respondents for my empirical research. The method of qualitative research used was that of conversational interviews with some experts in adult education. All the interviews were conducted "face-to-face" with individual respondents. Qualitative interviews yield rich insights into personal biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes, and feelings. Semi-structured interviews as used in my research project rest upon a basic schedule, in question form, of areas to be covered in the interview. The schedule guides the interview, but permits various input from the subject to come up naturally and in any order. This schedule ensures that basically the same information is obtained from all subjects.

The research methodology used was close to the methodology of the grounded theory. According to the grounded theory, the study is less about the verification of theories, but more about structuring and categorization of the field under research. For the evaluation, open coding (inductive and deductive conceptualizing and categorizing of the texts) and axial coding (creating and revising categories and subcategories) were applied (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1996, pp. 75 et seq.). In the process of coding, the data

from the interviews have been reduced and regrouped by dividing it into units of analysis and coding each unit. The process involved identification and analysis of categories of meaning which will be presented below.

The reasons for the selection of the countries under research will now be explained. Poland, as an EU member, is, on the whole, a stable democratic state. It draws its self-image to a large extent from history and religion, discussing at the same time difficult issues of its own involvement in the atrocities of the past (such as involvement of the Poles in the Holocaust). The selection of Ukraine for the study can be explained by the fact that, on the one hand, the country stepped onto the path of democratization after the Orange Revolution,[1] but on the other, after this revolution the new political powers launched a strong politics of national history, which was to be brought into line with the democratic aspirations. Furthermore, 'most current hopes for a further democracy development east of the Bug' (Nolte, 2007, p. 5) were directed towards the Ukraine. Russia was selected as an example of a country that is ruled autocratically and tries to pursue a strong official line of cultural memory on the one hand. On the other hand, Russia is relevant for the study as a state which served in the past as a main actor in the dissemination of the communist regime. The interviews were conducted in various regions of each country. In Russia they were carried out in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, the Republic of Komi (as a place where many GULAG camps were located, such as Vorkuta, Uchta and Pechora), as well as Perm (a region which in modern Russia is regarded as a small isle of functioning civil society). In Ukraine, three regions were included: Kiev as the capital, Lviv as a regional capital in Western Ukraine, and Donetsk as a regional capital in Eastern Ukraine. The division into Western and Eastern Ukraine has a historical basis and corresponds nowadays to different political, social and ideological attitudes. In Poland, three historically different regions were selected: the regions of Warsaw, of Gdansk and of Kracow. All in all, 91 interviews were conducted. These took place in Russia during April and May 2009, in Poland in June and the first half of July, and in Ukraine in July and August 2009.

The participants in this research seldom refer to themselves as "adult educators", but they perform the work of adult educators regardless of how they may denote it. They have worked at least four years in this field and can share a great deal of experience from their everyday practice. The interviewees represent different types of educational institutions within all three countries (public, private and church-related institutions and NGOs).

In order to find the eligible institutions, I have used the criteria developed by the German Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the Socialist Unity Party Dictatorship (Cf. Kasianov & Jilge, 2008; Ruchniewicz, Tyszkiewicz, Mählert, & Lotz, 2004), as well as topographic information from the book 'Places of Memory of the Mass Terror 1937/38' (Kaminsky, 2007). After a rough analysis of the initial data (in this case on the basis of the protocols), I identified the other institutions where individuals should be carried out. These were, for example, those of whom I became aware from the local context, or who were mentioned in conversations with the interviewees. This process was conducted according to the principle of variance maximization in order to review the assumptions which had been made (cf. Strauss et al., 1996, p. 150; Flick, 2002, p. 102). The findings were obtained both inductively and deductively.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions. All of them were open-ended. The intention was to get the respondents to talk about their reflections on each of the topics. All the interviews were tape-recorded. With a few exceptions all of them have been transcribed. The interviews were conducted in Russian, Polish and Ukrainian; for

citation I have translated the passages into German and English. Each participant's responses were analysed for frequent patterns or similarities. Once this was accomplished, all of the findings were compared – again looking for thematic patterns that had emerged from the participants' responses. Themes were identified based on the participants' responses to the interview schedule. Each response was read as a means of finding similarities and differences within the text. Once these were identified and noted, the passage was reread with the themes in mind and matched within the body of each response. All responses were then related to the appropriate themes.

The key question of the part of the research concerning the self-image of adult education was:

- What is the pedagogical self-concept of the leaders of adult education? Is the process of "coming to terms with the past" considered as a process of education (or, for example, merely as one of dissemination of information)? (In the interpretation of the interviews the elements of the pedagogical self-concept will be defined. It is probable that the leaders do not consider themselves explicitly as adult educators – that is why the implicit concept should be revealed. The pedagogical understanding in the different societies will be compared. One of the guiding questions will be: Is it is possible to discern a sort of pedagogical agenda?)

Differences between countries exist not only on the macro level, but also in the nature of the institutional landscape in the three countries themselves, and thus on the meso level: While adult education as an academic discipline is gaining in importance in Poland and classic adult education institutions such as community colleges, folk universities, etc. are becoming more and more established there, practical adult education in Ukraine and Russia is not well developed and organized and is often not explicitly represented as such. Initiatives for adult education can be found in libraries, museums, NGOs, associations, foundations, etc., although the representatives of these institutions do not understand their work as adult education.

As a basis for discussion, the interviewees were presented with the following quote from Horst Siebert: 'adults are capable of learning, but they are unteachable' (1996, p 90: 'Erwachsene sind lernfähig, aber unbelehrbar').[2] This citation initiated reflection on their methods, goals, and difficulties. In many cases, this topic was expanded upon by reflection on perceived successes and failures as well as desires and intentions with respect to their professional activities. Explicitly formulated principles, implicit inner motives, and bases for decision-making provide information about how adult educators assess their role in teaching about the past and how they wish to operate.

Agnieszka Bron suggests that there are many difficulties associated with research and data collection in different countries. She states that such studies can be effective only if the following criteria are fulfilled:

- A knowledge of the language of the investigated countries;
- Experience of living in the country;
- The control of one's own cultural and personal biases (cf. Bron-Wojciechowska, 1989, p. 13).

If I attempt to apply these criteria to myself, at least two of these are fulfilled due to the fact that Ukrainian and Russian are my mother tongues and I have learnt Polish since

my childhood. I have spent several months or years in each of these countries. As for the third aspect, the control of one's own cultural biases, this means primarily the critical awareness of and reflection on such biases which must be the constant effort of every researcher, regardless of their field of research.

Returning to the adult educators in the three countries examined, I will explore their ideas of professional identity and professional mission in times of social transition.[3]

Identity Crisis of adult educators and their new roles

In the field of adult education, the study of educators has a long research tradition (Jarvis & Chadwick, 1991; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). According to them, adult educators fulfil a wide range of activities (Kraft, 2006; Lattke & Nuissl, 2008) such as teaching, management, counselling and guidance, program planning, media use, and administrative support positions. Recent studies funded by the European Commission pointed out the key competences for adult learning professionals (Buiskool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis & Osborne, 2010), such as being an autonomous learner, communicator, team player, and networker as well as being responsible for developing the profession further, being an expert, being able to deploy a wide variety of learning methods, styles, and techniques, being a motivator, and being able to deal with the heterogeneity of groups. However, the study of the self-perception and self-ascription of adult educators during social and political upheaval and the resulting transformation has been neglected.

After the collapse of the socialist system in Eastern Europe, the intelligentsia in general and educators in particular found themselves in a deep identity crisis (cf. Gessen, 1997). During the Soviet era, many educators were granted various national privileges. They were, however, blind to the social realities and served the ideological apparatus of the state. The Polish researcher Hanna Palska (1994) refers to the quasi-intelligentsia existing in the Polish People's Republic – they were obliged to defend Communist propaganda but had no social mandate. An intelligentsia that was recognised in the public sphere but not at the service of the state did not exist. This was hardly possible anywhere in the Soviet Union because of the severely repressive state penal system (see Šanovs'ka, 2007, p. 179 et seq.; Gawin, 2008). Since the collapse of the system, their essential roles as propagators of party opinion and socialist interpretation have become obsolete, but their new roles have not yet been defined. The situation in Ukraine and Russia (and to some extent even in Poland) was therefore complicated by the fact that the transformations of the late 1980s and early 1990s revealed the lack of intellectuals[4] represented in the public sphere. The intelligentsia had gradually disappeared by the end of the Soviet era because there was no longer a demand for their typical function. Ryvkina, a Russian sociologist, argues that:

> The most important feature of the Soviet intelligentsia was to inform society – not an abstract function of information or education, but a very specific education: education of the people in the spirit of socialism and Soviet patriotism. [...]. The most important distinguishing feature of the intelligentsia was its 'service' to the Soviet system. (Ryvkina, 2006, p. 140)

Because their activity became obsolete after the collapse of the system, the intelligentsia as a social group was rendered useless. The second cause of the disappearance of this

group, as described by Ryvkina, was the role of the intelligentsia in the collapse of the USSR: they wanted to democratise the system, but they accelerated the end of the system without having a program in place (ibid.). With respect to the role of the dissident intelligentsia in the collapse of the USSR, the following words are often quoted: 'We aimed at communism, but hit Russia', which are attributed to the dissident Alexander Zinoviev. These words are mistakenly interpreted as a sign of repentance for the decay of Soviet dissidents. Ryvkina also describes another core problem of the contemporary Russian intelligentsia—"the flight of the intelligentsia". Intellectuals, i.e. teachers and doctors, either enter the commercial sphere or emigrate. According to Ryvinka, society demands pragmatic solutions, thereby obliging the humanists ("Gumanitarii") to give way to the representatives of techno-industrial professions ("Technokraty")[5] (see Ryvkina, 2006, p. 138 et seq.).

The phenomenon of independent intellectuals, who were free of state doctrine and independent of government funding, needed to be established in the years of democratisation. A professional career in education meant the production of personal and professional freedom as well as the extension of skills and knowledge. Do adult educators as a part of the intelligentsia understand themselves now as the critics and examiners of political, social and economic processes, as advocates for deprived groups, or as leisure providers?

Lepskij (2002) reflects on the possible roles of the intelligentsia in modern Russia and also diagnoses the loss of the social function of the intelligentsia in Russian society. He describes the five key roles currently attributed to the Russian intelligentsia (cf. ibid, p. 8):

- Mediators of the Western models: a role connected with attempts to implement Western models of life in Russia after 1991;
- Developers of the "image of the enemy": This position distracts from the real causes of the crisis by raising topical issues of social change;
- Permanent opposition to power: According to Lepskij, society faces the problem of consolidating all forces and resources for the survival of Russia; the opposition to power weakens Russia's chances.
- Judge and prophet: In this position, the intelligentsia takes responsibility for answering the classic question: Whose fault was this? What should be done? But in this situation, like in the Soviet period, the people appear as an object and not as the subject.
- Social diagnosticians: The intelligentsia points out the grievances of society which must be addressed. According to Lepskij, this position is still too early for Russian society.

Lepskij describes all five roles as being unsuitable for overcoming the crisis of modern Russian society. In his eyes, the required function of the intelligentsia, i.e. "the engineering of society" would not be exercised today. The most important "mission" of the intelligentsia has to be 'the awakening of reflective social consciousness' (p. 8). In this case, the intelligentsia can be understood (according to Lepskij) as a 'subject of social transformation'. The self-described roles of adult educators in Russian, Polish and Ukrainian society will now be analysed in connection with the question of the extent to which adult educators explicitly, or rather implicitly, want to engineer the social transformations described by Lepskij.

The professional profiles of the educators that were interviewed are extremely diverse—classical roles as 'legislators and interpreters' (Bauman, 1987) can be

complemented with additional categories of professional self-images. Some respondents spoke of themselves as historians, dissidents, active citizens, social workers, or political scientists, and not as teachers. In the interviews, however, extensive educational reflection does take place (see, for example Interview_P19, para 57). Most of the adult educators interact with adults in a didactical way without any explicit qualifications for their activity. The interviewed adult educators have intuitively distinguished their work from educational work with children and youth, often without having educational or more andragogical qualifications. Adult-oriented education is more intuitive in such cases. Discussion about the quality and professionalism of adult education only appeared in a few statements. It is thus justified to speak of a lack of professional self-confidence in respondents. It is noticeable from the conducted interviews that adult educators in all three countries apprehend one of their core functions as enhancement of and development of communities or society through the education of individuals, i.e. through encouragement and advancement of identity development and power over life choices.

The interviewees were involved in different adult educational practices and had diverse priorities. However, some characteristics of their descriptions of their practice and of their professional identity can be seen as significant in shaping their professional identity formation. The responses of adult educators were regrouped according to similarities and distinctions using such categories as educational aims and methods, the image of the participants, the question of personal motivation vis-à-vis their jobs, the description of their own successes and failures in educational practice, expression of their wishes and plans for the future development of the own practice. The adult educators described their own professional objectives in performing a vast variety of roles and sub-specialties. Despite the differences in personal situations and histories, some commonalities in interviewees' descriptions of themselves in a professional context were identified. Common skills and descriptions of these varying roles can be clustered into five general groups of self-images of interviewed adult educators. A rough grouping of the tendencies of adult educators is presented below. Here, I briefly describe the possible implications borne by particular self-understandings of the actors in adult education.

1. "Popularisers" take the roles of experts and are eager to spread their knowledge in the respective groups of society – to popularise it.

The function of education is therefore seen as dissemination of contents on one side, and the acquisition of information on the other. In these cases, the storage and transmission of knowledge is emphasised as the core of the educational process. After the collapse of the Soviet Union with its strong censorship, the need to accumulate previously unknown knowledge and ensure that this knowledge continues to exist seems intelligible. The respondents emphasised the need for "extensive education" without using the term itself. The task of a lesson is to 'give the largest possible amount of knowledge on the given topic during a course' (Interview_P04, para 42). One respondent described himself as an information provider:

> We must fix the lack of knowledge, some of which was caused by the [socialist] school.
> [...] Another important thing is to bring the knowledge to the people, where they live
> […], for example by our lecturers who drive through the area [to the people].
> (Interview_P12, para 63)

This adult educator also expresses one of the key priorities of his educational praxis, which is the training of multipliers – the adults who continue to spread the received knowledge, skills, and attitudes. According to another respondent, the acquisition of knowledge has an addition ethical value because knowledge is associated with such characteristics as decency and honesty: 'The more a person knows, the more he is ... he will not take out too much, he will be a moral man himself. He won't commit vulgarities, steal or commit other crimes.' (Interview_R12, para 67).

This self-perception had been instilled in these three countries even before the Soviet regime: In Ukrainian, the word "education" is derived from "osvita", and in Polish it is derived from "oświata", which includes the word "svitlo/światło", meaning "light". Therefore, the osvitjanyn/oświatowiec ("educator") is the one who brings light in the darkness of the "ignorance of the masses". For such an educator, participants play the role of the ignorant and have to be illuminated. The "popularisers" identify their areas of influence, real or intended, quite differently: from villages to the entire EU. An adult educator from Poland argues that: 'There must be an institution that articulates in the EU the perspective important for the Polish state. [...] We, like any other European country, must present our experience of the world' (Interview_P14, para 82-83). Perhaps one of the greatest dangers of "popularisers" is that they only popularise what they perceive to be correct and important. In addition, the critical analysis of this knowledge has less of a priority.

In all three countries studied, it became clear that most adult educators perceive themselves as a source, reservoir, or at least a heritage keeper and disseminator of knowledge. This self-awareness can only conditionally meet the requirements faced by social and political transformation. In his book 'Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy', Christopher Lasch pointed out that democracy requires a lively public discussion, and not just the dissemination of knowledge. The need for knowledge can occur when issues and problems are discussed (see Lasch, 1995, pp. 170 et seq.). An examination of the past that is not based on dialogue and a common search for answers risks becoming propaganda or agitation.

2. The dissemination approach of a populariser culminates in self-perception as a "missionary".

Education is understood as an indispensable mission this is to be fulfilled. Some of the adult educators interviewed see their educational work as an opportunity to restore justice. One adult educator argues that the 'restoration of justice' is to be ensured by honouring people who have been killed for political reasons (see Interview_P15, para 10). Other respondents feel themselves called to 'open the eyes' of their students. Here, the old legacy of political education comes to the forefront – an image of instruction and indoctrination. It is still believed that the main function of political adult education is 'conveying' messages to the participants.

Under strong pressure from the Russian politics of history that propagated "the happy oblivion"[6], critical Russian andragogues who are in opposition to state power feel even more obliged to fulfil their educational mission, i.e. searching for the truth or teaching critical thinking. One adult educator speaks of his work as 'battle for the souls of people' (Interview_R15, para 14). By contrast, another adult educator (from a state educational institution) follows the mission of patriotic education and strengthening Russian national identity: he fears the 'forgetting of their own roots' (Interview_R11, para 102) and the 'meltdown in European culture' (ibid.). The intended duty is therefore to 'preserve our originality (samobytnost) as the Russian people'.

The populariser and missionary models can, however, be based on the overestimation of one's own role within certain social groups. These adult educators have the task (at least in their own minds) of ensuring tradition as well as 'finding the truth and spreading it' (Interview_P19, para 27). One respondent admits, however, that the concept of truth prevents discussion because the "truth" is out of the question.

In the case of Ukraine, the self-perception of adult educators as missionaries has another dimension, which is described by the Ukrainian writer and journalist, Mykola Rjabčuk. This dimension refers to the Ukrainian national idea. As Rjabčuk puts it, intellectuals in Ukraine have 'a national duty' (Rjabčuk, 2009). One adult educator expresses this thought quite vividly: 'When I teach in Eastern Ukraine, I strive to consolidate […] the Ukrainian identity' (Interview_U07, para 41). Ukrainian intellectuals, Rjabčuk writes, are faced with the dilemma of choosing between a professional impartiality/neutrality on one hand, and current national interests on the other. As one example, he cites discussions which are particularly well known in L'viv: the attitudes of Ukrainian intellectuals concerning the Ukrainian Insurgent Army during the Second World War (OUN-UPA). Different interpretations, arguments, and visions clash at this point. According to Rjabčuk, cosmopolitan intellectuals couldn't approve of the totalitarian ideology of the OUN as well as its terrorist methods of struggle. On the other hand, the OUN simultaneously fought against the totalitarian regime – the Soviet Union – and fostered Ukrainian aspirations for continued independence and freedom (cf. ibid.). Intellectuals must therefore make a choice between defending and abandoning the "national duty".

3. The self-perception as a "moral authority" is connected with that of the missionary.

After the collapse of the system, the adult educators who offered resistance and experienced political repression during the Soviet time gained credibility because they could consistently defend their position over the years. One respondent from Russia insists that educational activity must be validated through life experience: 'How can you teach people the protection of human rights, if you are not concerned with the protection of human rights. It would be shameful' (Interview_R03, para 7). These adult educators usually have a real (or imagined) sense of authority within a group, which is based on achievement, social position, or experience. The cognition of this real or constructed authority can move educators to use it for different goals, such as provoking inciting discussion within a social group or providing arguments for certain decisions. However, their role and public acceptance seems to have dwindled in the 20 years following the collapse of socialism – not least in view of the growing generation with the mercy of a more recent birth.

In view of this special role, an important issue for educational practice in the transition period arises: the question of the personal involvement of the educator in the totalitarian system. Theodor Litt (1958) asked a controversial question after the Second World War: How should non-Democrats educate the young generation in democracy? From this point of view, a general question about the authorisation and biographical motivation of adult educators can be derived. Kade spoke about a 'biographical anchor' (Kade, 1989, p. 9), which is an interrelation between the educational praxis of adult educators and their own life stories. In analysing the interviews, it seemed relevant to know the biography of the andragogues (especially of those who deal with the question of coming to terms with the past), because many of the respondents trace their motivation to practise the profession back to their personal or family biography, and describe its influence on their activities.

4. "Facilitator and dialogue partner" provide learning opportunities and supports self-organisation and self-development

After the collapse of the socialist system, an established circle of educators sought new forms and models of educational praxis, which can be increasingly characterised by keywords such as dialogue, openness, and interaction realised in the form of projects, courses, meetings, or workshops. From the view of a "facilitator and dialogue partner", education means providing the opportunity to gain experience as well as contexts that facilitate learning and support self-organisation and self-development.

The adult educator tries to bring together different visions and facilitate discussion instead of providing the learners with knowledge. They advocate dialogue-based education without using this term in their answers. This is clearly evident in Poland and Ukraine. In Russia, however, it is only present in non-governmental institutions. One of the main functions of such a practice is to encourage participation, or in the words of a respondent, to 'gain access, assure and encourage' (Interview_P01, para. 67). Such educators explicitly distance themselves from the principle of "educating the masses" and emphasise collaborative work and discussion. Previous experiences, as well as the knowledge and opinions of the participants, are given priority.

Some adult educators endeavour to foster dialogue, something that couldn't be done under the totalitarian regime because of its monological nature, as well as its "culture of homogeneity" and "culture of unambiguousness" (Baberowski, 2003). Some interviewees assert the inability to discuss and to pose questions among the participants, which they see as a result of the former totalitarian influence. In Russian (and to a lesser extent Ukrainian) adult education, isolated discourses still exist. An adult educator from Poland insists that his institution be a platform 'for expressing different opinions' (Interview_P19, para 31). Another respondent wants to counteract the earlier practice of imposing opinions and suppressing the alternatives. He encourages the participants to adopt a 'ductus of nonconformity' (Interview_P20, para 157). Thus, in this role the adult educators try to recognise diversity in the group with regard to a historical, social, economic, religious, and cultural background as well as differences in learning needs, learning gaps, learning experience, gender, and age. The educator understands the value of diversity, respects differences, and can deal with diverse personal contacts and learning processes.

Educators also demand the development of individual thinking and analytical skills. The artificial creation and distortion of historical consciousness, as was the case in the period of socialism, enables the manipulation of popular sentiments, 'which assumes without question that our eastern neighbour is our closest ally and NATO is our greatest enemy' (Interview_P21, para 90). Education should now strive to make citizens resistant to such propaganda about the historical background (cf. ibid.).

The interviews generally show that Russian and Ukrainian educators often find difficulties transitioning to an open model of discussion and interactive education: This mainly concerns the shift of focus from productive and reproductive tasks to creative thinking. Reorientation is especially difficult for educators who had been educated in the Soviet departments affected by ideology because they are uncertain regarding the methods and the lack of professional andragogical discussion.

5. "Modernisers and idealists" are explicitly eager to facilitate and promote social and political change through education.

In such cases, an adult educator organises and realises a class not according to the existing demand, but they affect, form and express a demand in the sense of the approach of "community development" (Zeuner, 2007). They should not, however, be

misunderstood as a technocratic "change agents", who initiate prescribed political change. Such educators are representatives of active elites who, in situations of crisis and transformation, try to offer clarification and options for future development. The ability to make individual judgements and discuss them form the basis for education, which has a role in social development: 'The main goal is to be an active citizen' (Interview_P01, para. 39). In interviews with Russian adult educators, the idea of "changing society" through the education of adult members of the society was most often articulated.

Among some Russian respondents, it seems especially important to re-evaluate the relationship between the state and the citizen: The participant should understand 'that he has rights, and that these must be respected' (Interview_R02, para 58). Another respondent argues that dealing with history should enable a person to regain dignity as a human being: 'One must begin to believe that he is valuable' (Interview_R32, para 34). Through his educational work, a respondent from Russia wants to 'support the small person in his resistance' (Interview_R03, para 48).

Thus, these adult educators as intellectuals intend to form a particular institution in society, which, among other things, creates a basis for civil society. They aim to create awareness of certain issues, to clarify the contexts of the problems, to help create a hierarchy of problems, and thus to find possible solutions. The intended social transformation is seen as a long-term process which begins to germinate in educational discussions:

> Politics is made from above and consciousness formed at the [discussion] table. [...] The initiatives will in the end cause people to develop different perspectives. [...] I know that our work is not the smallest link in the chain that leads to a change of consciousness in society. (Interview_P15, para 29)

In a totalitarian state, an institution with these functions was, in principle, impossible – there was no public space for it. The perception of this role began after the collapse of the totalitarian system. The adult educators see their work as being largely focused on developing society. In the interviews, Russian adult educators assessed the chance of their work having a broad impact on society as being quite low. Nevertheless, they often expressed a high level of intrinsic motivation that turns their work into an important mission in life.

Synthesized outcomes and discussion

"Adult educator" is not a profession in the classical meaning (cf. Jütte, Nicoll & Olesen, 2011). However, from the interviews one can see a wide range of professional self-images, both in the ways that adult educators see themselves as members of a profession, and how they define themselves as part of a specific socio-political context. All these self-images have different impacts on educational practice and on opportunities for social development as it was shown above. Based on the interviews, education is generally not identified as a systematically planned effort from the perspective of the actors. The role of education is often seen as awakening curiosity and interest in a specific topic; in-depth study is planned only in rare cases. The best metaphor for this effort, which has also been implied in some interviews, is the understanding of education as throwing a seed onto the ground. One would 'leave a trace' (Interview_R22, para 79), give a jump start (see Interview_R22, para 79), wake

from sleep (see Interview_R33, para 1). In terms of dealing with the past, adult educators mainly see themselves involved in creating a stable basis for further developments: The objective is to collect and disseminate knowledge, ensure the spread of ideas, and coin new terms to allow for a common general discussion.

It must also be noted that the cooperation between adult educators is often unsatisfactory. Dealing with the past in the context of education mainly causes discourses that are separate or even isolated from each other, without any meta-reflection (this especially concerns Ukraine, and partly Russia). The integration of discourses remains a challenge nowadays in all three countries. There are attempts in adult education (mainly in Poland, minimally in Ukraine) to face this challenge by providing discussions and dialogues from different perspectives in the context of educational practice. A decisive impulse should come from adult education as a theoretical discipline, although it hardly exists as such in Ukraine and in Russia and seems to be just getting established in Poland.

It remains to sum up which social forces can be expected to promote democratic change in the interest of the population, and whether these forces are present in Russia, Poland and Ukraine. These forces are indeed active in all regions of these countries. One difference, however, is whether they are supported or hindered by the state. In Poland, institutions that deal with a critical examination of the past seem to be supported by the state. There is therefore no difference between the freedoms of educational life in state vs. non-state institutions. It is clear from the interviews that the Polish government supports initiatives to increase political and legal culture as well as social and political self-organisation, to stabilise civil society and to adopt civil forms of interaction.

In Ukraine, adult educators speak about "non-interference" or "ignorance" when they refer to governmental attitudes towards their work. The state does not stop their initiatives, but without support, they face certain insurmountable obstacles. In Russia, there is a vast gap between state and non-state educational institutions in terms of dealing with the past. The current political powers in Russia hardly support initiatives to deal with the past. In fact, they have hindered this through defamation campaigns, obstacles to financing, and their own public education programs. Adult educators often speak of obstructions, self-censorship and resignation to (and therefore acceptance of) the given rules. Under these circumstances, some adult educators in Russia feel themselves obliged to be advocates of the population in their relationship with the state (which is sometimes not demanded by the population). Some adult educators even see themselves as having a moral and historical duty to the public. Their work means more to them than any profession they might practise; it is an intense social engagement that borders on self-sacrifice.

Analysis of the interviews permits the conclusion that in Russia and partly in Ukraine there is a gap between the intelligentsia (which the adult educators understand themselves to be a part of) and the population. This gap was mentioned repeatedly by the interviewees when speaking about the incongruities, misunderstandings, disrespect on the part of participants of the courses, or from the public opinions that were witnessed. The importance of discussion about the past during the time of transition seems to have already emerged. However this understanding has hardly found a way to the broader social groups. The main difficulty in dealing with the past in Russia and Ukraine is still the fact that this discussion has remained a primarily intellectual phenomenon for which there is still no adequate social platform.

The decision to deal with issues from the past in a professional context has a special significance for most adult educators. This decision is often motivated by the

educator's own biography and own personal involvement in the past, in some cases due to political beliefs or social consciousness. Adult educators often want not only to transmit knowledge; they also seek to change values, and want thereby to contribute to social change through their work. It should also be noted that that almost all of the adult educators are not conscious of the biases that may result from their own personal biographies. The question of personal bias should gain in transparency – for adult educators themselves, as well as for the participants. Monique Eckmann speaks in this context of the question that every educator at a historical site should pose him/herself 'What perspective am I speaking from?' (Eckmann 2010, p. 64)

Conclusions

It is difficult to summarise this investigation of three heterogeneous countries without forgoing detail. This paper has not focused on the differences in the self-understanding of adult educators between Poland, Russia, and Ukraine, but has rather tried to figure out the common tendencies in order to describe the changing configurations in adult education during transition, using these three countries as examples.

From the perspective of its actors, adult education aims to conserve memory (see Interview_R05, para 15), to protect "true" memories (see Interview_R01, para 85), to resist the state's attempts to falsify memories (see Interview_R36, para 45), to promote political and civic engagement, to foster therapy and healing, to proselytise the "true" ideas, to advertise education, and to aid in the struggle against existing conditions. In addtion, to the "classical" function of an educator as a transmitter of knowledge or, in the modern sense, as a facilitator or moderator of the learning process, has been added a new task or function, namely the responsibility for the development of the community and the civil society. From the interviews, it can be concluded that adult educators who intend to fulfil the function of "engineering the society" (after Lepskij) do exist, even if they may be in the minority. Actors wishing to contribute to the shaping of socio-political changes through education are represented in all regions in each country.

In Russia and Ukraine, adult education, which is dedicated to dealing with the past, is unfortunately more a personal commitment than it is a social demand. In Russia, and partly in Ukraine, a growing gap between the intelligentsia and the population can be inferred. In these countries, the main difficulty is that dealing with the past and learning to change remains primarily an intellectual phenomenon for which there is still no adequate social context.

The data demonstrate the agency of adult educators. But they also pose questions for critical reflection: What is the strategic potential of "engineering of society" through adult educators who are not visible beyond their immediate context? Should their agency focus on fostering and support of individual growth, or on a renewal of society? Can both of these categories be understood separately from each other? It becomes evident, however, that in seeking for social change it is also indispensable to change the status quo in the field of adult education itself in all three of these countries.

Notes

[1] The research was conducted in 2009; the 2013/2014 Revolution on Euromaidan in Kiev was not considered in the study.

[2] This quotation was used as a thought-provoking impulse; constructivism is not the author's theoretical perspective.
[3] The extensive and important question of professionalization in adult education is, however, beyond the scope of this study.
[4] Intelligentsia refers to a Eastern European, or more precisely Russian phenomenon, while intellectual is a concept with US origins; however, both concepts share much in common (cf. Kochetkova, 2010, p. 12 et seq.). According to Lipset, intellectuals (and intelligentsia) are expected to dedicate themselves to 'create, distribute and apply culture' (Lipset, 1960, p. 311). Such an understanding of intelligentsia obviously includes adult educators.
[5] In Poland, opportunists and careerists were met with scepticism and given the pejorative name *Wykształciuchy* (Grzelka, 2010).
[6] The term used by one of the respondents referring to the tendency in the Russian politics of memory including the practice of thinking themselves righteous and forgetting the crimes of the past.

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