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## **EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND THE APPROACH TO COMPETENCES WITHIN THE POLISH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LLL**

**Key words:** European/Polish Qualifications Framework, educational policy, social competences, lifelong learning

**Abstract:** The implementation of changes to the system of education resulting from the adoption of the European Qualifications Framework became a starting point for a socio-political and scientific debate on the objectives and conditions of the educational policy in Poland. It was acknowledged that the main obstacles to the civilizational development of Poland are cultural and historical barriers, whereas social competences, that will build up the social capital of Polish people, are to be the factor of positive change. The article focuses on the holistic, contextual and interdisciplinary nature of competences, particular importance of social competences of emancipatory and critical nature, and conditions necessary for their development, i.e. teachers and the learning environment, characterized by what the purpose of education is.

### **The objectives and determinants of educational policy**

Numerous diagnoses indicate a growing civilizational gap between Poland and the Poles on the one hand, and the world and European leaders of change on the other. The Forecasting Committee 2000 Plus in their „Poland 2050 Report” described the current situation of Poland as a civilizational drift. A thesis was formulated and proved in it that cultural barriers, which derive from „... agrarian civilization, have their background in the anarchic democracy of the gentry, strong influence of the traditionalist Catholic Church, in the absence of trust in the institutions of the state, socialist egalitarianism, dislike of others, in nurturing memories of both victories and defeats, in the insufficient ability to work together, and in low social capital”, are the main causes of this drift (Poland 2050 Report, p. 114). We find a similar diagnosis of barriers to the development of social capital in another report, i.e. „Poland 2030”, developed by the Team of Strategic Advisors to the Prime Minister. According to it, these barriers arise from cultural-historical conditions that favoured first the formation of the capital of survival, and after 1989 the adaptive capital. As we read in the

report, Polish society is currently at a critical moment in its development, whose dynamics and direction will determine the welfare of the country in the coming decades (p. 344). In the opinion of the authors of the Report, this situation can be seen as an opportunity to free the society from the historical determinants blocking development and to make a modernization jump based on new factors of development, the key one of which **will be social capital**, i.e. *resulting from the trust and applicable standards and patterns of behaviour, the ability of citizens to mobilize and pool resources, which fosters creativity and strengthens the will of collaboration and understanding in achieving common goals, (Poland 2030).*

The developmental capital of the Poles, as a result of denying the values of the survival and adaptive capital, is to be the source of change (Table 1). A society with strong developmental capital is characterized by openness to the attitudes, opinions and ideas of others, the ability to collaborate, and by innovation and creativity.

Table 1. Survival and adaptive capital vs. developmental capital

egalitarianism, security, adaptation, caring and demanding attitude, little stabilization	ECONOMIC DIMENSION	meritocracy, risk, innovation, self-responsibility, success
passivity and apathy, lack of respect for the law, an affirmation of privacy and distance to the state	POLITICAL DIMENSION	civic participation, legalism, civic loyalty
collectivism, opportunism and conformism, xenophobia	CULTURAL DIMENSION	individualism, criticism, openness and tolerance

Source: Poland 2030 Report, Warsaw 2009, pp. 343 [Online: <http://zds.kprm.gov.pl/raport-polska-2030-wyzwania-rozwojowe>, Retrieved on 06.10.2012]

The deficit of public trust, which causes the erosion of the original social fabric, is a particularly significant barrier to the civilizational development of Poland and Polish people (Sztompka 2007). Its reconstruction is a challenge and salvation for the Polish system of education (Brzezińska, Czub 2013). Public trust depends critically on the nature of individual and collective experience, whereas the current level of trust is a result of the relationship between internal and external trust. Based on these assumptions, Brzezińska and Czub indicate three directions of interaction on the part of the system of education: 1. activities aimed at early, developmentally valuable experience, especially of small children, decisive for the formation of a durable generalized sense of social trust in them, 2. impact on the change of organizational culture of educational institutions and on the culture of social relations among all participants in the social system, 3. building a positive public image of

education, schools, teachers and a positive environment for learning, acquiring education and gaining qualifications (p. 37). The authors cited caution that reforming the system of education focusing solely on increasing the efficiency of transmitting or acquiring knowledge, without caring about the quality of the social learning environment, will contribute to the intensification of competition, passivity and deepening social erosion (p. 39).

The authors of the „Poland 2050 Report „call for an overall change of the educational system as a prerequisite for the further development of Poland. For Z. Kwieciński, it is surprising for two reasons, i.e. because of the total marginalization of the role of education in the transformation of Poland in public discourse and because of the condition of education itself (2013, p. 20). Consequently, the same author rhetorically asks: does the idea that a transformed educational system would contribute to the acceleration of the development of our country, not remind us, regarding the degree of difficulty, of Baron von Münchhausen's method, who supposedly saved himself from drowning in a swamp by pulling out his own hair? Is this kind of an aporia not a problem without a solution? (p. 21). At the same time, he notes that „the very problem of the direction of changes in the system of education in the intellectual sense is not as difficult as is the issue of the national strategy of their implementation, socially agreed upon and consistently implemented for several years” (p. 22).

According to Z. Kwieciński, the aim of education should be to support each individual in achieving autonomy in their adulthood: „Autonomous man is an independent subject of reflection on himself, the world and culture, who can effectively deal not only with his own prosperous maintenance, but can collaborate with others and work together for the common good, resolve moral dilemmas and problems of his own and of the communities in which he lives, is an active participant and co-creator of culture, and can continually learn and work on his own development” (ibid.).

The distance between our country and the most developed European countries is large, and the issues involved are very complex. Until recently, many of these barriers were not of particular importance, because the competitiveness of the Polish economy was based on such advantages as low labour costs, a large market, the location in the centre of Europe. Knowledge-based society and economy require strengthening educational competences understood not as technical efficiency of learning, or reading with understanding, but as a cultural competence inherent in the process of developing identity (Jurgiel-Aleksander, p. 125). The basis of this process is participation in formal, non-formal and informal education throughout one's whole life, because it determines social activity, career development, and translates into the quality of life.

## Social competences in the Polish Qualifications Framework

The Polish Qualifications Framework developed in response to the recommendations of the Council of Europe of 2008 is seen as a tool for reforming education in Poland at all levels. The core curriculum of general education has been changed, modular education corresponding to professional qualifications in vocational training is being introduced, standards of education have been abandoned in higher education, the national register of qualifications that will enable validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning throughout the whole life is being developed at the same time. Stakeholders are involved in working on the changes in educational policy, a broad disseminating action is being conducted regarding the results of public consultations and actions taken. In spite of this, this large-scale educational reform is located on the margin of social and political discourse, and is seen by teachers as another bureaucratic necessity; there is no will to engage in constructive criticism and to penetrate the meaning of this change, yet another change. The Polish approach to change in education is dominated by subordination to the needs of the economy and the labour market, and by the policy of performance and quality measured by test scores in schools or, in higher education, by points for scientific activity, taken over from this sphere of social life. This is at odds with the pedagogical demands of sustainable development of adaptive, emancipatory and critical competences in an environment of high culture of social relations. The situation of absence of a socially agreed and commonly accepted educational direction of change does not serve well the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, where also advantages can be noticed: a greater awareness of the objectives of education expressed in the language of learning outcomes, emphasizing the activeness of the learner in the place of learning, indicating competences as a separate category of learning outcomes, promoting lifelong learning.

In my further deliberations I shall focus on the pedagogical interpretations and expectations related to social competences in the Polish Qualifications Framework.

The concept of social competences, although widely known and used in the theory and practice of many areas of social and economic life, brings a number of concerns together with an attempt to define it. Where do they come from? At the outset, I will turn the reader's attention to the holistic, contextual and interdisciplinary nature of this concept.

Both the concept of competences and its attribute – *social*, contain a number of components that relate to both a person and their functioning in the world; that is why, perceiving and understanding them requires a holistic approach that takes into account different scientific perspectives and the diversity and variability of the contexts in which they are developed and used, which creates natural interpretation problems. Since all walks of life are areas of

shaping social competences, a number of scientific disciplines, including psychology, political science, economics and education are involved in their examination.

The contemporary political and educational debate in Poland, however, has been dominated by the economic (neo-liberal) point of view also in the interpretation of social competences, which other scientific disciplines have succumbed to, focusing in their reflection, research and recommendations on adaptive competences, which enable one to operate effectively and efficiently, to find one's place on the labour market, and to be entrepreneurial and communicative. **Emancipatory competences**, allowing the understanding of social reality, making choices and acting with the awareness of the consequences of those choices (e.g., an awareness of social roles, and willingness to act in the public interest), **and critical ones**, allowing the perception of the reasons legitimizing one's own actions and social practice, enabling an understanding of one's own situation and the contexts in which creative, independent, and ethical actions occur, **have remained on the margin of this discourse.**

The principle of sustainable development of all types of competences as effects of the implementation, by educational institutions, of the basic functions of education, i.e. adaptive, emancipatory and critical, was adopted in the „Educational Functions of Universities in the Light of the Requirements of the European and National Qualifications Frameworks” project accompanying the implementation of national qualifications frameworks (Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2012). The consistent and conscious realization of these functions and the development of competences deriving from them is supposed to contribute towards building the Polish developmental capital, based on post-materialist values such as, among others, free expression and self-realization, the pursuit of happiness and quality of life, environmental protection, women's rights and participation in public life. In the Polish Qualifications Framework, emphasis is placed on the development of social competences due to the specific needs of Poland and Polish people in this area. They arise both from everyday observation and a scientific diagnosis of the areas that make up social capital, i.e. deficits in the fields of social trust, the level of civic activity, the structure of non-governmental organizations, cultural and creative potential, as well as the attitudes and values pursued (Social Capital Development Strategy in 2011 – 2020).

The definition of a social competence as „the ability to shape one's own development and autonomous and responsible participation in professional and social life, including the ethical context of one's conduct” (Reference Report, p. 91) adopted in the Polish Qualifications Framework is consistent with the Recommendation of the European Parliament of 23 April 2008 and captures the meaning of the entries listed in the EQF. It is the starting point for working on their realization in educational practice at various levels of education (Table 2).

Table 2. The universal characteristics of social competences in the PQF

<b>Social competences in the Polish Qualifications Framework</b>	
Level	is ready to:
1.	respect the obligations arising from membership in various communities; act and collaborate under direct supervision in organized conditions; evaluate one's own actions and take responsibility for their direct effects
2.	undertake the obligations arising from membership in various communities; act and collaborate under direct supervision in organized conditions; evaluate the actions in which they take part and assume responsibility for their direct effects
3.	belong to communities of all kinds; function in various social roles and undertake basic obligations arising therefrom; act partially independently and co-operate in organized conditions; evaluate one's own and team actions, assume responsibility for the consequences of these actions
4.	assume responsibility relating to participation in various communities and functioning in various social roles; autonomously act and collaborate in organized conditions; evaluate one's own actions and those of other person's under their management; assume responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions and those of other person's under their management
5.	undertake basic social and professional duties, their evaluation and interpretation; act and collaborate independently with others in organized conditions; manage a small team in organized conditions; evaluate one's own actions and those of other people or teams, who are managed by them; take responsibility for the consequences of these actions
6.	cultivate and disseminate examples of good practice in the workplace and outside; make decisions autonomously; critically evaluate one's own activities, the activities of teams which they manage, and the organizations in which they participate; take responsibility for the consequences of these actions
7.	create and develop models of good practice in the workplace and living environment; undertake initiatives; critically evaluate themselves, teams and organizations in which they participate; lead a group and take responsibility for it
8.	conduct independent research enlarging the existing scientific and creative achievements; take on challenges in the professional and public spheres allowing for their ethical dimension, responsibility for their consequences, and shaping patterns of proper conduct in such situations

Source: Reference Report, Warsaw 2013, p. 37  
 [http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/images/download/Publikacje/Raport\_referencyjny\_PL.pdf; Retrieved on 08.03.2014]

The key concepts developed in the context of social competences at all levels and within are the following: identity (participation, sense of responsibility, conduct), collaboration (teamwork, operating conditions, leadership), and responsibility (consequences of one's own actions and those of a team, and their evaluation) (Ibid. p. 22). Politicians expect quick results and benefits for the economy, educators are aware of fulfilling the conditions necessary on the road of their development, first of all: teachers and the learning environment, characterized by what we want to develop. And it is with this that we have the biggest problem in Poland.

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### **Polityka edukacyjna i podejście do kompetencji w Polskiej Ramie Kwalifikacji dla uczenia się przez całe życie**

**Słowa kluczowe:** Europejska/Polska Rama Kwalifikacji, polityka edukacyjna, kompetencje społeczne, uczenie się przez całe życie

**Streszczenie:** Wdrażanie zmian w systemie edukacji wynikających z przyjęcia Europejskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji stało się przyczynkiem do społeczno-politycznej i naukowej debaty na temat celów i uwarunkowań polityki oświatowej w Polsce. Uznano, że głównymi przeszkodami rozwoju cywilizacyjnego Polski są bariery kulturowo-historyczne, a czynnikiem pozytywnej zmiany mają być kompetencje społeczne, które będą budować kapitał społeczny Polaków. W artykule zwrócono uwagę na holistyczny, kontekstualny i interdyscyplinarny charakter kompetencji, szczególnie znaczenie kompetencji społecznych o charakterze emancypacyjnym i krytycznym oraz niezbędne warunki do ich rozwoju: nauczycieli i środowisko uczenia się charakteryzujących się tym, co jest celem edukacji.

**Bildungspolitik und Kompetenzansatz im Polnischen Qualifikationsrahmen  
für lebenslanges Lernen**

**Schlüsselwörter:** Europäische/Polnische Qualifikationsrahmen, Bildungspolitik, Sozialkompetenz, lebenslanges Lernen

**Zusammenfassung:** Die Umsetzung der Veränderungen im Bildungssystem, die von der Annahme der Europäischen Qualifikationsrahmen resultierte, war ein Beitrag zur gesellschaftspolitischen und wissenschaftlichen Diskussion über die Ziele und Bedingungen der Bildungspolitik in Polen. Es wurde festgestellt, dass die größten Hindernisse für die weitere Entwicklung Polens kulturhistorische Barrieren sind. Der Faktor der positiven Veränderung sind Sozialkompetenzen, die das Sozialkapital Polens aufbauen können. Der Artikel weist auf den ganzheitlichen, kontextbezogenen und interdisziplinären Charakter der Kompetenz hin. Besondere Bedeutung haben emanzipatorische und kritische Sozialkompetenz sowie notwendige Bedingungen für ihre Entwicklung: Lehrer und Lernumfeld, die dadurch gekennzeichnet, ist was der Zweck der Bildung ist.

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