

**Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

**THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN INTEGRATING THE LOW-  
EDUCATED IN THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAIN REGION**

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## 1. Problem statement

Knowledge, learning, the accessibility of education and training, the quality of education all affect regional competitiveness and economic development (*Enyedi, 1996; Lengyel, 2012*). As a result, ensuring the conditions necessary for knowledge-based economy and society is of high priority nowadays. Human capital investment is highly valued (*Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961*), life long learning (LLL) and improving the competencies necessary for LLL are prioritized (*Commission, 2008; Kálmán, 2010*). Related to all of the above, the role and necessity of adult education has become central. Adult education may ensure the correction of formal education deficiencies, may complement inadequate knowledge and provide training and re-training (*Benő, 1996; Mayer, 2000*), which is essential for adapting to rapidly changing economic and technological conditions. As a result, adult education contributes to the improvement of individuals' labour market position and social status (*Varga, 2006*) and affects regional economic and social processes (*Commission, 2008; Csoma, 2005*).

Improving knowledge-based economy and competitiveness has become a priority in Hungary as well, especially in disadvantaged regions. One main reason of reproducing inequalities is that education occurs at a low quality and in limited scope (*Havas, 2008*). There are tremendous differences among regions per the quality and efficiency of education and the current system of education conserves regional inequalities rather than reducing those.

Among all regions in Hungary, the Northern Great Plain region is at a disadvantage in many respects but there are significant differences within the region with regard to schooling. The education level of the population in the region falls behind the country average (*KSH, 2013a; KSH, 2013b*) – and mainly as a result of this – the region's labour market status is much less favourable regarding employment and unemployment indicators than the country average (*Baranyi, 2002; Csoba- Jász, 2011; Fazekas- Scharle, 2012; Horváth- Szaló, 2003; Kertesi-Köllő, 1998; Kovách, 2012; KSH, 2012a; KSH 2012b; Lőcsei, 2010*).

Social status is fundamentally determined by labour market position, whose background is provided by education level – one of the most important factors – and vocational qualifications. Employers' expectations change with the increase of education levels, jobs previously not requiring qualifications are now fulfilled by more

educated employees. This correlates with the low employment rates in Hungary, the employment of low-educated people (lacking GCSE) is extremely low as compared to international data. The employment rate of people with ISCED 2 or below education is 37.7% in Hungary while the European average exceeds 53% (*Eurostat, 2012*).

Besides, the structure of non-qualified people is changing as well. There are more employees from disadvantaged background that do not possess the minimal competencies required by employers, thus they are practically excluded from the labour market (*Köllő, 2009; Óry, 2005; Varga, 2006*). Labour market changes correlate with the increasing role of competencies. Today, adequate schooling, vocational qualifications and experience are not enough to fulfil positions. Due to the rapidly changing labour conditions – as a result of development – there is a growing demand for quickly adapting, improvable, constantly re-trainable workforce, besides the expectations for vocational qualifications.

In the case of marginalised social groups however, the attainment of qualifications, the improvement of competencies are not the results of a linear study path but there are numerous braking points, shorter-longer pauses. To catch up missed possibilities a number of adult education forms have emerged and transformed recently that enable people to gain capitals necessary for labour market and social integration. However, the accessibility of such forms of education in disadvantaged regions is limited as compared to the needs (*ÁSz, 2010; Halmos, 2005*).

In relation to educational situations, both the individual choices, preferences and decisions and the contextual, social conditions, disadvantages – that shape individuals' actions – play important roles. Social structures, the institutions embedded in those and individuals are strongly related to one another, which can be considered as a separate unit that shapes social relations (*Giddens, 1984*). Joining adult education may be pressure or possibility with promising future for marginalised youths and adults. They follow different patterns when judging the opportunity-creating function of adult education, its role in labour market and social integration and also, they follow various motivations when joining adult education and choosing training forms. In many cases – due to the lack of motivation or possibilities – those people in certain regions and social groups stay away from adult education where it would be most needed (*Commission, 2008; Köllő, 2009; Varga, 2006*). This possibly explains the fact that in Hungary, especially in disadvantaged regions, the ratio of adult education utilization is very low, which might lead to deficiencies that will be impossible to reduce.

The education forms provided limitedly as compared to the needs are not likely to achieve success uniformly. Studies analysing the success and efficiency of adult education have found that training programs contribute minimally to labour market/social integration and in most cases they mean a “parking space” or income-gaining activity – via training support – in regions with high unemployment rates (*Csoba 2010; Csoba- Nagy- Szabó, 2010; Halmos, 2005*).

## **2. Research goals**

In this thesis we examined the role of adult education in labour market and social integration and its possible contribution to regional economic development. Low educated employees (lacking GCSE) served as our target group whose employment is very difficult in post-industrial societies that demand high education and qualification levels. Adult education is not only a matter of economy and labour market but affects social equality, cultural integration and personality development as well. These people falling behind in terms of education, qualifications, skills and abilities might be excluded from society. However, adult education might serve as an antidote against exclusion and a tool for social inclusion as successful adult education programmes positively impact not only welfare and employment indicators but health care indices as well. It is characteristic to labour markets (too) that without external intervention, disadvantages cumulate, the low-educated and people with other disadvantages are underrepresented in adult education (*Pulay, 2009*).

Our aim was to examine the degree to which people in the Northern Great Plain region in Hungary with no GCSEs participate in adult education and whether they benefit from participation in various forms of training. If yes, we explored what these advantages are and on what fields and also, what positive effects are shown by trainings short-term and long-term. Is non-formal adult education able to overcome disadvantages, help labour market integration, that is, compensate for low education (output indicator: is the number of training participants growing?) and the deficiencies resulting from that (achievement indicator: can they utilise the newly acquired qualification?)?

With regard to adult education, we know much about the input, the content and quantity of training, accredited institutions and trainers, the trainees but we know much less about trainees dropped out, abstainers, the reasons for low participation rates: financial, vocational, human or other or the potential explanatory conflicts. By

analysing the databases available so far, we have limited information on what happens after the successful completion of adult education programmes (for an impact study on labour market trainings see *Galasi et al., 2007*, quoted by *Galasi-Nagy, 2012*; and *Csoba-Nagy, 2011*), in most cases we only have the number of the graduated. We have much less information on whether the trainees could find jobs with their new qualifications or the degree to which their status improved as compared to prior the trainings and the new certificates. Besides, it is also a question, which forms of adult education, among what target groups and training programmes are the most efficient.

Research outcomes usually imply that we have no information on outcomes and results, as there are not such data potentially. Numerous data show that where there is no workforce demand, there is no positive impact of trainings on employment. As our research involves the Northern Great Plain region, whose human development index is the second lowest in Hungary (*Smahó, 2010*) with possibly the largest gap between labour market supply and demand (*Polonkai, 2004*), we primarily focus on the contextual effect of the region.

Sociological analyses so far involved training participants, from the inside and examined adult education from an educational, pedagogical, education-systemic perspective. Our research however focused on low-educated people by analysing their labour conditions, income, consumption and living conditions to learn what adult education means for participants as compared to non-participants.

As most studies focus on trainings and not the participants, the novelty of our research is that – by concentrating on participants – we may analyse various trainings and qualifications in a cumulative way and can measure the correlation of different training forms. An important element of our investigation is that we not only focus on some adult education forms (for example, labour market trainings) but we included all general and special training that participants began. Such a wide content analysis of adult education is missing from many studies and most examinations tend to involve vocational trainings only.

### **3. Hypotheses**

Numerous factors are necessary for adult education to fulfil its integrating role among disadvantaged groups. Besides a synthesis of the academic literature, we analysed the opinion of the population living in the Northern Great Plain region with no GCSEs on adult education, thus we focused on the individuals. In our empirical study we examined

the participants of adult education and compared the socio-demographic and socio-cultural background, qualifications and competencies of participants and non-participants. Furthermore, we analysed the features of participation (form of training, reason and aim of participation) and the advantages of qualifications gained for participants.

Of the conditions influencing participation in trainings, we examined individual factors (time spent with studying and work, previous experiences in adult education). We also focused on participants' educational level as on the one hand, qualifications affect individuals' employment status, social status and on the other hand, participation in adult education may be influenced by whether individuals possess the knowledge and qualifications necessary for entrance. Besides, we also examined participants' internal and external motivation for partaking as an internal factor.

On the other hand, we studied external conditions (such as parental education level) as research on educational inequalities had proved as early as the 70s that family background and parental education levels determine schooling (*Csákó-Liskó, 1978; Ferge, 1976; Gázsó, 1971*). Among external factors we primarily focus on the relation of settlements (type, size, sub-regional development level) and participation in adult education as the Hungarian settlement structure significantly differentiates accessible chances at all levels of schooling (*Gázsó, 1999*).

Based on academic literature and our experiences, we formed the following hypotheses regarding the participation of people living in the Northern Great Plain region with no GCSEs in adult education:

H1: we suppose that individuals' education level and labour market status influence their participation in adult education. We presume that the higher their education level is (vocational education), the more they tend to learn as adult, too, as compared to those that have primary education level or below. As a result of our hypothesis, we think that counter-selection occurs in adult education, not the lowest-educated people from the most disadvantaged background learn, thus adult education strengthens the qualification inequalities of formal education. Furthermore, we think that inactive persons participate in adult education less than employed or job-seeking persons. As the majority of the most disadvantaged people do not join adult education, the currently organised adult education in the examined region does not reduce disadvantages among various social groups but increases those.

- H2: The majority of the examined target group is motivated by gaining income to participate in adult education and only the minority is driven by a potentially more beneficial labour market position. We think that one group of participating adults chooses trainings directly to get or change jobs. Furthermore, we suppose that unemployed people in the region primarily participate in trainings that are organized by Labour Offices. For such clients, adult education is usually a form of unemployment benefit, that is, a form of income-gaining (re-training support), a part of social security system. Among these people, presumably there are more multiple training enrolments that join any programmes without choosing the right ones for them. As the system is counter-selective, that is, active labour market measures target those that potentially testify successful outcome, we suppose that this group included more educated people.
- H3: Adult education contributes less to labour market integration, thus it partially helps social integration and reduces exclusion. We believe that completed trainings and gained qualifications do not compensate the disadvantages resulting from education and adult education supply does not consider labour market demand, low-educated people that gained qualifications in adult education may find employment in very low ratios. Qualifications gained are not efficient help in finding jobs or benefit on the labour market. Consequently we assume that adult education serves as a “parking slot” for a wide range of participants, does not mean real labour market integration and results in social mobility only for a small group living under better conditions anyway. We think that people in the “parking slot” are unemployed and possibly will not utilise their qualifications gained in adult education.
- H4: the current system of adult education does not balance but deepens regional inequalities. We assume that the more favourable a region is (GDP per capita, employment and unemployment ratios) the wider the training supply is and the better the workforce is (education, abilities, work experience) the more active is participation in trainings. However, in an unfavourable labour market position, participants are less motivated. In disadvantaged regions, external factors are not motivating, investment in adult education less worth it as there are less jobs, the

income gap between qualified and low-educated people is small, subsistence constraints are strong, they have to work more hours for the same unit wage, thus they have less free time. We suppose that the most disadvantaged people are excluded from adult education even among the low-educated population in a disadvantage region. We believe that people in the more developed Northern Great Plain sub-regions or in bigger settlements have more opportunities to join various trainings, thus the ratio of adult education participants is higher among them. As a result, measures supposed to solve regional disadvantages are dysfunctional because of the internal logic of the system.

#### **4. Theoretical background, research methods, and main research outcomes**

To test our hypotheses and ensure the success of our empirical research we offer a detailed review on territorial differences and inequalities in Hungary, the relevant characteristics of the Northern Great Plain region from a topic-oriented approach. We concluded that labour market chances and its differences per education levels in the region have not substantially changed since the years of systemic change. The region falls behind the national economic, education and employment averages (*Ábrahám–Kertesi, 1996; Baranyi, 2002; Baranyi, 2008; Baranyi, 2009a; Baranyi, 2009b; Baranyi, 2013; Faluvégi et al., 2005; Kertesi–Köllő 1998; KSH, 2013a; Lőcsei 2010*). Furthermore, we studied the role of education and qualification in improving employment status and found that qualification and competencies are key criteria for regional competitiveness (*Enyedi, 1996; Rechnitzer, 2008; Romer, 1990*). However, the majority of the population in the given region are low educated, thus we outlined the presumptive social factors, the effect of education expansion and the relation of qualifications and competencies to employment. A major reason of low educated persons' exclusion from labour market is that their level of knowledge and skills do not reach the level that economy demands from employees (*Köllő, 2009; Óry, 2005; Varga, 2006*).

From the perspective of analysing national and international processes, we summarized the concepts, tendencies, forms and problems related to adult education as a tool for compensating for the deficiencies of formal education and ensuring adaptation to the changing environments. We concluded that uneducated employees are able to study further or change and re-train to professions to a lesser degree (*Csoba, 2008*;

*Csoba, 2010; Galasi-Tímár-Varga, 2001; Kozma, 2006; Pulay, 2009; Szöllősi, 1997; Tót, 1997).*

Besides a synthesis of the academic literature, we analysed the opinion of the population living in the Northern Great Plain region with no GCSEs on adult education. Our hypotheses were tested in the confines of the INNOTÁRS (Willingness to work and job-seeking in low-employment segments) research project that was lead by Balázs Krémer at the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Debrecen and was supported by the National Institute of research and Technology (INNOTARS\_08-1-2008-0004). The general aim of the project was to answer the following question in a complex way: why is low-employment segment low level (and consequently, the employment of the entire population) if the opposite should follow from all conditions of the economic structure? The research project thus aimed to investigate the reasons for and characteristics of the low employment of low-educated people (*A projektről röviden, 2009*).

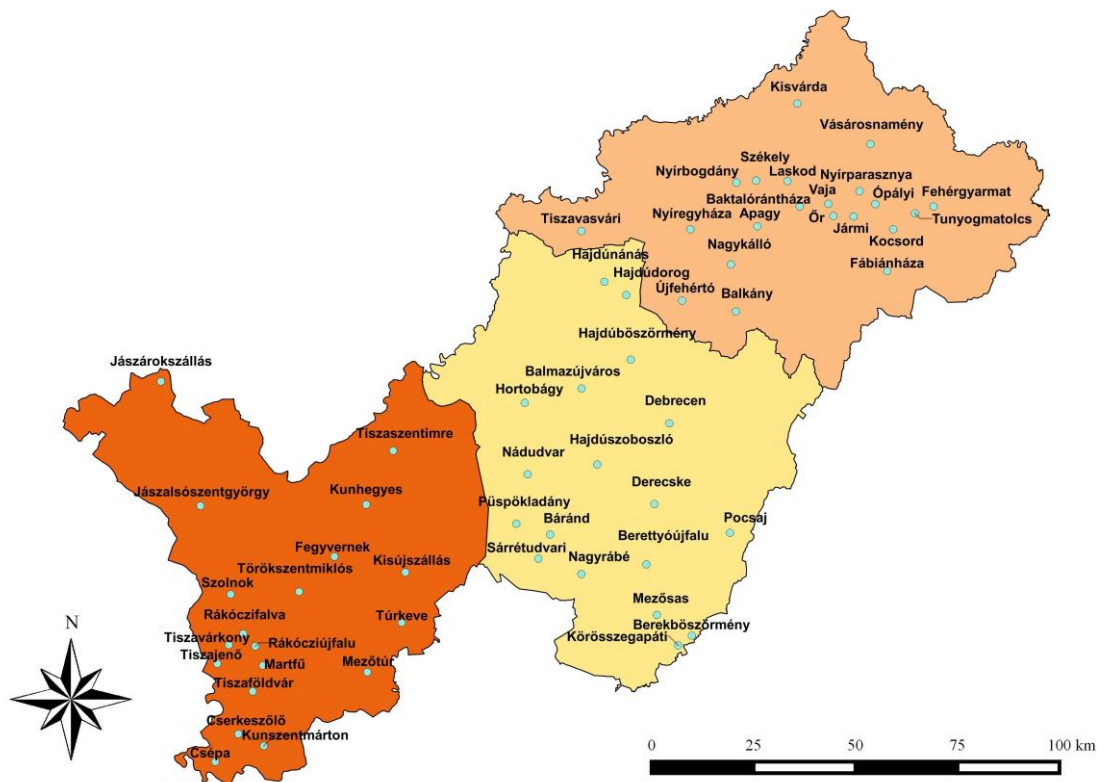
The employee sub-project involved a questionnaire survey of the 16-24-year-old population that was living in the Northern Great Plain region and had no GCSEs. The aim was to collect 1000 responses. The questionnaire measured entire lifeworlds from work strategies, the variability of providing living, potential school failures to the quality and quantity indicators of participation in adult education. The research especially focused on school career paths, including formal and non-formal trainings and the correlation of these with labour career paths. The research also aimed to study the people with no GCSES that participate in non-formal education, their aims and reasons for doing such trainings, their training choices and the benefits those granted for them upon successful completion.

We analysed adult education in the following dimensions:

- The socio-demographic and socio-cultural background of the low-educated people involved: gender and age cohort distribution, residence, parental education level, participation in formal education, competencies
- Characteristics of participation in adult education: trainings, number of qualifications, training forms, entrance to trainings, initiating participation in trainings, reasons for participation, length of trainings, costs of trainings, reasons for drop-out
- Utilisation of qualifications and knowledge gained: resulting benefits, employment related to qualifications

The statistical relevance of data is ensured by random sampling. We selected the settlements in the sample (Figure 1) with a software (Telebank) randomly. We defined the number of questionnaires per settlement so that it is proportionate to the number of 16-64-year-old population with no GCSEs living in the various-sized settlements of the three counties in the region.

Figure 1: Locations of the questionnaire survey, 2010



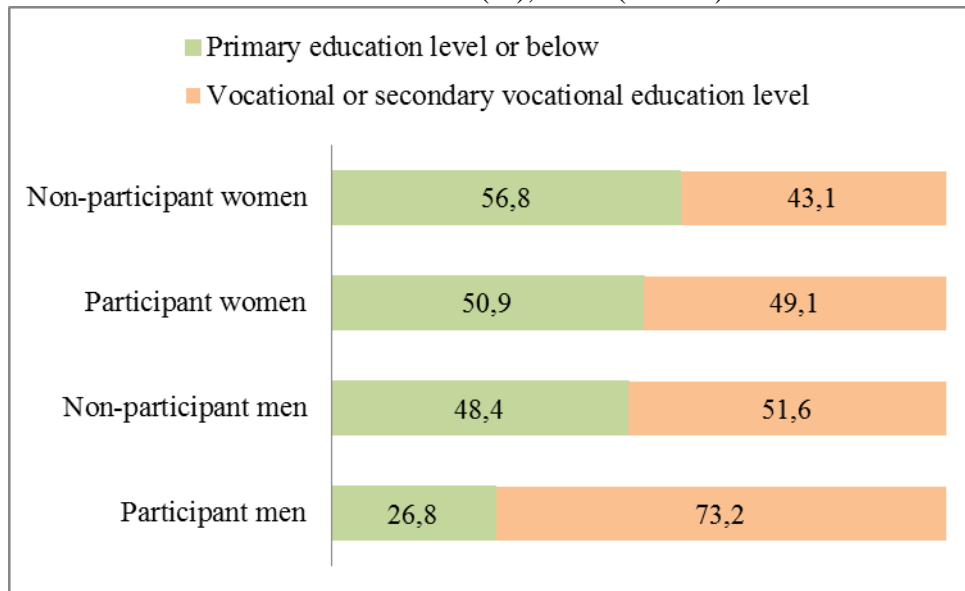
Source: INNOTÁRS data, own editing

To be able to reach our respondents, we chose the method of “random walking” to find households with research-methodological expert assistance and complemented it with the year-of-birth method.

Less than half of our respondents (44.9%) from the region with no GCSEs have ever participated in adult education. Those that are in a more advantageous position within the group, that is, live in bigger, more developed settlements, have higher education levels (vocational school) (Figure 2) and higher levels of competencies and more work experience take part in trainings. Low educated women (women: 34.6%, men: 55.4%) (Figure 2) or youths (aged 20-24 years: 26.7%) are less represented among adult learners. Territorial disadvantages are mirrored by participation in adult education. The more disadvantaged regions start the least adult education trainings, thus the lowest

adult education ratios are found among the most disadvantaged sub-regions and municipalities (municipality: 34.7%, county city: 48.8%, other town: 50.2%).

Figure 2: Education levels of adult education participant and non-participant women and men (%), 2010 (N=991)

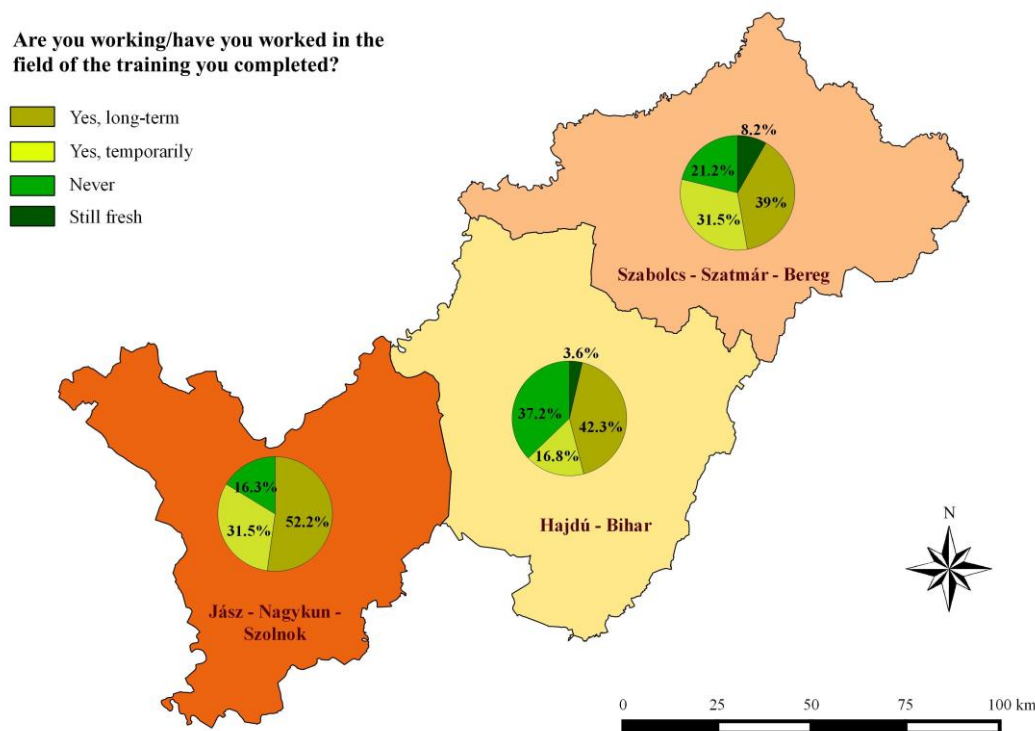


Source: INNOTÁRS data, own calculation and editing

The primary motivation for low educated persons for participation in adult education is attaining better positions at the labour market and the ratio of income gaining as a major motivation factor is small. Most adults earned qualifications because they considered them to be beneficial or necessary for their employment (45.6%) and the ratio of those who were motivated by the potential of gaining income (5.9%) is negligible. Despite our hypothesis, only a slight number of trainings are organized by labour offices (12.3%) but the ratio of partaking low educated (primary education level) job-seekers in these trainings were unexpectedly high (54.1%).

Participants could utilise their qualifications, knowledge, competencies at the labour market and everyday life to a huge degree. In total, only a quarter of participants (26.3%) have never used their adult education qualifications at the labour market, a quarter of them did so occasionally (24.4%), almost half of them used their training qualification long-term as well (44.6%). Employment is heavily influenced by age, the sub-regional level of development, the field of training, the method of entering trainings and the reasons for participation. Primarily those were able to work with their newly gained qualifications that consciously took part in trainings.

Figure 3: The distribution of people that found jobs with the qualifications gained in adult education per county (%), 2010 (N=445)



Source: INNOTÁRS data, own calculation and editing

When analysing regional inequalities we found that people in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county could utilise their qualifications in the labour market (83.7%) the most and participants from Hajdú-Bihar county the least (59.1%) (Figure 3). The ratio of those that worked with their qualifications long-term is the lowest in county cities (36.4%), the same ratio is much higher in other towns (48.4%) and municipalities (45.7%). If we add up temporary and permanent employment ratios with the newly gained qualifications, those from county cities are in the worst position (60.4%) again. Employment chances are the lowest in the more developed settlements, while persons in the most disadvantageous settlements could work with their qualifications in the longer run.

To sum up, adults with better backgrounds, higher education and motivation levels take part in adult education whose better labour market status is already given without adult education as well. However, as a result of adult education participants – independent of their background and qualification – grow and improve, thus they succeed easier in the world of work, especially if they deliberately selected the trainings.

Furthermore, settlement is a factor that determines both participation and employment. Consequently, we have proven that that exist significant differences within a region with relation to the size and level of development among settlements. The majority of those participants that have never worked with their qualifications gained live in county cities, while participation in trainings here is so much higher than in municipalities where participants were able to use their qualification long-term as well. Similarly, the rate of partakers from the most disadvantaged settlements is the lowest while these are the people that could utilise their qualifications on the longer run. There are more opportunities for trainings in bigger, more developed settlements, where population is bigger as well but employment chances are smaller. Consequently, the rate of participation in trainings is higher in bigger towns and cities but its utilisation is smaller, while participation ratios are smaller in disadvantaged settlements while their utilisation is higher.

## **5. Conclusions, recommendations**

Based on the academic literature, previous research outcomes, database analyses and our own research outcomes we found the following regarding the participation of the population living in the Northern Great Plain region with no GCSEs in adult education and its correlation with the labour market:

*H1: Our hypothesis is verified, the most disadvantaged people with primary education level or below and the inactive respondents are less likely to participate in adult education.*

We found that both the socio-demographic and the socio-cultural background determine participation in adult education. Participation strongly correlates with individuals' gender, age, residence, parental education level and the type of settlement and neighbourhood they lived in when they were children. Besides, participation in adult education is influenced by individuals' education level, qualifications, competencies, the ratio of time spent with legal employment or inactivity as proportionate to active age. Of all these factors, gender, education, residence and employment/inactivity in the active age range were the most influencing.

Among low-educated adults, primarily men learn. Thus women with no GCSEs are at a disadvantage in both the formal and non-formal forms of education, have lower education levels, mainly primary education and are underrepresented in adult education.

Participants in adult education were more successful at primary school, they were more likely to love school, receive rewards, had less difficulties (failure) and found it less difficult to meet expectations than non-participants, and furthermore, they attained higher qualifications and more competencies. The higher education levels are, the higher the participation rates in adult education and the number of qualifications gained are. The highest participation rate in adult education is shown by men with vocational or secondary vocational education. Besides, they tend to begin higher-level trainings which implies their willingness to learn, though they could not complete the training they began, dropped-out trainees are still motivated to gain new (higher-level) qualifications, which is supported by higher participation rates in adult education.

Participation rates in adult education are lower among those that have never worked and are much higher among respondents that have worked 75% of their active age. This is strongly related to the time spent inactive and participation in trainings. The more time has been spent inactive, the lower the participation rates in adult education are, thus for example, if people have been inactive in 50% of their active age are one-fifth more likely to participate in trainings as compared to those that have not been inactive. At the same time, respondents that have spent more than 50% of their active age unemployed are three times more likely to participate in trainings as compared to people that have never been unemployed.

All these support our hypothesis that in the examined target group, people with better social and labour market status participate in adult education, thus it does not reduce but increase disadvantages.

*H2: Our hypothesis is false as low-educated people that participate in adult education are motivated by the attainment of more beneficial labour market positions and the ratio of those that learn to gain income is low. This is related to the low participation rate in labour market trainings that provide income.*

Most adults (almost half of the respondents) gained qualifications because they thought that those will be beneficial/necessary for their future employment. Labour market motivation was dominant both in general and vocational trainings. This phenomenon is even stronger among those that have participated in multiple trainings. Another reason for participation in education was that employers obliged them to learn or it was necessary “for life”. The ratio of hobby learners or those that learnt for interest is lower but the rate of income-motivated respondents is even lower, only 6%.

Contrary to our expectations, trainings organized by Labour Offices are of lower ratio among our respondents, only 12% and not all of these participants were motivated by income-gaining here either. We could not verify our hypothesis either that more educated, that is, easily educable people are trained primarily as the ratio of people with primary education level was higher (one-fifth) than we expected and participants with vocational or secondary vocational education was lower (one-tenth) in trainings.

*H3: Our hypothesis is false. According to our respondents, adult education develops professional competencies, the majority of participants utilises their knowledge, qualifications gained in life, job-seeking and most of them had found employment due to those qualifications.*

Due to trainings, participants' professional competencies improved. Professional competencies had higher mean values in participants' self-assessment than in their non-participants fellows' and the possession of all competencies listed is twice among participants than non-participants.

More than half of the participants answered that they utilised their knowledge gained in trainings during work or job-seeking, one-fourth of them responded that they benefited from that qualification during everyday life. Knowledge and competencies learnt in general trainings are used in private life and vocational trainings are better utilised at work.

Participants in adult education have a huge advantage at the labour market. We have proven that they have better labour market positions than non-participants. In sum 69% of participants have worked with their qualifications gained with 44.6% long-term. Among multiple qualification owners the ratio is higher for long-term employment in the field of the training completed.

Based on respondents' answers, and the change in their lives, status and labour market positions we have verified that adult education develops participants' competencies and offers knowledge and qualification that can be utilised in private life, job-seeking or at work.

*H4: Our hypothesis is verified, among the people living in the Northern Great Plain region with no GCSEs, individuals from less developed, smaller settlements are less likely to participate in adult education.*

People living in municipalities participated in adult education in a lower ratio than respondents in county cities or other towns. The more population settlements have, the more people participate in adult education and individuals living in settlements bigger than 10000 citizens are primary participants. With regard to the developmental level of sub-regions, participation rate in adult education is the lowest among people living in the most disadvantaged settlements. All these support our hypothesis that trainings do not concentrate to locations where they would be most needed. Furthermore, we found that residence is also determining within the settlement, more than half of the people living in good neighbourhoods participated in non-formal education while this ratio was only one-third among bad neighbourhood inhabitants.

Besides the current residence, childhood neighbourhood is also determinative with regard to life path. Respondents that had lived in the capital city are less likely to participate in trainings, which is followed by past municipality inhabitants, county city citizens and the most likely participants are found among past other town inhabitants. The latter group usually partakes in multiple trainings. Adult education participation is determined by childhood neighbourhood within the settlement factors. More people participated in adult education that had lived in good neighbourhoods while people coming from bad neighbours had one-third less chance to join adult education.

Settlement influences employment besides participation in adult education. The ratio of those that have worked with their qualification long-term is the lowest among county city citizens while this ratio is much higher among other town and municipality inhabitants. The ratio of those that have never worked with their qualifications is the highest among county city people. With regard to the developmental level of sub-regions, people living in more developed settlements have the worst chances for finding jobs. The ratio of those that have never worked with their qualifications is the lowest among citizens of grade 4 (undeveloped) settlements and the ratio of those that worked occasionally or long-term in the field of their qualifications gained is the highest here. People from the most disadvantaged settlements could work long-term with their qualifications gained.

The majority of people that have never worked with their qualifications gained lives in county cities while participation rate in adult education is much higher here than in municipalities where people could find long-term employment with their attained qualifications. Similarly, participation rate in adult education is the lowest among the most disadvantaged settlements but these are the people that worked long-term with

their qualifications gained. Training supply is higher in bigger, more developed settlements where more people live but they find employment more difficult.

All these support our hypothesis on counter-selection, participation rate in programmes is much higher in bigger cities where the utilisation of education is lower and participation rate is lower in smaller, disadvantaged settlements where utilisation is higher. The measures that are supposed to balance regional inequalities are dysfunctional due to the internal logic of the system and until this logic is changed, adult education cannot be efficient in catching up people.

In all, our original hypothesis is proven, based on our analyses we can state that among low-educated people, adult education fulfils its integrating role only partially.

## **6. Novel and original scientific outcomes**

1. This is the first comprehensive empirical examination among low-educated (no GCSE) people on participation in adult education in the Northern Great Plain region.

2. By embedding economic, employment and education-policy perspectives in regional context we follow a new research-methodological approach that is able to track and analyse the role of adult education in labour market and social integration, its potential contribution to regional economic development.

3. It is a new methodological element that all general and special trainings began were involved in the empirical (questionnaire-based) study, we did not select separate forms of adult education, such as labour market trainings. With this approach we could balance the widespread practice of theoretical and applied research that primarily focus on trainings rather than training participants and thus we could ensure the cumulative analysis of different training forms.

4. Contrary to our dissertation, the topic-specific examinations so far have analysed the number and employment ratios of training participants and have focused less on the benefits participants have experienced and whether their employment occurred due to the new qualifications gained.

5. We could verify that counter-selection occurs in adult education, not the people most in need participate in it, not the most disadvantaged, lowest-educated persons are targeted but individuals that are otherwise in a better situation and have higher education level. Adult education opportunities organised in the region do not fulfil their role in creating chances, do not reduce gaps but strengthen the inequalities of formal education further.

6. We found that qualifications gained in adult education are better utilised in smaller settlements with regard to employment. As compared to county city citizens, people living in towns and municipalities have less access to adult education while they could find short- or long-term employment with their qualifications gained.

7. Our analyses clearly proved that the disadvantage-reducing effect of adult education is significant among people that could successfully join trainings. Our study conducted in the Northern Great Plain region found that increased participation in adult education is a rewarding investment and contributes to labour market integration even in a disadvantaged region. Based on the target area of our research we could verify that the more disadvantaged region is involved in adult education and the more success it achieves, the higher its integrating effect is depending on its efficiency.

### ***Practical outcomes***

1. It is not true that in disadvantaged regions, only complex, major fund-consuming development is able to ensure better chances and catch up disadvantages. Rather, individual adult education programmes could integrate marginalised groups, increase equality and improve labour market chances more efficiently.

2. We found that one condition for the competitive development of the region is increasing employment potential and for that it is necessary to widen the range of participants in adult education and reduce entrance levels. This might be achieved for job-seekers by having more training programmes among labour market measures, and for employees by supporting participation in trainings wider (for example, introducing training leave to ensure ample time for participation in trainings). Training material,

methodology and training programmes developed for low-educated people may help them to reduce learning difficulties and overcome barriers.

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