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University Lifelong Learning to Live a Better Life – Continuing Education for Sustainable Quality of Life in Europe

Author: Zuzanna WOJCIECHOWSKA

Institution: Warsaw University

Strand: Wellbeing in a Digital Age

Learning without available patterns. Young adults in the new, digital reality of social life

Contemporary young adults are in a particularly difficult position according to lack of possibility to learn about the surrounding social world from the narration of older generations. The reason of such inconvenient situation is that generations of their parents or grandparents lived in a different social reality, devoid of virtual relations. Nowadays, it is assumed that young people postpone the time of entering adulthood and extend the period of the moratorium. The transition phase between childhood and adulthood lasts longer than it used to in the twentieth century. Referring to Jeffrey Arnett's theory, there can be observed delay by a decade in taking up by young people roles traditionally regarded as specific for adults - professional, marital and parental. Contemporary young adults have to face completely new challenges, that their parents or grandparents did not have to face. Above all, the greatest challenge - also in the context of adult education tasks - is the necessity to live independently in the world of social relations, without the possibility of referring to the experience and knowledge of older generations.

Post-modern reality can be metaphorically seen as mosaic, full of contradictions and shimmering meanings. Young adults are immersed in a continuous stream of information and social interactions, as well as in a stream of media events. Widespread use of social media such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* together with communicators such as *Messenger* or *What's app*, causes the situation that young adults continuously participate in social life - both private and professional, connected with work, without any break. The main reason why they cannot disconnect from social interactions even for a moment seems to be the fear of losing information. The phenomenon of fear, that something will pass them by, got the name FOMO syndrome (*fear of missing out*).

Another contemporary problem becomes the separation of private and professional life, which is a big challenge due to the speed of e-mail, the availability of instant messaging and the ability to conduct a teleconference anywhere, anytime. All these phenomena cause professional work ceases to have any limits or boundaries.

In my research, I attempt to investigate the phenomenon of reversing the perception of knowledge by young adults in comparison to older generations. I am also trying to know how young adults learn to live in a new social world and how do they gain knowledge about interpersonal communication without any available sources or patterns. Among my interests there is also learning within digital communities on the example of closed groups in social media. The whole research project is based in an interpretative paradigm. It is included into the field of qualitative research and has a character of biographical research. The method used during the research are narrative interviews. The research results show mainly the issues essential for Poland, but the subject can be seen in much wider perspective, due to living in a new social world, where virtual communication starts to dominate.