Higher education and adult motivation towards lifelong learning
An empirical analysis of university post-graduates perspectives

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SUMMARY

The increasing role of higher education (HE) in lifelong learning processes seems to be a trend in the global context of the knowledge society. As in many other European countries, the rapid expansion of HE in Portugal in the last decades has resulted from democratisation of access and increase of participation at the tertiary level of education. The Portuguese post-graduate offer at universities has also increased and diversified in recent years, proving that there is a need for post-initial education across the lifespan of individuals. In this article, we intend to discuss some of the results obtained through a survey centred on the educational and professional trajectories of post-graduates from a group of Portuguese universities. We try to understand adult perspectives about learning and discuss the adult motivational dynamics towards their future learning.

Introduction

This article discusses the importance of adult motivation towards lifelong learning processes. We present some of the results obtained through a survey – developed by an interdisciplinary team and financed by the Portuguese government – centred on the educational and professional trajectories of post-graduates from a group of Portuguese universities. We try to understand adult perspectives about learning and especially discuss adult motivational dynamics towards their future learning – in the framework of lifelong learning processes.

We try to understand what types of motivation are more relevant for this group of adults, and the influence of factors such as gender, age and professional activity on the motivational process. We should also like to point out some new challenges that higher education is facing in redefining learning boundaries and reflect on the role, strategies and practices of a provider of multiple and diverse opportunities for adult learning and development.

Lifelong learning and higher education

The knowledge and lifelong learning society

The many different forms of provision, between education, training and leisure (Edwards, 1997) across boundaries, shows the complexity between education, training, work and employment. The policy discourse on lifelong learning – lifelong and lifewide – puts emphasis on learning and learners, and places a bigger emphasis on adult responsibility.

The European Union targeted the year 2010 for building a strong knowledge-based society and economy. The European employment strategy and Member States' political agendas established as a priority investment in lifelong learning activities. European education and training policies keep on stressing the need for raising the population qualification structure, related to economic and social goals, and put emphasis on acquiring qualifications relevant to employment and working life. Lifelong learning is considered as one of the key factors of the knowledge society and economy, and it is considered by the European Commission a crucial element for the transition to 'the knowledge based-society', and an important answer to the challenges of globalisation, competitiveness and employment. The European Commission considers there is a need for comprehensive and coherent strategies for lifelong learning.

However, several studies on lifelong learning and new challenges for education and training systems in European countries point out a need for substantial improvements, specifically regarding adult learning. As summarised by Gordon (2004), there is still considerable progress to be made to broaden access, remove existing barriers, develop new paths and structures to qualifications, and respond to the needs of adult learners.

According to a study carried out by OECD (Pont, 2004), there are many reasons for non-participation in adult education and training: among others, lack of information, time, motivation, incentives, funding. Although not always put forward in many studies, lack of motivation is an important and significant reason. For the author, it is the 'people who have the highest educational attainment levels who feel they would like to participate and who actually do participate more, revealing a close complementarity between initial education and adult learning' (Pont, 2004, p. 35).

There is a lack of studies and research on adult reasons and expectations regarding learning, education and training, especially from a lifelong and lifewide perspective. Their reasons, interests and needs are seldom known in depth, although they play a fundamental role in their demand and participation in education and training activities.

It has been pointed out by several studies that adults' motivation to participate in learning activities – in continuing education and training – are multiple, complex and subject to change (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Nowadays understanding the motivational structure related to adult learning is becoming more and more important, specifically in the knowledge society and lifelong learning society. The relevance of adult learning is widely recognised for equity and social cohesion, democracy, employment and economic development.

Higher education and the knowledge society

The increasing role of higher education institutions in lifelong learning processes seems to be a trend in the global knowledge society. As stressed in the outcomes of the world conference on higher education (WCHE) in 1998, with globalisation, higher education has become recognised as a significant catalyst for social and economic progress due to the creation, dissemination and application of all forms of knowledge (Kearny, in Eggins, 2004).

Higher education has become in recent years an important sector for providers, creating new opportunities for lifelong learning.

In 2004, just over 17 million students were enrolled in tertiary education in EU-27 (ISCED levels 5-6), representing a little more than 15 % of all those enrolled in education in Europe (ISCED levels 0-6) ([1]). If we look at the data on higher education 'in the EU-27, the student population in tertiary education is continuing to rise relatively fast (by over 10 % in 2004 compared to 2001). The growth of enrolments is slowest in ISCED level 5B programmes (3 % between 2001 and 2004, with a net decrease between 2003 and 2004), whereas student enrolments in an advanced research programme (for a doctorate at ISCED 6) increased by over 20 % in three years' (European Commission, 2007).

As in many other European countries, Portugal has witnessed general improvement in the population level of education and training in recent years. Increasing political concern to widen access to HE has been developed in parallel with raising the level of qualifications. However, compared to other countries, it still represents lower levels of education and training qualifications. Nevertheless, the rapid expansion of HE in Portugal in the past two or three decades has democratised access and increased participation at the tertiary level of education. Enrolments in tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-6) as a percentage of the total number of students in the year of 2003/04 is about 18 %, which is slightly above the European average, 16.4 % (European Commission, 2007).

Portuguese post-graduate education at universities has increased and diversified in recent years – namely the masters (*mestrados*) and PhD –, proving there is a need for post-graduate education across the lifespan of individuals.

However, HE institutions are still trying to find their own roles, strategies and practices as providers of multiple and diverse opportunities for adult learning and development.

As sustained by Merriam and Caffarella 1999, p. 45, participation in adult education is largely a voluntary activity, so 'providers of adult education therefore need to know who is participating, why they are participating and what conditions are likely to promote greater participation'.

Nevertheless, as we stated before, there is still a lack of studies on adult learning processes, particularly on adult motivation (reasons, interests and needs) towards lifelong learning – specifically in tertiary education.

([1]) European Commission (2007), *Key data on higher education, Eurydice/Eurostat*, p. 37.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this specific part of research – adult motivations towards lifelong learning – is based on the descriptive Carré model (1998, 2001) on adult motives and orientations towards learning and training activities.

From this model, and based on analysis of our empirical data, we introduce a new concept for adult motives of implication. We raise the hypothesis of creating a new category of reasons that we identify as existential motives, given by adults for participating in lifelong learning processes.

The Carré model on adult orientation and implication on learning and training activities considers two main dimensions: the content of motivation (the motives of implication) and the process of motivation (the dynamics of implication). According to the author, the content of motivation are the reasons acknowledged and given by adults to explain their learning/training choices. Regarding adult motivation, this model considers two main orientation axes: one on the intrinsic/extrinsic orientation, and the other one the orientation towards learning/participation.

The first axis, intrinsic/extrinsic orientation, is theoretically based on the concept (Deci and Ryan, in Carré, 1998) that the main motive to learn is the satisfaction gained by the process of learning itself; the main result of the action is intrinsic to the activity of learning. The extrinsic orientation exists when learning is a means to obtain external goals or results.

The second axis, orientation towards learning/participation separates motivation to acquire learning content (knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.) from motivation to participate, which means the main reason is being present and participating in training activities, independently from the type of knowledge acquired. In this case, participation in learning activities is related to anticipating a result, independent from acquiring knowledge.

According to this model, the intrinsic motives, – the learning process itself is the source of satisfaction and pleasure; the results and the process are interrelated – are the following:

Intrinsic motives

The epistemic motive
Learning and knowledge are a source of satisfaction and pleasure. Motivation is linked to its own content: to learn, acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc. Motivation is linked to the content ('I like everything related to economics', 'I like the intellectual perspective of things'). The emotional dimension is a presence in this type of motive (to like, to love, etc.). And sometimes the pleasure of learning is orientated to the opening of the mind, metacognition development, and the aim is to widen and enrich the spirit.

The socio-emotional motive
Adults are interested in learning/training activities because they want to establish social contacts, to develop new relationships; they want to be integrated into a group, they want to communicate, to reinforce social links. The emotional dimension, the pleasure to be with others is present in this motive.

The hedonic motive
Adults participation in learning activities is also related to the pleasure to participate, but linked to the conditions of the training environment itself, with the materials, the resources, documents, etc. Pleasure is independent from the content of learning.

In the Carré model, the extrinsic motives are those linked to the satisfaction or reward externally obtained from the learning/training process. The process and the results are different and separate. Learning is seen as a means to obtain other goals, which are external to the process. Within this group of motives, we can identify:

Extrinsic motives

The economic motive
Reasons for participation in learning activities are explicitly material: economic advantages (direct or indirect – such as a promotion, or to get a job).

The prescriptive motive
In some cases participation is due to explicit external pressures, such as an obligation or an imposition, coming from an external context. Sometimes there are more subtle pressures, such as the social pressure to conform, influences of hierarchy, and so on.

The derivative motive
The reason for participation is to avoid unpleasant situations or activities; adults prefer to participate in learning/training activities to escape from suffering or boredom at work (such as unhappy environment, routine, lack of professional interest, personal conflicts, etc.).

> **The professional operative motive**
> The reason for learning is related to developing competences, knowledge and skills that are needed for specific professional activities. The aim is to improve professional performance, to anticipate or adapt to changes. Learning is 'a professional tool', an instrumental answer to a professional challenge. It is related to the classical function of continuing training (development of competences).
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> **The personal operative motive**
> Adults learn to get competences, knowledge and skills that are understood as necessary for activities outside the job and working life (such as leisure, family life, associative responsibilities, and so on), but always with a clear goal. Learning is a means to a project, an interest, or to satisfy a specific need.
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> **The identity motive**
> This learning motive is for acquiring competences, knowledge, skills or symbolic recognition to transform or preserve adult identity characteristics. This motive can be understood from the perspective of professional, cultural or social status (to get a diploma, a qualification, to keep or get a position, etc.). It is centred on social image, and is external to economic motives.
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> **The vocational motive**
> Learning is orientated by a logic of professional guidance, carrier management, or getting a job. Adults want to develop competences, knowledge or skills to keep their job, get a new job, or improve their job (they refer to 'career', 'mobility', 'professional future', 'opportunities', and so on.).

As we have already mentioned, the Carré model points out that it is also necessary to understand the process – the dynamics of learning implication –related to the action itself (enrolment and participation in training activities). From the theoretical point of view, this process is based on three dimensions: sense of self-determination, perception of competence and the project (Deci and Ryan, Nuttin, 1980, in Carré, 1998, 2001); understanding the motivational framework of adults results from the links between these three factors ([2]).

According to the model, adult motives are not commonly exclusive, they can be diverse and combined (with a minimum of two), in an 'individual original constellation' and contribute to the construction of 'personal motivation frameworks'. These frameworks try to understand the adult relationship with learning, at a specific moment, and the motivation that orientates the adult towards that learning situation.

([2]) The question used in the questionnaire regarding future learning is only related to adults' reasons to learn in the future; we centred our analysis on the content of motivation.

To understand adults' relationships with learning, it is also important to identify the main obstacles and barriers. From the theoretical point of view, adults barriers to participation in learning activities combine psychological and social factors; interpretation is only possible if we analyse the interaction between structural factors and the individual 'conceptual apparatus' (Rubenson, 1998, in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

According to several authors, we can identify situational and dispositional barriers, and also institutional barriers (Cross, 1991, in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). There are dispositional factors (internal barriers, through attitudes, such as age considered adequate to learn), situational factors (external factors that escape individual control, such as the cost of the fees) and institutional factors (related to practices and procedures that prevent adult participation in learning).

Methodology of the study

The discussion of this paper is empirically based on the results of a research project developed by an interdisciplinary team ([3]) and financed by the Portuguese government, between 2003 and 2006 – 'Project Telos II – Lifelong learning: evaluation of the effects on post-graduates in higher education' centred on the study of the educational and professional trajectories of post-graduates from a group of Portuguese universities. In this paper, we try to understand and discuss the motivational dynamics of this group of adults towards their learning – in the framework of adult lifelong learning processes.

The study aims to characterise the education, training and work trajectories of a group of adults with higher levels of qualification that have obtained a master's degree (*Mestrado*) and/or PhD in the academic years of 1995/96 and 2000/01, in the four universities that participated in the project: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Universidade de Lisboa, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa and Universidade de Aveiro.

The academic and post-graduate services provided us with exhaustive lists of people that finished their post-graduate degrees. From 569 graduates (449 masters and PhD), we contacted 440 post-graduates (343 masters and 97 PhD) and sent them a questionnaire

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[3] The research team was composed of researchers from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia), Universidade Técnica de Lisboa (Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão), Universidade de Lisboa (Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação) and Universidade de Aveiro.

by mail, in 2005. A month and a half later we resent it by mail. This provided us with 145 replies, corresponding to 32.95 % of all recipients, which is within the acceptable limits for this type of survey.

Research continued through different stages and using different instruments of data collection – a questionnaire and interviews to post-graduates and universities post-graduate education coordinators. In the first stage, the research team developed the questionnaire, divided into four main sections: personal and social characteristics; academic trajectory; professional trajectory; evaluation of academic training (⁴).

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of participants: age, gender and formal education

The national sample for our survey consisted of 145 (128 masters and 27 PhD respondents), who finished their post-graduate studies in the years 1995/96 and 2000/01 in the four Portuguese universities mentioned. On gender, 69 respondents were males (47.6 %) and 76 females (52.4 %).

The majority of respondents belonged to the group 25/39 years (49 %), followed by the group 40/54 years (41 %) and those of 55 years and over (10 %).The average was 41 years.

More than half of respondents were married (61.8 %) and the others single (25 %), divorced (9 %) or living together (4.2 %).

At the time of the survey, the formal schooling qualifications were: degree and masters – 107; degree and PhD – 5; degree, masters and PhD – 33.

Respondents belonged to different academic domains: engineering, economics, business and administration, sciences of education, supervising.

Results and discussion

We believe adult motivation for learning is linked to reasons, the perception of the contribution/benefits and the satisfaction obtained through learning. In the questionnaire, we tried to identify the reasons, contributions, satisfaction with the academic course and the intention to pursue further learning.

(⁴) Some of the questions regarding learning contexts and situations, obstacles to participation and the improvement of professional competence where reproduced, with agreement, from the DG EAC-Cedefop lifelong learning Eurobarometer questionnaire. This survey was carried out in 2003 in 15 Member States, Iceland and Norway, covering residents of all these Member States aged 15 years and over.

(a) Motivation towards master and PhD courses

Respondents stated the main reasons for attending post-graduate courses were: acquiring more knowledge (95.3 % of masters and 94.3 % of PhD) and intellectual development (94.4 % of masters and 93.9% of PhD).

Secondary reasons pointed out by the group of masters concerned the professional domain: doing their job better (86.6 %) and professional progression (74.4 %). For the PhD respondents, to belong to the scientific community (88.2 %) and doing their job better (83.3 %) were other important reasons for attending the course.

Table 1. **Reasons for attending the course (%)**

Reasons	Master		PhD	
	Very important and important	Little or not important	Very important and important	Little or not important
Possibility of finding a job	39.7	60.3	41.9	58.1
Possibility of keeping a job	36.2	63.8	56.3	43.8
Possibility of changing a job	37.3	62.7	45.2	54.8
Possibility of finding a well paid job	46.5	53.5	51.6	48.4
Not having job expectations	14.9	85.1	12.9	87.1
Doing the job better	86.0	14.0	83.3	16.7
Possibility of getting the desired job	66.9	33.1	81.3	18.8
Progression in the professional career	74.4	25.6	69.7	30.3
Progression in the academic career	62.2	37.8	78.8	21.2
Contributing to the intellectual development	94.4	5.6	93.9	6.1
Belong to the scientific community	54.7	45.3	88.2	11.8
Acquiring more knowledge	95.3	4.7	94.3	5.7
Demands of the company	14.8	85.2	40.6	59.4
Initiative of the company	6.3	93.8	13.8	86.2
Family expectations	5.3	94.7	6.5	93.5
Progressing in studies	66.7	33.3	66.7	33.3
Other situation	85.7	14.3	100.0	0.0

Source: Ambrósio, T. et al (2005) Projecto Telos II.

Expectations regarding learning seemed to be attained, since the majority of respondents considered they were 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied' with the courses (93.5 % – masters and 88.9 % – PhD), and 88.9 % of them would have followed their academic trajectory if they had the possibility to choose again.

Table 2. **Satisfaction with academic training**

Level of satisfaction	Master	PhD
Very satisfied	38.8 %	55.6 %
Satisfied	54.4 %	33.3 %
Little satisfied	5.0 %	11.1 %
Not satisfied	1.4 %	0.0 %

Source: Ambrósio, T. et al (2005) Projecto Telos II.

The main contribution of academic training was considered 'learning new things and development at the personal level (97.8 % – masters and 97.4 % – PhD), followed by 'development of scientific culture' (94.9 % – masters and 94.7 % – PhD) and by 'development of knowledge in their scientific area (91.9 % – masters and 81.8 % – PhD).

'Widening of general culture' (89.1 % – masters and 81.1 % – PhD) and 'development of an interest in learning and research in order to develop a permanent learning trajectory' (86.8 % – masters and 84.2 % – PhD) were also relevant contributions of academic training.

Aquisition of new learning, development of scientific culture and knowledge development belong to the epistemic domain.

There seems to be a strong correlation between the reasons for learning, the contributions perceived by adults and satisfaction obtained from learning.

We would like to stress the consistency between the reasons/motives and the perceived contributions of the academic courses. The most valued aspects were the learning process itself, and the most valued reasons are intrinsic and also oriented to the learning process. This relationship is consistent with strong motivation for learning – academic and scientific knowledge –, and with higher levels of commitment to HE courses.

According to post-graduates of this study, personal benefits – acquiring scientific culture and knowledge – were more valued than professional benefits – 'respond to professional needs', 'participate

in the job organisation', 'progress in professional career', and 'make contacts for development of the professional trajectory'. We can also identify these findings in Cedefop's study (Cedefop, Chisholm et al., 2004) in all countries, were personal benefits were more valued than work-related ones.

We should also like to point out that economic benefits – 'raise the economic income' – were not considered a relevant contribution for post-graduates (about half the masters respondents and a third of PhD respondents).

Table 3. **Contribution of academic training (%)**

	Master		PhD	
	Contribute a lot and contribute	Contribute little or nothing	Contribute a lot and contribute	Contribute little or nothing
Learn new things and development at personal level	97.8	2.2	97.4	2.6
Respond to professional needs	73.0	27.0	83.3	16.7
Widen general culture	89.1	10.9	81.1	18.9
Establish personal and professional contacts for development of the professional trajectory	53.3	46.7	69.2	30.8
Guarantee a high social status	23.5	76.5	40.5	59.5
Change the family situation	11.0	89.0	21.6	78.4
Obtain a diploma	76.9	23.1	84.2	15.8
Develop a critical vision of the world	75.0	25.0	67.6	32.4
Progress in professional career	69.6	30.4	78.9	21.1
Participate in job organisation	71.9	28.1	89.2	10.8
Develop interest in learning to develop a permanent learning trajectory	86.8	13.2	84.2	15.8
Contribute to personal and social development	84.7	15.3	76.3	23.7
Raise economic income	48.1	51.9	66.7	33.3
Develop scientific culture	94.9	5.1	97.4	2.6
Develop knowledge in the scientific area	91.9	8.1	94.7	5.3
Make decisions reflexively	78.5	21.5	83.8	16.2

Source: Ambrósio, T. et al (2005) Projecto Telos ll.

(b) Barriers and obstacles to learning

The main reasons for not studying are lack of time and difficulty balancing different obligations, specifically professional ones. According to respondents, 'Professional obligations take too much energy' (65.5%) and post-graduates 'had to quit some or all free-time and leisure activities' (47.6%) to keep studying.

According to research developed by OECD (2003-a, in Cedefop, Chisholm et al., 2004 ([5]) time is confirmed as the most significant barrier to continuing learning, followed by lack of funding. This shows coherence with results from different studies about adult learning obstacles and barriers – reasons for non-participation in adult education – namely lack of time, lack of money, and family responsibilities (Valentine, 1997, in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). According to Chiousse and Werquin (2005), based on results from an international study, (IALS, 1998-99) adult non-participation is due to time and money constraints and professional and family constraints.

We also identified how finance obstacles are important to post-graduates, 40.7 % of respondents consider that finance obstacles were a 'great obstacle', 33.1 % a 'small obstacle' and for 24.1 % it is not an obstacle to studies or training courses. For 2.1 % of post-graduates, finance was considered an insurmountable obstacle.

Regarding course fees (masters and PhD), most respondents supported payment by themselves (54.9 %), followed by employers' support (13.2 %). Only 7.6 % said that families supported the fees.

It is interesting to note respondents' acknowledgement of the lack of available courses related to their needs: 18.6 % of respondents identified as obstacles to participation the 'non-existence of adequate courses considering their needs' and the 'non-existence of available courses nearby' (14.5 %).

These aspects, according to theory, can be considered institutional barriers to participation. It is important that HE institutions are aware of this type of obstacle and try to diversify post-graduate courses, providing learning opportunities related to their students' needs.

([5]) Cedefop research (2004) shows that 'time' (all time-related obstacles) is considered the most important barrier for 37 % of respondents in the EU on average. Respondents reported that family, work or leisure commitments demand too much of their energy to leave time available for learning. When analysing items separately, family commitments come first, followed by a threat to leisure time, job commitments, and last comes being too old to learn. According to research developed by OECD (2003a, in Cedefop, 2004) time is confirmed as the most significant barrier to continuing learning, followed by lack of funding.

(c) Motivation for future learning

We wanted to know what motivates this group of post-graduates for future learning. The last two questions of the questionnaire were oriented to the future: 'Are you interested in pursuing further learning?' (YES/NO) 'Why?'

Most respondents (117 post-graduates) answered they were interested in pursuing further learning (81 %), while very few respondents (5 post-graduates) said they were not interested in it (3 %); 16 % of respondents (23 post-graduates) did not answer the question.

There are some differences between men and women – 76.1 % of men and 84.6 % of women say YES.

If we look at age groups, there is no significant difference: from 25 to 39, 95.7 % answer YES to this question; the age group from 40 to 54 years presented 98.3 % positive answers, and from the group of 55 and over we got 93.3 % affirmative answers.

The reasons why people were not interested in pursuing learning were diverse and related to different aspects:

• personal aspects – 'I am thinking of retirement and have to think about the family'; 'I am satisfied with my actual level of education/ training';
• professional and academic aspects – 'Academic training is far from practical training and does not correspond to the enterprise needs'; 'To be a first grade teacher it's not necessary to make an investment in a personal learning path', 'Not interested in continuing an academic trajectory'.

Analysis of adult motivation: a new category of motives?

We developed a qualitative analysis of further learning reasons presented by adults, based on the Carré model (1998, 2001). However, a new group of reasons emerged from the data. Due to the consistency and specificity of this new group of reasons, we raise the hypothesis that they could constitute a different category of motives.

We identified another reason for learning, a category of deeper motive linked to development of the human being, in the personal sphere. This type of motive is deeply linked to self-development. This can be seen from the following sentences: 'it is part of human

development', 'it gives a meaning to life', 'it is a way of being alive', 'it's a philosophy of life'. In some cases, they appear like a basic need for survival, almost like a biological survival process ('it is a need', 'to stop is to die', 'learning until death', 'to survive', 'when you get to this point, it is irreversible'). We classify this type of reason for adult learning in the same domain as intrinsic motives and learning/ process oriented motives. We call it the existential motive.

Deeper analysis of the reasons presented by adults, based on the Carré model (1998, 2001), shows that the motives for learning are not exclusive, they are diverse and sometimes combined – giving place to what the author calls the 'individual original constellation'.

Table 4. **Adult motives**

Motives	No	%
Epistemic	28	23.93 %
Epistemic + professional	3	2.56 %
Epistemic + vocacional	5	4.27 %
Existential + epistemic	6	5.13 %
Existential	16	13.68 %
Existential + personal	1	0.85 %
Existential + professional	2	1.71 %
Exist + prof + epist	1	0.85 %
Identity	3	2.56 %
Economic	1	0.85 %
Identity + economic	1	0.85 %
Personal	4	3.42 %
Professional	21	17.95 %
Professional + personal	6	5.13 %
Prof + pers + epist	1	0.85 %
Prescriptive / context	6	5.13 %
Prescriptive + existential	1	0.85 %
Vocational + professional	1	0.85 %
Vocational	5	4.27 %
Others	5	4.27 %
Total	117	100 %

Analysis of the data shows that the most significant motive to pursue learning within this group of adults is the epistemic motive. This motive appears in the first place and in a single form for almost 24 % of adults, and in a combined way for almost 13 % of respondents (in the following combination forms: epistemic and professional, epistemic and vocational, epistemic and existential, epistemic and vocational, epistemic professional and personal).

The professional motive is the second single most important motive for this group of adults, for almost 18 % of respondents. And combined professional motives are relevant to almost 12 % of adults (in the following combination forms: professional and existential, professional and personal, professional and vocational, professional epistemic and personal). The following most important single motive is the existential one, for almost 14 % of respondents. And in a combined constellation, it is significant for 4.26 % of adults (in the following combination forms: existential and epistemic, existential and personal, existential and professional, existential and prescriptive, existential professional and epistemic).

Figure 1. **Adult motives**
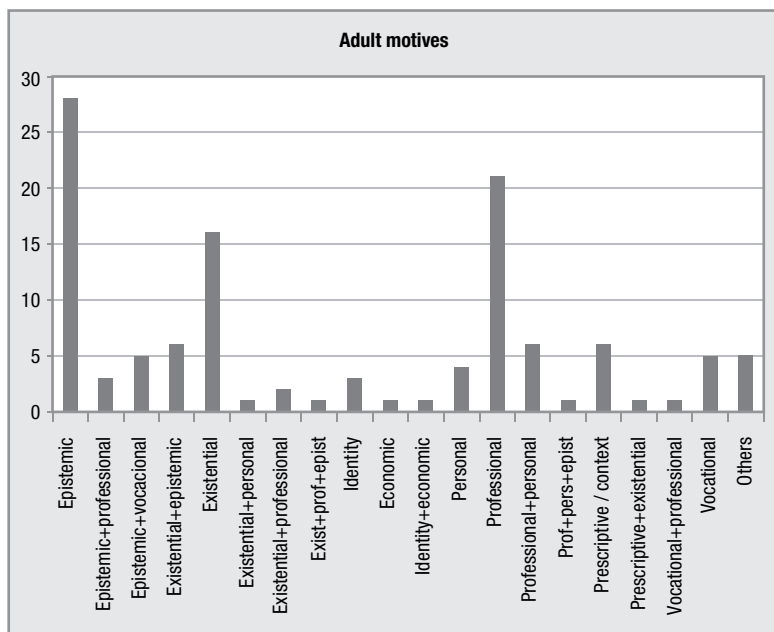
(a) Motives/gender

The group of respondents is composed of 52.4 % women and 47.6% men.

Analysis of the influence of gender on motives shows no significant differences between men and women regarding interest in pursuing learning:
- the epistemic motive comes in first place both for women (27 answers) and men (17 answers);
- the professional motive comes in second place both for women (23 answers) and men (12 answers);
- the existential motive comes in third place both for women (16 answers) and men (11 answers).

However, the prescriptive motive and the economic motive were only referred to by male respondents (7 and 2 answers).

Figure 2. **Motives/gender**
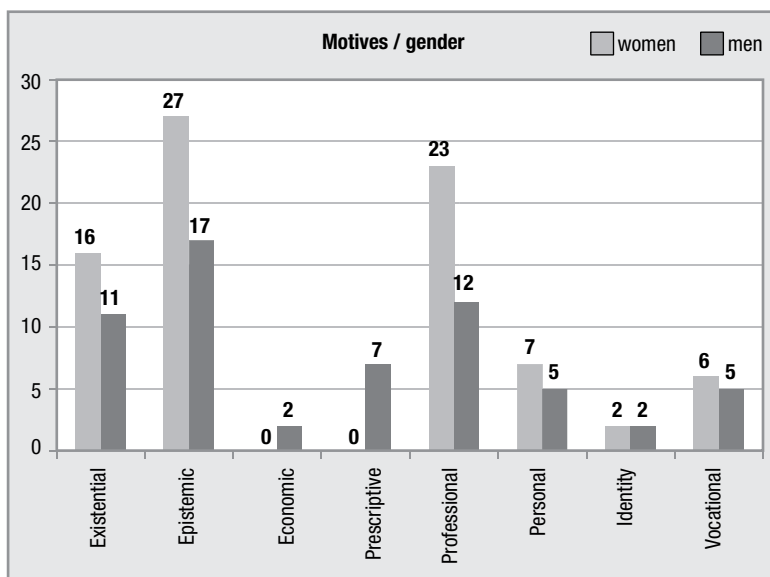
(b) Motives/age

For respondents in the age group of 25/39 years, the most significant reasons for further learning belong to the epistemic motive (22 answers), followed by the professional (20 answers) and personal motives (9 answers). For the age group 40/55 years, the motive in first place is existential (20 answers), followed by the epistemic motive (19 answers) and then the professional motive (11 answers).

For the age group of 55 and over, the professional motive comes in first place (4 answers), followed by the epistemic and the existential motive (both with 3 answers).

According to these data, age seems to have a significant role in the motives for pursuing learning. Younger people (25/39 years old) seem to put the epistemic motive in first place, followed by the professional one, while the group of 40/55 years old seems more to value the existential motive, followed by the epistemic one. However, the group of 55 years old and over seems to value the professional motive above all the others, followed by the epistemic motive.

Figure 3. **Motives/age**
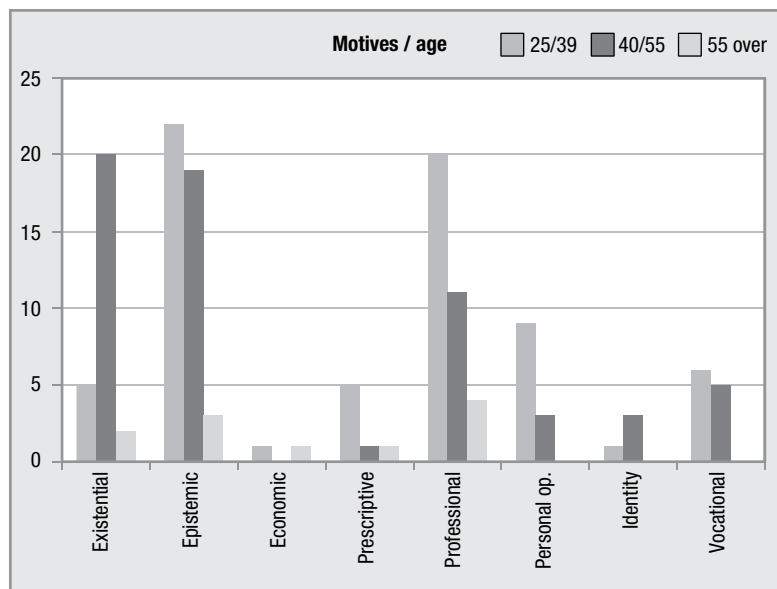
(c) Professional activity/motives

Concerning professional activity, 65 % of respondents are employed, and belong to the group of teachers and researchers, 32 % belong to other professional groups (architects, engineers, mathematicians, chemists, computer scientists, technical public employees, etc.), and 3 % of respondents are not employed.

For the professional group of teachers and researchers, the epistemic motive (29 answers) are in first place, followed by professional motives (24 answers). Existential motives are in third place (21 answers). For the group of respondents that have other professional activities, the most important reasons for learning

Figure 4. **Motives/professional activity**
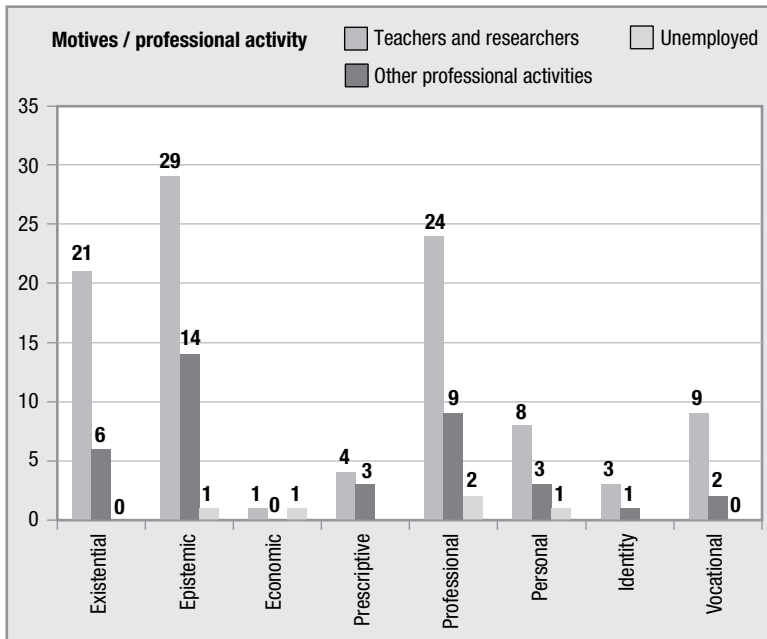
belong to the same motives as the first group. There seems to be no differences between these two groups.

However, for the group of unemployed people, the professional motive comes in first place, followed by economic, personal and epistemic motives. We think this is consistent with the main need of this group, which is situated in the professional and economic domains (have employment, get economic stability).

Final comments

As we stated in the theoretical framework, motives for pursuing learning can appear in single or combined form, in different 'combination constellations'. Motives are plural, contingent and they are dynamic, they evolve (Carré, 2001). We would like to stress that the epistemic motive is the most valued by this group of adults regarding pursuit of learning, followed by the professional and existential ones. According to the model, the epistemic motive is situated on the intrinsically orientated axis and on the axis oriented to learning content (Carré, 1998, 2001). If we consider that the new group of reasons (that we identified as existential motives) is also intrinsically oriented and oriented to learning content, then there seems to be a very strong group of motives that can be situated in this quadrant of the model.

These types of motivation seem very consistent with a strong engagement towards learning and intention to pursue further learning. This group of adults is strongly committed to demanding learning activities, such as academic post-graduate courses (masters and PhD), that demand time, personal commitment and also a high financial investment – high fees, expensive books and other material resources. Other studies have shown that motivation for learning are stronger in the socio-economic group of highly educated people with a high-level job (Cedefop, 2004, Pont, 2004).

Although there is a difference in the percentage of men and women interested in pursuing learning (women show a higher percentage) the qualitative analysis of data seems to show that gender and professional activity – with the exception of unemployed people – does not seem to have a significant role on motivation for this group of adults.

However, age seems to be a factor that can influence motivation towards future learning. The main motive for younger people seems to be the epistemic one, while for the middle age group the existential motive is more valued.

Concluding remarks

If we consider that learning is a process centred on the individual, driven by a complex combination of motives, linked with projects and expectations, it is important to understand the reasons that can drive adults towards learning.

A deeper look into the motives for pursuing learning in higher education shows that adult motives are plural and related to the specific period of each person's life story (age, employment situation, etc.). Results of this research highlights that there is a strong relation between epistemic motives, higher levels of education and training, and interest in pursuing learning.

According to the Cedefop survey (2004), motivation to take part in education and training tends to be mixed – both work-related and personal reasons. Overall in the EU, the proportions of respondents are equivalent (personal and work-related motives), and only a minority of people undertook education and training solely for one of these motives. It is also underlined in the Cedefop study that this finding contrasts with literature on adult learning, where usually a higher proportion of adult learners are driven by work-related issues.

Regarding the major obstacles and barriers towards learning, post-graduates of the study identified difficulty to reconcile studies and professional activity, lack of time and finance constraints. This shows consistency with the trends identified by Chiousse and Werquin (2005) and other international studies (OCDE, 2003 and 2005) and, it seems, this is a general rule regardless of contexts, systems and cultures.

At the level of institutional barriers, individuals pointed out the lack of available courses related to their needs – particularly nearby. HE institutions should reflect on their strategies to respond to new demands from individuals and from society. Institutions are still trying to find their own role, strategies and practices as providers of multiple and diverse opportunities for adult learning and development.

Lifelong learning cannot be separated from individuals' motivational dynamics (their intentions, expectations, projects and benefits, etc.) but can only be improved if linked to structural and institutional conditions.

Educational institutions, organisations and enterprises have a crucial role in redistributing responsibilities to promote the conditions for wider and successful adult participation in learning and training activities, providing learning opportunities related to their needs and removing existing barriers, such as time and finance constraints.

The diversity of motives and diversity of adult needs, demands, from the educational point of view, an integrated and coherent approach to adult learning policies, as pointed out by Pont (2004, p. 45). For the author, adult learning policies should reflect a 'systemic view of learning', including the 'diversity of demand for and the supply of learning opportunities as part of the whole system'. It should consider broadening the concept of adult learning (as well as non-formal and informal learning), in a broad range of educational strategies. The adult learner should be placed at the centre of the learning process that must be understood as an inclusive process covering multiple objectives and responding to different motives for learning – underpinned by professional, personal or social reasons.

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