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Educational and professional potential of Polish returnees

Edukacyjno-zawodowy potencjał polskich reemigrantów

Streszczenie. W czasach masowej emigracji zarobkowej Polaków warto zastanowić się, jak przebiega proces uczenia się osób decydujących się na życie poza granicami swojego ojczystego kraju. Czego uczą się emigranci, w jakich okolicznościach oraz w jaki sposób wykorzystują nabytą wiedzę? Według koncepcji całościowego uczenia się zdobywamy wiedzę w obszarze formalnym, pozaformalnym i nieformalnym. Emigracja, jako istotne wydarzenie w biografii, wydaje się być sprzyjającą sytuacją do zdobywania wiedzy we wszystkich trzech obszarach.

Do analizy powyższego zagadnienia wykorzystane zostały przeprowadzone przeze mnie badania dotyczące procesu pozyskiwania i kapitalizowania doświadczeń edukacyjno-zawodowych przez polskich (re)emigrantów. Celem badania było opisanie i pogłębienie wiedzy na temat tego procesu, a także próba zrozumienia motywów podejmowania działań edukacyjno-zawodowych na emigracji i po powrocie do kraju oraz ich znaczenia dla reemigrantów. Badania przeprowadzone zostały metodą jakościową za pomocą wywiadów częściowo ustrukturalizowanych. W efekcie poddanych zostało analizie sześć wywiadów pogłębionych.

Na doświadczenia związane z emigracją składa się zarówno okres planowania emigracji, przebywania na emigracji, jak również czas związany z powrotem do kraju, który okazał się dla reemigrantów równie istotnym wydarzeniem w biografii. Badani pracowali poniżej swoich kwalifikacji, przeważnie w branży niezwiązanej z wyuczonym zawodem, pomimo to zdobyli nową wiedzę i umiejętności. W sytuacji konieczności zmierzania się z licznymi trudnościami oraz nowymi sytuacjami, respondenci dostrzegli w sobie nowe cechy osobowościowe, a także przewartościli swoje myślenie i podejście do życia.

Okazuje się, że reemigranci mają w sobie duży potencjał wynikający z codziennych, jak i zawodowych doświadczeń emigracyjnych, jednak z różnych przyczyn nie zawsze jest on należycie diagnozowany i wykorzystywany.

Słowa kluczowe: emigracja zarobkowa, reemigracja, całościowe uczenie się, kompetencje

Summary. As a new experience in their biography, emigration and return migration became a source of formal, non-formal and often informal learning which provided the respondents with new skills and knowledge, allowed them to develop certain characteristics of their personality and change the way in which they perceive reality, which inspired them to reconsider their philosophy of life, occupation, education and redefine their values and beliefs.

The article is based on my research on the process of acquisition and capitalisation of educational and professional experience by Polish migrants and returnees. The aim of the study was to describe and further explore the process and to attempt to understand the motives behind educational and professional activity, both abroad and after the return to Poland, as well as their significance for returnees.

Key words: economic migration, return migration, lifelong learning, competence

Poor economic situation, high unemployment rate and grade inflation in Poland have driven economic migration. Ever since Poland joined the European Union, Poles have availed of the possibility to seek for new employment opportunities in other Member States on a mass scale. Some of them have been forced to take up jobs unrelated to the area of their education, often below their competence and qualifications, or even to remain unemployed.

Destabilisation of labour market, resulting in job insecurity and frequent job changes, calls for continuous skill improvement and acquisition of new qualifications. This approach to learning implies a number of social consequences and enforces a change in the attitude to education, also with respect to its particular type, i.e. lifelong education. Learning process is nowadays believed to be inseparable from the general course of entire life. It occurs in a variety of places and contexts, both intentionally and unintentionally, as formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning.

According to Memorandum on Lifelong Learning formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognized diplomas and qualifications. Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. May be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups or through services that have been set up to complement formal systems. Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills (Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, Commis-

sion of the European Communities, 2000, p. 8) Learning can take various forms and take place at every stage of our lives. The term “lifewide” shows a wide range formal, non-formal and informal learning can take place at school, in daily worklife, as well as in the family or in leisure time.

Uncertainty of living conditions has pushed society towards education which has become more easily accessible and therefore universal. We have witnessed a sudden increase in the popularity of higher education, which has led to grade (diploma) inflation resulting in a disproportionate ratio of the number of graduates and available jobs (Melosik 2004, pp. 328–366). Due to a surplus of graduates in a given field compared to the actual social demand, some diploma holders have been forced to take up jobs unrelated to the area of their education, often below their competence and qualifications, or even to remain unemployed. This situation was one of the factors that led to mass emigration of Poles (GUS 2013, p. 54). This way emigration has become a new place of learning for many Poles.

Description of the study

The possibility to pursue a career outside the country of origin offers new educational and professional opportunities, but it is also connected with a number of threats. I have carried out research to find the answer to the questions of what and where Polish immigrants learn, what opportunities they are using and what difficulties they encounter. Another goal of the study was also to find out how the respondents use or plan to use the knowledge gained in emigration. The study focused on the process of acquisition and capitalisation of educational and professional experience by returnees (Kławsiuć-Zduńczyk 2014). The aim of the study was to describe and further explore the process and to attempt to understand the motives behind educational and professional activity, both abroad and after the return to Poland, as well as their significance for returnees. The study was carried out with the use of a qualitative data collection method, i.e. semi-structured interviews (Bauman 1995, p. 65). I chose this method in order to get to know the direct, in-depth opinions of the respondents and to understand the motives of their behavior. Research has been embedded in the interpretive paradigm: understanding and adaptive. During the interview, no specific questions were asked in a specific order, but the subject areas were discussed, during which the respondent had a lot of freedom of speech (Bauman 1995, p. 63). The subject areas discussed in the interviews concerned the time be-

fore emigration, emigration and re-emigration in order to show the process of acquisition and capitalisation of educational and professional experience by respondents.

The analysis was carried out by a collective case study (Silverman 2008, p. 169). Data analysis was carried out according to the general stages of qualitative research analysis (Rubacha 2008, p. 260). Conducted interviews were transcribed and coded in accordance with the applicable procedure (Babbie 2007, p. 400–406). Main categories have been created based on repeated threads. There were ten categories of occupational and educational activities of the respondents, motives of emigration and re-emigration, difficulties related to them and a sense of quality of life. I will only refer to part of the research results for the purposes of the article.

Characteristics of the researched people

Researched people were enrolled in the study provided that they lived abroad as migrants for the minimum period of one year after 1 May 2004. Half of the respondents volunteered to participate in the study in response to the announcement the others were recruited using the snowball method (Babbie 2007, p. 205). Six in-depth interviews were included in the final analysis as a result. Two men and four women took part in the research. It wasn't a requirement to participate in the study, but 4 people had lived in Great Britain and two in Ireland, in countries which from the beginning of post-accession emigration are in the forefront of European countries, most often inhabited by Poles (GUS 2017, p. 2). All respondents were under 35 years old. They lived in Poland from at least half a year.

The researched people represented a variety of education levels and profiles. Most of them were people with higher education, including one person after postgraduate studies, while two participants graduated from vocational secondary schools. Each of them had acquired a specific profession, i.e. the profession of an educator, an economist, a historian, a goods specialist/manager, an administrative specialist, an accountant and a gardener.

Educational and professional activity prior to emigration

Their professional activity prior to emigration was not always the same as their originally trained profession; therefore, the type of work they did was

either consistent with the previously obtained education or it had nothing to do with it. The type of their activity kept changing depending on the stage in their life, e.g. sometimes they needed to do seasonal work not related to their profession or do extra work because of their life situation. Before emigrating the researched people did a number of jobs, such as a social and administrative worker, a caregiver for disabled children, a cashier in a supermarket, a sales representative, a bank employee, a vet assistant or a pedagogue. In terms of their professional experience the respondents may be divided into the following two groups: those who had experience consistent with their profession and those who never worked in their profession. When taking the decision to leave Poland, two respondents, one with higher education and one with secondary vocational education, were working in their profession; one of them was very pleased with their work, while the other, although satisfied with the fact that their job corresponded to their original competence, was disappointed with their pay. The other researched people were either unemployed or dissatisfied with their work due to its inconsistency with their qualifications and financial expectations.

Motives behind emigration

The economic factor was a common reason for and purpose of the respondents' decision to emigrate. Only one person identified their interest in living in a different culture and learning a new language as their main motive. High earnings abroad were to contribute to improving the respondents' material situation and quality of life. Some of the respondents defined their objectives for their emigration, such as buying an apartment or a house, raising money to pay for studies, etc., which were to become possible with the remuneration earned abroad. Their migration was also driven by economic reasons connected with the difficulty of finding a job in Poland, even by those with higher education. Based on some of the statements, leaving Poland seemed to have been dictated by trends prevailing at that time, a specific fashion for migration and following other people's example.

Tomek: Some of my friends left after graduation. I stayed because I wanted to find a job in Poland, but I didn't find it and after a few months I joined them.

The opening of the EU borders to Polish employees after Poland's accession started a wave of economic migration which with time turned into a phenomenon on a mass scale.

Educational and professional activity during emigration

The migrants' professional activity had different dimensions. They carried out work either far below or corresponding to their qualifications. In frequent cases they agreed to work which was less satisfactory in terms of their intellectual potential, mostly due to insufficient language skills; however, in return they received a satisfactory financial gratification.

Kamila: No, it wasn't a job in my profession. When I was going to Ireland I didn't speak English so I was looking for any job. I had no choice.

Some researched people, showing exemplary characteristics of a good employee, were promoted, which had a multidimensional effect.

Ola: I was immediately made the manager of the night shift, because I had the title of finished pedagogical studies in Poland. They trusted me so much that I could give away medicines without any preparation. So my education counted a bit.

Forced to often change their jobs, the participants got to know also the dark side of employment for migrants, as represented for example by inadequate working conditions or improper treatment of employees. However, Polish employees were appreciated by employers for their efficiency, visible commitment to work, flexibility, versatility and professionalism, as well as for the fact that they were fast learners willing to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills.

Educational activity of the Polish migrants varied. With the status of an immigrant, the respondents could attend free language courses, study at colleges and even at universities. All of them had the opportunity to learn English in an informal way, but only some availed of these favourable conditions to acquire new knowledge. Studying, including learning a foreign language, requires commitment, investment of one's free time, patience and determination, which some of them lacked. In addition, they rarely had a chance to apply their education at work, which to a large extent was associated with their insufficient knowledge of English.

Agata: When I came there, I started going to college and learning was free. That was just a special college for expatriates. Classes were held twice a week and were financed from the city office budget, from the expatriate department.

Some researched people took language courses and improved their professional qualifications, which had a positive effect on them, both financially and psychologically.

All the respondents planned a shorter stay abroad and had different reasons and explanations for prolonging their emigration. Life abroad, which in itself required some of their pay, quickly forced them to review their vision of earning a lot of money in a short time and made them stay abroad for the subsequent years. Another reason for prolonged emigration was satisfaction with the quality of life abroad, followed by a number of other circumstances.

Employment was most often referred to when it comes to differences between the quality of life in Poland and abroad. Having a job was recognised as an unquestionable advantage, with a positive impact on the migrants' quality of life. Job security and the possibility to change jobs gave them a sense of stability and security, while the high standards of work, as manifested by the respect of employee rights, provision of decent working conditions, enacted also by trade unions, and a high financial gratification, contributed to an even higher level of satisfaction with their work.

Magda: It was great that I was able to buy a new washing machine for my parents, just a great feeling. And the fact that I was in Poland three times a year. I came to Poland when the others for two years didn't come to Poland, because they were all working on a dishcloth, it was a bit hard for them to pay for it tour. Well, during these two years I met a little bit of the world, because I went to Majorca, to Paris.

A new beginning

The respondents' motivation behind going back to Poland was varied. It was based either on their social (integration difficulties, home-sickness), economic (deterioration of the economic situation of the host country and increased unemployment, willingness to invest savings in Poland) and family situation (family circumstances, return to the spouse) (Ghosh 2002, p. 20), or on their desire to change the character of their work, mostly from physical labour to mental work.

Kamila: I could work there all the time, but I chose Poland. Longing for Poland, four years, but still patriotism is in me and I came back.

Agata: I already had enough. I was aware that there wouldn't be a chance for a better job.

Upon taking the decision to return to Poland, all the respondents were optimistic about the upcoming change, despite being aware of the possibility that the standard and quality of their life in Poland might be lower. Nevertheless, they believed that they would quickly find a new job, settle down, perhaps invest the money they earned in their own business.

Most researched people took measures to prepare for going back while they were still abroad. To this end, they fixed all the necessary formalities to have their benefits transferred to Poland, obtained the references from their employers, collected information about the current economic situation in Poland, as well as the situation in the national and local labour market. Some study participants set certain objectives which they wanted to achieve after returning to Poland.

Agata: But you know, on the other hand, I've explained it to people that I have to come back without a plan, then I don't want to go back, because there is nothing for it. Because I know what will happen, the money runs out, we'll be back here and it will be like you say.

Despite all the preparations, after coming back the researched people realised that they could have done much more. Two of them were rather casual about their return; they did not plan it or think about their future career in Poland. Their decision to come back was not very well thought out and was rather emotional than rational.

Tomek: I didn't know what I'm exactly going to do in Poland but I decided to come back.

Having experienced a variety of disappointments after returning to Poland, mostly related to their lack of success in finding a job, some respondents changed their attitude and shifted towards the model of intentionally unpredictable return, which does not rule out re-emigration to the country from which they returned or to another place (Grabowska-Lusińska, Okólski, 2009, p. 216). The returnees also reported that some migrants decided not to return to Poland after they learned about the experience of other Poles who did.

The term most frequently used by the interviewed respondents to describe their return to Poland was disappointment. The returnees were disappointed with the disastrous situation in the labour market, incomprehensible rules of recruitment and the fact that their professional experience from abroad was overlooked by potential employers. Of the six respondents the only person who managed to find a job, which happened only after seven months of being unemployed, confirmed this thesis and admitted that they were employed only because of their connections.

Kamila: I came back and found that nothing had changed in Poland during these four years. I'm totally disappointed. (...) There is no job. When I returned, my wings fell. (...) I feel so bad, my self-esteem drops.

Kamila: You can't live with dignity in Poland. In Ireland you get a payment, even the lowest one, but you can live with dignity and not spend everything. And here I can't save because I still have too little money for everything.

The returnees found it also very difficult to accept exorbitant prices compared to general pay and high cost of living in Poland. Additionally, their emigration resulted in the weakening of their family bonds and contacts with friends.

Learning outcomes in emigration and after return

Particularly during the initial period of their emigration, the respondents were confronted with a number of new, unforeseen situations that forced them to make many unusual choices which they had to deal with. The very moment of arrival in a foreign country, in many cases experienced for the first time, was extremely difficult. The difficulties were related to the search for accommodation, work and the need to adapt to a new social reality. Faced with multiple difficulties and obstacles, the respondents acquired new experience and knowledge.

In order to meet the new challenges, the respondents resorted to their social capital, i.e. help of family, friends and other immigrants; however, they were often forced to rely on themselves. They turned out to be resourceful, courageous, effective and determined in their actions. They emphasised that the situation and the need to cope with it enforced this type of behaviour and attitude in them.

During the emigration, most of the respondents learned English. The new situation forced them to work on their language skills, at least at the communicative level. Studying was most often a natural process taking place in everyday situations, which would indicate its informal nature. The respondents improved their language skills formally, i.e. at school, college, as well as non-formally, i.e. by attending courses and trainings.

During their stay abroad they studied subjects related to their profession in order to increase their qualifications and competence, which translated directly into their remuneration and function at work.

One of the visible changes caused by the emigration was the subjects' change in their approach to learning. The returnees emphasised particularly strongly the importance of knowing English and its usefulness in everyday life. They declared their willingness to improve their language skills by participating in courses and studying English as their major after coming back to Poland.

Ola: And besides, I'm starting my three-year English language program from September, today I am also going to English classes after our conversation. I said that I must do something, I can't be suspended.

It is worth pointing out that prior to their departure none of the respondents could speak English at a level higher than communicative, while three of them did not even know the basics of the language.

The acquisition of new knowledge also had a psychological effect. With their new skills, particularly language skills, the respondents felt more self-confident, saw new prospects for their development, while their life as an immigrant became easier and gave them more satisfaction. The employers appreciated the Poles for their determination, willingness to learn and acquire new skills, astuteness, versatility and professionalism, which also had a positive impact on the respondents' morale. The respondents learned many new skills during their emigration. They included as follows: marketing skills, people management, management of websites; one respondent obtained qualifications in health and social care.

The experience of emigration covers both the time of migrants' stay in another country and their return to the country of origin, which in the respondents' case turned out to be an equally important event in life. Their development was inspired by both positive and negative events which resulted in the researched people new characteristics, such as self-confidence, assertiveness, better stress management, increased independence, open-mind-

edness, ability to handle nearly any situation. Along with new features, the returnees' way of thinking also changed; they had more faith in their abilities and skills, were more curious about the world, were open to new challenges and goals, and wanted to be consistent in achieving them.

Magda: I'm more confident (...) I used to be more stressed during a job interview or in other situations. Now I'm not so stressed, now I'm talking openly, I don't stutter, I don't blush, I say what I mean, what I want and that's it. And life in exile has a big impact on the fact that I became independent that I had to take care of myself and manage somehow.

Despite a number of difficulties encountered in their biography, the emigration made them approach life with greater optimism and deal better with problems. The emigration enforced a more flexible approach, as they needed to adapt to different places, people, living and working environment. Due to their contacts with representatives of different cultures, religions and nations, most of the respondents admitted that they became more sensitive to cultural and social differences, and stopped thinking stereotypically about certain issues, which made them more tolerant. One respondent said that due to their emigration experience they felt not only citizens of Poland, but also of Europe.

Agata: You become a member of the European Union, not just a Pole.

Kamila: (...) Someone who has not left, doesn't know how it is and is afraid because it is abroad, a new place, new people. And it's cool that man learns, has a different point of view, different thinking. And when you come back, you are a different man, really.

The emigration taught the respondents the distance to themselves and others. Contacts with and the need to spend time with other often random people enforced an appropriate attitude, psychological resilience, perseverance and patience. They also learned some distance to material goods which were easier to obtain abroad. Material security and people's different mentality made the study participants more distanced to everyday problems which were replaced by space, freedom and peace of mind. Contacts with other Polish migrants, particularly when compared to other people, allowed the respondents to see national flaws, both those of Poles in general and of their own.

The emigration changed the respondents' approach to work. Transparent rules of employment and career development, as well as a decent pay

made them respect their job. Even if they were not able to practice what they learned in Poland, the work gave them satisfaction. They also felt valued by employers for whom their experience and actual knowledge were more important than a university degree.

While abroad, the respondents had an opportunity to get to know other business management methods, specificity of the respective companies and on some occasions to prove themselves as a staff manager. This is the kind of experience that the returnees planned to transfer to Polish conditions when starting their own business inspired by the ideas from abroad.

Ola: I have a dream, but it will probably take a while before I realize it. I dream of such a small home for seniors, a nursing home, the kind I have worked in, which has a family atmosphere. Such that everyone would go wherever they wanted, would have more freedom, more activity, and not sit alone in their rooms most of the time. I would like to create something like that.

Analysis of biography through the prism of emigration and return experience

The results of the conducted research are confirmed by other studies conducted on a larger group and the theories of adult learning.

As Maciej Milewski and Joanna Ruszczak-Żbikowska's study of Internet users residing abroad reveals, Polish migrants tend to be often under-employed; they are affected by a phenomenon referred to as "brain-waste", which means they are employed in low-skilled jobs, below their competence, which in turns leads to a decrease in the quality and level of qualifications (deskilling) (Kaczmarczyk, Okólski 2005, p. 45). Other studies suggest that as many as 33% of immigrants with a university degree carries out work which does not require any qualifications (Milewski, Ruszczak-Żbikowska 2008, p. 21.)

When performing work below their qualifications, in which their intellectual potential is not used, over time an employee tends to forget their previously acquired skills. Their knowledge is subject to devaluation, which has a significant negative impact on such person's professional status in the sending country. Their professional career is interrupted, while the chances for their further development in their area of expertise are dropping. Formal qualifications acquired before the emigration, particularly if not used in practice, which is typically the case of those emigrating directly after grad-

uation, become obsolete and lose their market value. The factors affecting the social and professional mobility of migrants include as follows: education, its recognition in the host country, knowledge of the language of the host country, gender, age, institutional and legal solutions (Grabowska-Lusińska, Okólski 2009, p. 163). In terms of Polish migrants, devaluation of qualifications to a large extent results from their poor knowledge of the language of the host country, low availability of work in selected occupations, as well as legal and institutional restrictions.

Work below one's capacity and qualifications may bring about psychological consequences, such as lower self-esteem, a feeling of professional failure, general dissatisfaction with oneself, a sense of loss of what could have been achieved so far, negative comparison to peers who at that time reached much more in terms of professional career.

The other studies on Polish migrants in the UK, shows that at the time of their arrival in the destination country the vast majority of Poles knows neither the type of work they are supposed to do nor its conditions, and are helped out by their family or friends, migrants themselves, when it comes to looking for a job (Grabowska-Lusińska, Okólski 2009, p. 112). They acted in accordance with the concept of bounded rationality, representing the type of intentional unpredictability (Grabowska-Lusińska, Okólski 2009, p. 145). It refers to people who take spontaneous decisions about migration and work for the nearest future.

The emigration and return to Poland may turn out to be critical events in life, in the literature referred to as "turning points", crucial, significant moments which play a unique role in one's life (Teusz 2009, p. 86). In order to be able to cope with such critical events, it is necessary to reinterpret their external elements and to get to know one's own resources (Sęk 1991, p. 32) supported by learning and acquiring new skills. While exploring one's own resources, it is important to analyse one's own biography.

In the book *Learning From Our Lives. Using Educational Biographies with Adults* (Dominicé 2006) Pierre Dominicé shows how important it is to analyze a biography from a learning perspective. An in-depth analysis of one's own biography allows seeing the impact of cultural, social, economic and political contexts on the formation of a personal educational path. Reflection on the course of an individual learning process can lead to a more autonomous and conscious attitude towards education. It gives a sense of control in learning in the future. According to Dominicé, there is a relationship between major life changes and the approach to education (Dominicé 2006, p. 25). Analysis of previous experiences allows you to observe ways of effec-

tive learning, which increases the motivation to learn. It also shows sources of motivation to learn at particular stages of life.

Hermeneutic approach to one's own experience allows to understand how many factors affecting identity are indeed a result of educational experience (Dominicé 2006, p. 28). In this respect, a clear correlation arises between formal education and experience-based training. The emigration and return to Poland may turn out to be an opportunity to explore one's own personality and analyse one's decisions. New experiences can change the perception of the world and yourself and provide new stimuli for striving for further knowledge and personality development.

Referring to Jack Mezirow's concept of transformative learning (Mezirow 1991), the emigration experience could lead to changing frames of reference. The transformation of one's personal experience entails educational value, leads to learning new skills. Brought about by the emigration, the new experience was an opportunity to test the previously acquired knowledge in practice and to introduce the necessary changes in case it proves ineffective. According to Mezirow's theory, the learning process helps change the way in which people interpret themselves and the surrounding reality, by means of a reflective, critical and informed consideration of their individual experience. Influenced by the experience of emigration, returnees can not only gained new skills, but also notice multiple changes in behaviour and way of thinking, as well as in terms of values and opinions.

Conclusions

As a new experience in their biography, emigration and return migration became a source of formal, non-formal and often informal learning which provided the respondents with new skills and knowledge, allowed them to develop certain characteristics of their personality and change the way in which they perceive reality, which inspired them to reconsider their philosophy of life and redefine their values and beliefs. In the case of some returnees, the stay abroad made their belief in their values, commitment to tradition and sense of belonging with the Polish nation even stronger. Staying for emigration has also become an opportunity for the respondents to analyze their own personality and to learn new ways of learning.

Because they had a chance to improve their skills and get promoted, the respondents' stay abroad was not a time lost, "torn out of their biography", even though the work they did was in most cases in no way related to

their original profession. Nevertheless, the acquired resources, however valuable, turned out to be insufficient to find employment in Poland in a profession in which the returnees had no experience. Without a formal confirmation of the knowledge and skills acquired abroad getting a job in Poland may prove to be difficult. Emigration may become a trap for those who plan to return and who by working below their qualifications do not increase their resources, acquire new knowledge or skills, are not focused on self-development and in consequence, allow for a gradual depreciation of their education. Conversely, emigration may be an opportunity to people who take informed decisions about their career path in terms of the type of work, education, learning and self-development activities. Moreover, a well-planned strategy of return, supported by a large capital base, determination and perseverance in the pursuit of one's goals, eventually result in a high chance of success. Based on their newly gained knowledge, competence, experience and skills, returnees have a chance to create a new reality in Poland.

In the postmodern world an individual may have a freedom of choice, but at the same time they are placed in a position where they have to make a choice. Choices related to life, work and education, during and after emigration, involve a risk. Working on their biography, an individual has to constantly take decisions, make choices, for which they themselves are responsible the most.

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