

Higher Education and the Adult Motivations Towards Lifelong Learning

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SUMMARY

The increasing role of Higher Education (HE) institutions in lifelong learning processes seems to be a trend in the global context of the knowledge society. Like in many other European countries, the rapid expansion of HE in Portugal in the last decades has been seen as democratisation of access and increase of participation at the tertiary level of education. The Portuguese post-graduate education offer at universities has also increased and diversified in recent years – namely masters and PhD –, evidencing that there is a need for post-initial education across the lifespan of individuals. HE institutions are still trying to find their own role, strategies and practices as providers of multiple and diverse opportunities for adult learning and development.

In this paper we intend to discuss some of the results obtained through a survey – developed by an interdisciplinary team and financed by the Portuguese government –, centred on the study of the educational and professional trajectories of post-graduates from a group of Portuguese universities. We try to understand adult perspectives about learning and specially discuss the adult motivational dynamics towards their future learning – in the framework of lifelong learning processes.

Starting from the motivational model of Carré (1998, 2001), we identified several types of motives towards future learning in this group of post-graduated university students. A provisory analysis of the data shows that it is possible to identify types of motivation for learning that are more relevant for these group of adults than others, and we try to understand its relationship with several factors. We intend to discuss the influence of gender, age and the professional activity on the motivational process, amongst other relevant factors, and shed some light on the trends, convergences or divergences that emerge from this analysis. We would also like to identify some of the new challenges that Higher Education is facing in a context of redefinition of learning boundaries.

1. LIFELONG LEARNING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

• THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE LIFELONG LEARNING SOCIETY

The increasing de-differentiation across boundaries, namely between different forms of provision, between education, training and leisure (Edwards, 1997) shows the existing

complexity between education, training, work and employment. The policy discourse on lifelong learning – *lifelong* and *life wide* – puts the emphasis on learning and learners, and places a bigger emphasis on adult responsibility.

The European Union set up until the year 2010 for building of a strong knowledge-based society and economy. The European Employment Strategy and the member states political agenda has established as a priority the investment in lifelong learning activities. European education and training policies keep on stressing the need of raising the population qualification structure, related to economic and social goals, and put the emphasis on the acquisition of 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 that there is the need for comprehensive and coherent strategies for lifelong learning.

However, several studies concerning lifelong learning and its new challenge to education and training systems in European countries point out the need for substantial improvements, specifically regarding adult learning. As it is summarised by Gordon (2004), there is still a considerable progress to be made in order to broaden the access, remove existing the barriers, to develop new paths and structures to qualifications, and respond to the needs and requirements 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, it is identified the lack of information, lack of time, lack of motivation, lack of incentives, lack of funding. Although not always put forward in many studies, the lack of motivation is one important and significant reason. For the author, it is the “people who have the highest educational attainment levels who feel that they would like to participate and who actually do participate more, revealing a close complementary between initial education and adult learning” (Pont, 2004:35).

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

It has been pointed out by several studies that adults’ motivations to participate in learning activities (in continuing education and training) are multiple, complex and subject to change (in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Nowadays the understanding of the motivational structure related to adult learning it’s becoming more and more important, specifically in the context of the knowledge society and the lifelong learning society. The relevance of adult learning is widely recognised, both from the equity and social cohesion perspective, and the democratic, employment and economic development point of view.

• HIGHER EDUCATION

The increasing role of Higher Education institutions in lifelong learning processes seems to be a trend in the global context of the knowledge society. As it was stressed by the outcomes of the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 1998, in a context of globalization, Higher Education has become recognized 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 becoming in recent years an important sector of providers, regarding the creation of new opportunities for Lifelong Learning. However, and as sustained by Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 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".

Like in many other European countries, Portugal has witnessed a general improvement in the population level of education and training in the recent years. However, if compared to other European countries, it still presents lower levels of education and training qualifications.

Nevertheless, the rapid expansion of HE in Portugal in the last two or three decades has been seen as democratisation of access and increase of participation at the tertiary level of education. The Portuguese post-graduate education offer at universities has also increased and diversified in recent years – namely the masters (*mestrados*) and PhD –, evidencing that there is a need for post-initial education across the lifespan of individuals. HE institutions are still trying to find their own role, strategies and practices as providers of multiple and diverse opportunities for adult learning and development.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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

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

The model of Carré about the adult orientation and implication on learning and training activities considers two main dimensions: the content of the motivation (the motives of implication) and the process of motivation (the dynamics of the implication). According to the author, the content of motivation are the reasons acknowledged and explicitated by adults in order to explain the finality of their learning/training action strategy. Regarding the

content of the adult motivation, this model takes into account two main orientation axes: one axis concerning the intrinsic/extrinsic orientation, and the other one concerning the orientation towards learning/towards participation.

- A) The first axis, intrinsic/extrinsic orientation, is theoretically based on the conception (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 mean to obtain external goals or results.
- B) The second axis, orientation towards learning/participation separates the motivations to the acquisition of a **learning content** (knowledge, skills, attitudes,...) from the motivations towards **participation**, which means that the main reason is the **presence and participation** of the adult in the training activities, independently from the type of the knowledge acquired. In this case, the participation in learning activities is related to the anticipation of a result, independent from the acquisition of knowledge.

According to Carré, the **intrinsic motives**, those where the satisfaction/pleasure is obtained through the learning process itself and the process and results are related, are the following motives:

• THE EPISTEMIC MOTIVE

Learning and knowledge is a source of satisfaction and pleasure. The motivation is linked to its own content: to learn, to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, ... The 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 motives (to like, to love,...). And sometimes the pleasure of learning is orientated to the opening of the mind, to the metacognition development, and the aim is to wide and to 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 in a group, they want to communicate, to reinforce the 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 with the pleasure to participate, but linked to the conditions of the training environment itself, with the materials, the resources, documents, etc. The pleasure is independent from the content of learning.

In the model of Carré, 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 separated. The learning is seen as a means to obtain other goals, which are external to the process. Within this group of motives, we can identify:

• THE ECONOMIC MOTIVE

Reasons for participation in learning activities are explicitly material: economic advantages (direct or not direct – like a promotion, or to get a job).

• THE PRESCRIPTIVE MOTIVE

In some cases the participation in learning, training activities is due to explicit external pressures, like an obligation or an imposition, coming from an external context. Sometimes there are more subtle pressures, like the social pressure to conformity, influences of the hierarchy, and so on ...).

• THE DERIVATIVE MOTIVE

The reason to participation in learning activities is to avoid unpleasant situations or activities; adults prefer to participate in learning, training activities in order to escape from suffering situations or boredom activities at work (such as displeased environment, routines, lack of professional interest, personal conflicts, and so...)

THE PROFESSIONAL OPERATIVE MOTIVE

The reason to learning is related to the development of competences, knowledge, skills, that are needed to the specific professional work activities. The aim is to improve the professional performance, in order to anticipate or adapt to changes. Learning is “a professional tool”, an instrumental answer for a professional challenge. It is related to the classical function of continuing training (development of the competences).

• THE PERSONAL OPERATIVE MOTIVE

Adults are engaged in learning activities in order to get competences, knowledge, skills that are understood as necessary to the specific activities outside the job and working life (such as leisure, family life, associative responsibilities, and so on), but always with a clear action goal or with a concrete action aim, well identified. Learning is a means to a project, an interest, to satisfy a specific need.

• THE IDENTITY MOTIVE

This learning motive has the finality of acquiring competences, knowledge or skills, or acquiring the symbolic recognition need to a transformation or preservation of the 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 function,...). It is centred on the recognition of the social image, and it is external to the economic motives.

• THE VOCATIONAL MOTIVE

The engagement in learning is orientated by a logic of professional guidance, carrier management, or getting a job. Adults want to develop competences, knowledge or skills in order to keep the job, to get a new job, or to improve their job (they refer the words “career”, “mobility”, “professional future”, “opportunities”, an so on).

As we have already referred, the model of Carré points out that it is also necessary to understand the process – the dynamics of learning implication – that is related to the action itself (the 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); the understanding of the motivational framework of adults results from the articulation between these three factors.

Considering that the question that we used in our survey is related to the adults' reasons to future learning, we could not take into account these dimensions in our study, and we centred our analysis only on the content of the motivations.

According to the Carré model, the adult motives are not mutually exclusive, they can be diverse and combined (with the 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, in a specific moment, and the motivation dynamic that orientates the implication of the adult in that learning situation.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The discussion of this paper is empirically based on the results of a research project developed by an interdisciplinary team¹ and financed by the Portuguese government – “Project Telos II – Lifelong learning: evaluation of the effects on pos-graduate from the 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 the adult lifelong learning processes.

¹ The research team is composed by 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.

The project aims to characterize the education, training and work trajectories of a group of adults with higher level of qualification that have obtained the degree of Master (*Mestrado*) and PhD in the academic years of 1995/1996 and 2000/2001, in the universities that have participated in the project.

The academic and pos-graduate services provided us with the exhaustive lists of people that finished their pos-graduation degrees. From a universe of 569 graduates (449 masters e 120 PhD) we got a working universe of 440 post-graduates (343 masters and 97 PhD) to whom we sent a questionnaire by mail. A month and a half later we resent it by mail. This two stages process allowed us to get 145 answers, that correspond to 32,95% of all the inquired population, which is within the expectable values for this type of inquiring.

The research was carried on through different stages and using different instruments of data collection. On a first stage the research team elaborated the questionnaire. It is divided in four main sections: personal and social characterization; academic trajectory; professional trajectory; evaluation of the academic training.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS: AGE, GENDER AND FORMAL EDUCATION

The national sample for our survey, carried out in 2005, consists of 145 (128 masters and 27 PhD respondents), who finished their post-graduate studies in the years of 1995/1996 and 2000/2001 in the four mentioned Portuguese Universities. Concerning the gender, 69 of the respondents are males (47,6%) and 76 are females 52,4%).

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

More than half of the respondents are married (61,8%) and the others are single (25%), divorced (9%) or are living together (4,2%).

At the moment of the inquiring the formal schooling qualifications were the following ones: degree and master – 107; degree and PhD – 5; degree, master and PhD – 33.

Respondents belong to different academic domains: Engineering, Economics, Business and Administration, Sciences of Education, Supervising.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We consider that adult motivation for learning is articulated with the reasons, with the perception of the contribution/benefits and with the satisfaction obtained with the learning. In the questionnaire, we tried to identify the reasons, the contributions, the satisfaction with the academic courses and the intention to pursuing further learning.

a) Motivations towards the master and PhD courses

The respondents considered that the main reasons for attending the post-graduate courses are: acquiring more knowledge (95,3% of masters and 94,3% of PhD) and the contribution for the intellectual development (94,4% of masters and 93,9% of PhD). These reasons belong to the epistemic domain.

The second reasons pointed out by the group of masters are articulated with 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 the other important reasons for attending the course.

Table 1. Reasons for attending the course (%)

Reasons	Master		Ph.D	
	Very important and important	Little or not important	Very important and important	Little or not important
<i>Possibil. of finding a job</i>	39,7	60,3	41,9	58,1
<i>Possibil. of keeping a job</i>	36,2	63,8	56,3	43,8
<i>Possibil. of changing a job</i>	37,3	62,7	45,2	54,8
<i>Possibil. of finding a well payed job</i>	46,5	53,5	51,6	48,4
<i>Not having Job expectations</i>	14,9	85,1	12,9	87,1
<i>Doing better the job</i>	86,0	14,0	83,3	16,7
<i>Possib. of getting the desired job</i>	66,9	33,1	81,3	18,8
<i>Progression in the Professional carrier</i>	74,4	25,6	69,7	30,3
<i>Progression in the Academic carrier</i>	62,2	37,8	78,8	21,2
<i>Contributing to the intelectual development</i>	94,4	5,6	93,9	6,1
<i>Belong to the Scientific Comunity</i>	54,7	45,3	88,2	11,8
<i>Acquiring more knowledge</i>	95,3	4,7	94,3	5,7
<i>Demands of the company</i>	14,8	85,2	40,6	59,4
<i>Initiative of the company</i>	6,3	93,8	13,8	86,2
<i>Family expectations</i>	5,3	94,7	6,5	93,5
<i>Progressing in studies</i>	66,7	33,3	66,7	33,3
<i>Other situation</i>	85,7	14,3	100,0	0,0

Source: UIED, Projecto Telos 2005.

Expectations regarding learning seemed to be attained, since the majority of the respondents considered that they were "satisfied" and very satisfied with the courses (93,5% – master 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 the academic training

Level of satisfaction	Master	Ph.D
Very satisfied	38,8%	55,6%
Satisfied	54,4%	33,3%
Little satisfied	5,0%	11,1%
Not satisfied	1,4%	0,0%

Source: UIED, Proyecto Telos (2005).

Table 3. Contribution of academic training

Contribution of the academic training	Master		Ph.D	
	Contribute a lot and contribute	Contribute little or nothing	Contribute a lot and contribute	Contribute little or nothing
<i>Learn new things and development at the personal level</i>	97,8	2,2	97,4	2,6
<i>Respond to the Professional needs</i>	73,0	27,0	83,3	16,7
<i>Widen general culture</i>	89,1	10,9	81,1	18,9
<i>Establish personal and Professional contacts for the development of the Professional trajectory</i>	53,3	46,7	69,2	30,8
<i>Garantee abigh social status</i>	23,5	76,5	40,5	59,5
<i>Change the family situation</i>	11,0	89,0	21,6	78,4
<i>Obtain a diploma</i>	76,9	23,1	84,2	15,8
<i>Develop a critical vision of the world</i>	75,0	25,0	67,6	32,4
<i>Progress in the Professional carrier</i>	69,6	30,4	78,9	21,1
<i>Participate in the Job organisation</i>	71,9	28,1	89,2	10,8
<i>Develop interest in learning in order to develop a permanent learning trajectory</i>	86,8	13,2	84,2	15,8
<i>Contribute to the personal and social development</i>	84,7	15,3	76,3	23,7
<i>Raise the economic income</i>	48,1	51,9	66,7	33,3
<i>Develop scientific culture</i>	94,9	5,1	97,4	2,6
<i>Develop knowledge in the scientific area</i>	91,9	8,1	94,7	5,3
<i>Make decisions in a reflexive way</i>	78,5	21,5	83,8	16,2

Source: UIED, Proyecto Telos 2005.

The main contribution of academic training was considered "learning new things and development at the personal level (97,8% – Master and 97,4% – Ph.D), followed by "development of scientific culture" (94,9% – Master and 94,7% – Ph.D) and by "development of knowledge in their scientific área (91,9% – Master and 81,8% - Ph.D).

“Widening of general culture” (89,1% – Master and 81,1% – Ph.D) and “development of an interest in learning and research in order to develop a permanent learning trajectory” (86,8% – Master and 84,2% – Ph.D) were also relevant contributions of academic training.

The acquisition of new learning, development of scientific culture and knowledge development are articulated contributions, that belong to the epistemic domain.

We can conclude that there seems to be a strong relationship between the reasons for learning, the contributions perceived by the adults and the satisfaction obtained with the learning.

We would like to stress the consistency between the reasons/motivations and the contributions of the academic courses. The most valued aspects were articulated with the learning process itself, and the most valued reasons are intrinsic and also oriented to the learning process. This relationship is consistent with a and strong motivation for learning.

b) Motivations towards future learning

We wanted to know the motivations towards future learning of this group of adults. The last two questions of the questionnaire oriented to the future where the following: “Are you interested in pursuing further learning?” (YES / NO). “Why?”

The great majority of the respondents answered that they were interested in pursuing further learning (81%), while a very small part of the respondents said they were not interested in it (3%). 16% of the respondents didn't answer the question.

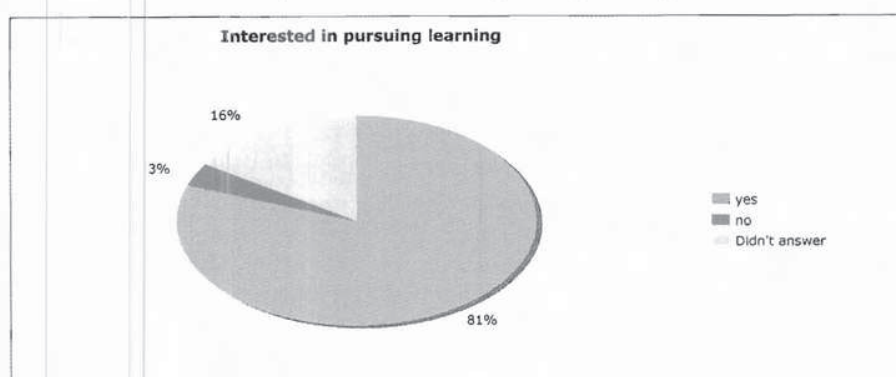
There are significant differences between man and women – 76,1% of men and 84,6% of women say YES.

And if we look to the age group, there is no significant difference: from 25 to 39 years old, 95,7% answer YES to this question; the age group from 40 to 54 years old presented 98,3% positive answers, and from the group of 55 and over 55 we got 93,3% affirmative answers.

Table 4. Interested in pursuing learning

	N	(%)
YES	117	81%
NO	5	3%
Didn't answer	23	16%
Total	145	100%

Graphic 1. Interested in pursuing learning.



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 the practical training and does not correspond to the enterprise needs”; “To be a teacher of the first grade it's not necessary to make an investment in a personal learning path”, “Not interested on the continuation of an academic trajectory”.

• AN ANALYSIS OF THE ADULT MOTIVATIONS – A NEW CATEGORY OF MOTIVES?

We developed a qualitative analysis to the further learning reasons presented by the adults, based in the model of Carré (1998, 2001). However, a new group of reasons were emerging 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.

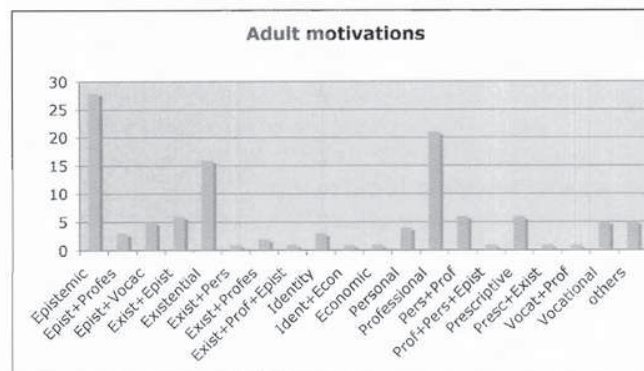
Based on the inductive analysis of our data, we identified another reason for learning, a category of deeper motives, more profound, articulated with the development of the human being, within the personal sphere. This type of motives are deeply linked to self-development processes, and they seem to be self-finalised processes. This can be seen from the following sentences: “it is a part of the human development”, “it gives a meaning to life”, “it is a way of being alive”, “it's a philosophy of life”, and so. In some cases, they appear like a basic need of 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 not reversible anymore”). We classify this type of reasons for adult learning in the same domain of the intrinsic motives and of the learning/process oriented motives. We call them in this proposal **the existential motive**.

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

Table 5. Adult Motives

Motives	N.º	%
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%

Graphic 2. Adult Motives.



The 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 the adults, and in a combined way for almost 13% of the 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 more important motive for this group of adults, for almost 18% of the respondents. And the combined professional motives are relevant to almost 12% of the adults (in the following combination forms: professional and existential, professional and personal, professional and vocational, professional epistemic and personal). The following more important single motive is the existential one, for almost 14% of the respondents. And in a combined constellation, it is significant for 4.26% of the adults (in the following combination forms: existential and epistemic, existential and personal, existential and professional, existential and prescriptive, existential professional and epistemic).

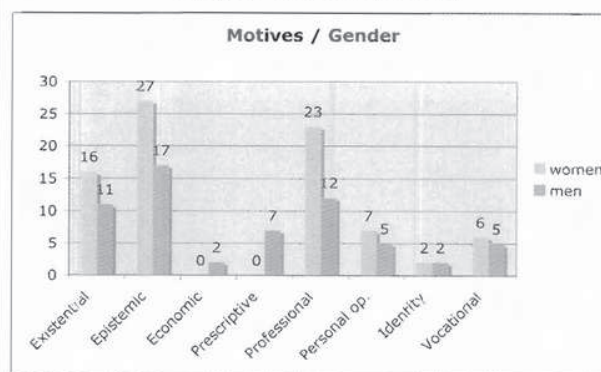
a) Motives/Gender

The group of the respondents is composed of 52, 4% women and 47,6% men.

Table 6. Motives/Gender

	Women	Men	Total
Existential	16	11	27
Epistemic	27	17	44
Economic	0	2	2
Prescriptive	0	7	7
Professional	23	12	35
Personal	7	5	12
Identity	2	2	4
Vocational	6	5	11

Graphic 3. Motives/Gender.



An analysis of the influence of gender on motives seems to show no significant differences between reasons presented by men and women regarding the interest in pursuing of learning: the epistemic motive comes in first place both for women and men, followed by the professional and by the existential motives. However, the prescriptive motive and the economic motive were only referred by the male respondents.

b) Motives/Age

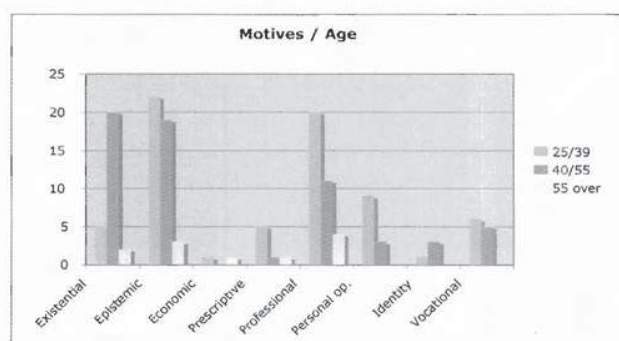
For the respondents that belong to the group of 25/39 years old, the most significant reasons for further learning belong to the epistemic motive, followed by the professional and the personal motives. For the age group of 40/55 years old, the motive that comes in the first place is the existential, followed by the epistemic motive and then the professional motive. And for the age group of 55 years old and over, the professional motive comes in first place, followed by the epistemic and the existential motive.

According to this data, age seems to have a significant role in the motives for pursuing learning. Younger people (25/39 years old) seem to put in first place the epistemic motive,

Table 7. Motives/Age group

	25/39	40/54	55 and over	Total
Existential	5	20	2	27
Epistemic	22	19	3	44
Economic	1	0	1	2
Prescriptive	5	1	1	7
Professional	20	11	4	35
Personal op.	9	3	0	12
Identity	1	3	0	4
Vocational	6	5	0	11

Graphic 4. Motives/Age.



followed by the professional one, while the group of 40/55 years old seems to value more 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.

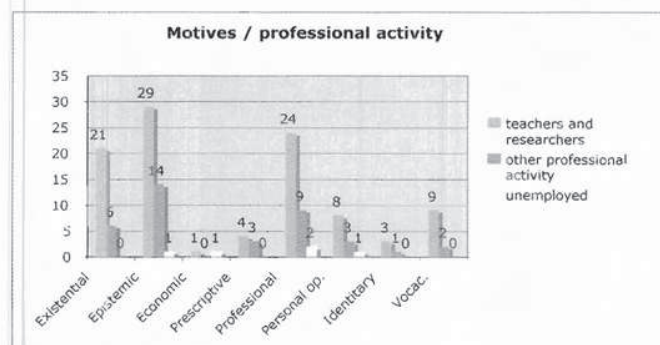
c) Professional activity/Motives

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, ...), and 3% of the respondents are not employed.

Table 8. Motives/Professional Activity

	Teachers and researchers	Other professional activities	unemployed	Total
Existential	21	6	0	27
Epistemic	29	14	1	44
Economic	1	0	1	2
Prescriptive	4	3	0	7
Professional	24	9	2	35
Personal	8	3	1	12
Identity	3	1	0	4
Vocational	9	2	0	11

Graphic 5. Motives/Professional activity.



For the professional group of teachers and researchers, the motives that come in first place for pursuing learning are the epistemic ones, followed by the professional motives. Existential motive comes in third place. For the group of respondents that have other professional activities, the most important reasons for learning 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 the economic, personal and epistemic motives.

FINAL COMMENTS

Motives for pursuing learning can appear in a single or in a combined form, in different combination constellations. According to Carré (2001), motives are plural, contingent and they are dynamic, they evolve. We would like to stress that the epistemic motive is the most valued by this group of adults regarding the pursuing of learning, followed by the professional and existential ones.

According to the model of Carré (1998, 2001), the epistemic motive is situated on the axis intrinsically orientated and on the axis oriented to the learning content. If we consider that the new emergent group of reasons (that we named by existential motives) is also intrinsically oriented and oriented to the learning content, then there seems to be a very strong group of motives that can be situated in this quadrant of the model. These type of motivations seem very consistent with a strong engagement towards learning and the intention to pursue further learning.

This group of adults is strongly committed to demanding learning activities, such as the academic pos-graduate courses (Masters and Ph.D). Other studies have shown that motivations 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 that are interested in pursuing learning (women show a higher percentage), the qualitative analysis of the data seems to show that gender and professional activity (exception to unemployed people) does not seem to have a significant role on the content of motivations, within this group of adults. However, age seems to be a factor that can influence the content of the motivation towards learning. The main motive for younger people seems to be the epistemic motive, while for a middle age group it is the existential motive that is more valued.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In contemporary society – “the learning society”, “the lifelong learning society” –, learning is being valued within the major socio-economic demands, articulated with the globalisation, the increasing of competitive markets, the changes in the workplace, the need

of new professional competences, and so on. From the political point of view, learning seems to be an individual responsibility, particularly when it is related to the development of the competences that are considered relevant for the economy sector.

Edwards (1997:184) identifies various meanings and significance from the discourses of the learning society, different paths with a coincident shift "from the focus on the provision of learning opportunities to one learning". One of these is a conception of learning society "in which learners adopt a learning approach to life, drawing on a wide range of resources to enable them to support their lifestyle practices. This supports lifelong learning as a condition of individuals in the contemporary period to which policy needs to respond. (...) The normative goals of a liberal democratic society – an educated society – and an economically competitive society – a learning market – are displayed by a conception of participation in learning as an activity in, and through, which individuals and groups pursue their heterogeneous goals". (idem:ibid.)

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

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

The consideration of the diversity of motives and the diversity of adult needs demand, from the educational point of view, an integrated and coherent approach to adult learning policies, as it is pointed out by Pont (2004:45). For the author, the 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 take into account the broadening of the concept of adult learning (also considering the non-formal and informal learning), as 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 a multiplicity of objectives and motivations for learning – underpinned by professional, personal or social reasons.

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