

THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION IN POST-WAR RECOVERY

Inna Balahurovska^{1,2} <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3642-9506>

¹Sumy State University, Sumy, Ukraine

²Silesian University of Technology, Gliwice, Poland

Corresponding author: i.balahurovska@biem.sumdu.edu.ua

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-609-9-12>

Keywords: adult education; social cohesion; post-war recovery; veterans' reintegration; social entrepreneurship.

Abstract

The full-scale war in Ukraine has caused profound social, economic, and psychological transformations that have significantly affected the structure of society, the level of trust between social groups, and the ability of communities to act collectively. Social fragmentation, traumatic experiences, forced displacement of the population, as well as the difficulties of reintegration of veterans, create new challenges for state policy and civil society. In this regard, the search for effective tools to foster social cohesion as a prerequisite for sustainable post-war recovery is of particular importance.

Social cohesion in the proposed study is considered a complex phenomenon encompassing levels of trust, the inclusiveness of social institutions, the intensity of horizontal ties, and readiness for collective action. In post-war conditions, it serves not only as a social characteristic but also as an economic resource that determines society's ability to recover and develop. Accordingly, policies and practices aimed at strengthening it should take into account both institutional and behavioral aspects.

One of the tools for building social cohesion is adult education, which goes beyond the traditional understanding as a system for transferring knowledge and skills. In modern conditions, it appears as a multifunctional platform that combines human capital development, social integration, civic engagement, and the restoration of social capital. Practice-oriented educational programs that integrate learning with real community challenges and promote participants' involvement in joint activities are gaining particular relevance.

The purpose of this work is to examine the role of adult education in fostering social cohesion during post-war reconstruction, using a case study of participation in an educational program on social entrepreneurship. The program was implemented with the support of DVV International and the Center for Lifelong Learning NGO as part of an initiative aimed at veterans' reintegration through the creation of educational opportunities and the development of entrepreneurial competencies.

The course under study had a clearly structured educational architecture and lasted from 2024 to 2025. Its total duration was 24 academic hours and included 6 thematic modules (4 hours each), combining theoretical and practical components. This format ensured not only the acquisition of basic knowledge in social entrepreneurship but also the development of applied skills through active participation in practical tasks.

The course covered issues in creating and developing social enterprises. In particular, the first module was dedicated to entering social entrepreneurship and included a practical analysis of social problems, which allowed participants to identify current challenges of communities. The second module focused on the business models of social entrepreneurship, in which participants, in the practical part, developed their own business models using the Canvas approach. The third module was dedicated to financing issues and included the practice of forming a social enterprise budget. The fourth module revealed marketing tools in the field of social entrepreneurship, and the practical part involved developing a marketing plan. The fifth module focused on social impact assessment, during which participants conducted a SWOT analysis of their own business ideas. The final module was dedicated to the ethical issues of social entrepreneurship and included developing their own code of ethics. Such a comprehensive approach to building the educational process ensured the integration of knowledge and practice, contributed to the development of systems thinking, and fostered participants' ability to work on socially significant projects. It is important that the training took place in an interactive, cooperative format, which created conditions for the formation of trust, mutual understanding, and social ties among participants.

The case demonstrates that adult education programs can create inclusive learning environments that unite representatives of

diverse social groups (veterans, civilians, internally displaced persons) around shared activities. An important characteristic of such environments is the horizontality of interaction, which helps overcome social barriers, reduce stigmatization, and build mutual trust.

Within the program, training was built on a project-oriented approach, learning through experience, and social constructivist principles. Participants worked in teams to develop social entrepreneurship ideas to solve current community problems. This format allowed combining the acquisition of practical entrepreneurial competencies with the development of social skills, in particular communication, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. At the same time, joint work on projects created conditions for the formation of long-term social ties that go beyond the educational process. The study paid special attention to the role of social entrepreneurship in fostering social cohesion. Unlike traditional forms of entrepreneurial activity, social entrepreneurship focuses on creating social value, making it an effective mechanism for combining economic activity with social integration. Within the program, participants not only developed business ideas but also assessed their potential social impact, thereby fostering responsible thinking and an orientation to community needs.

For veterans, participation in such educational initiatives opens the door to transforming their own experience into activities of social significance. This contributes to their economic adaptation, the restoration of social roles, and the formation of a new identity outside the military context. At the same time, interaction with other participants in the educational process contributes to the dismantling of social stereotypes and the creation of a more inclusive environment, an important factor in long-term social stability.

An important result of the study is the identification of the role of partnerships in ensuring the effectiveness of adult education programs. Cooperation between civil society organizations, international institutions, and local communities ensures the adaptation of educational programs to real needs, their resource support, and sustainability. In addition, such partnerships contribute to the dissemination of best practices and the formation of networks of interaction that strengthen social capital. Based

on the analysis, it can be argued that adult education plays an important role in post-war recovery. It contributes not only to the development of human capital and economic activity but also to the formation of trust, strengthening horizontal ties, and increasing communities' ability to self-organize. Thus, adult education is an important tool for building sustainable and cohesive societies.

The study's practical conclusions include the need to integrate adult education into national and regional recovery strategies. It is advisable to expand support for programs focused on social entrepreneurship, the development of inclusive educational environments, and the stimulation of intersectoral partnerships. It is also important to ensure that such programs are accessible to different social groups. Thus, adult education in modern conditions appears not only as a learning tool but also as a strategic resource for social recovery, helping to form inclusive, sustainable, and cohesive communities in the post-war period.

References

NGO "Lifelong Learning Centre" <http://educationforlife.com.ua/uk/>
DVV International. <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/>