

Older adult education in Lithuanian ageing society

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Abstract. The article analyzes the phenomenon of the demographic ageing of the population and educational opportunities for older adults in Lithuania. Ageing population is a natural outcome of demographic evolution of society. However, a growing number of older people in Lithuania as well as in other European countries requires continuous revision of societal resources in social security, economics, education, health care areas and their adjustment to the new demands. Though current discussion in Lithuania highlights the inclusion of older adults into active social life through educational activities, the studies in diverse areas show that a small number of older people take part in lifelong learning. For this reason and in the attempt to make older people feel satisfaction with life it is necessary to encourage their activity, to promote their social roles, to give them opportunities to take up voluntary tasks, educational and cultural functions and study new subjects.

Introduction

Long-lasting ageing of the population is transforming societies considerably. Demographic ageing causes a lot of multifaceted consequences for sustainable development of societies. The ever growing number of older people both in Lithuania and in Europe requires manifold social and economic changes which are necessary in order to secure further development of the country. According to Statistics Lithuania in 2003 over 20 per cent of the population of Lithuania was 60 years old and older, and, if current demographic trends persist, it is predicted that by 2030 the share of the population that is 60 years old and older will have reached over 27 per cent. Therefore, it is recognized that, with the ageing of society, more attention should be paid to the quality of life of older people, since it is this group of people that will determine the general standard of living and societal stability of the country. One of the crucial challenges among them is implementation of structural reforms in educational system to adapt to ageing societies.

The paper seeks to discuss the trends in population ageing in Lithuania and their implications for older adult education. Constant attention devoted to the lifelong learning in European Union policy has a positive impact on education policy-making and development of lifelong learning system in Lithuania.

Trends and challenges of population ageing in Lithuania

During the last twenty five years Lithuania has experienced an unprecedented number of transitions – economic, socio-political, demographic and cultural. Lithuania, as well as the other EU member states, is facing the process of demographic ageing. The ever growing number of older people both in Lithuania and in Europe dictates manifold social and

economic changes which are necessary in order to secure further development of the country. The changing ration of younger and older population in the society transforms the application of the present social, political, economic, educational, health care and other resources of the society for the new needs.

The rapid increase in the older generation substantially poses challenges for a number of social institutions, which were once designed and adjusted for a demographically young society. In Lithuania, numerous recent reforms in the labour force and education system, social security and health care system are part of the answer to the challenges of population ageing. These reforms are crucially important as social institutes, established and functioning when the society in Lithuania was demographically younger, became inadequate and are not meeting in full the needs of an ageing society in the new situation [17]. In fact, structural changes are necessary in every field: in the labour force, in consumption, in investment and savings, in the education system, in the pension system, in the social services system, in the health care system, etc. Moreover, many European documents point out that no less important are the psychological well-being of the elderly, and development of an attitude towards ageing as a positive, active and natural process. Meeting the integration needs of older persons by facilitating their adequate education, self-expression, leisure, political and community activity is also the key for the modern situation [4, 6].

The age structure of the population of Lithuania has undergone significant changes during the last five decades. Proportions of all age groups in the total number of population have undergone changes; however, these changes went to different directions. The proportion of the youngest population has decreased almost twice – from 27 percent in 1959 to 15 percent in 2010, and the proportion of those over 65 has doubled – from 8 percent in 1959 to 16 percent in 2010 [17]. Mikulionienė (2011) [17] writes that ageing of Lithuanian population is seen in the quantitative data (growth of absolute number of older people) and proportionally (when proportion of children is shrinking, the proportion of older people is growing correspondingly).

In order to measure Lithuanian population's age structure in a wider context, it is useful to compare it to other EU-member states. While analyzing EU states structural changes of population according to the age, it comes to focus that over the period 2002–2012 the percentage of older people (aged 65 and over) was growing at different paces (Fig. 1).

As Eurostat data indicates, the average growth of population ageing in European member states was 1.9 percentile (it is the percentage of 65-year-olds and over in comparison to the number of the rest of population, Kanopienė, Mikulionienė, Česnuitytė, 2015) [25]. The biggest growth (from 3 to more percentiles) was spotted in Malta – 3.8, Lithuania – 3.6, Germany – 3.5 and Latvia – 3.2 percentile. The slowest demographic ageing is seen in Spain, Belgium (0.4), Ireland (0.8), United Kingdom (0.9) percentiles [25]. In the future, according to the Eurostat population projections (baseline scenario), the proportion of the youngest population (aged 0–14) will decrease in Lithuania to 13.7 percent in 2050.

Respectively, the percentage of working age population (aged 15–64) will change to 59.6 percent and the share of the older people (aged 65 and over) will increase to 26.7 percent [6, 7]. The same indicators for the EU-27 in 2050 will be: 13.4; 56.7 and 29.9 respectively [6, 7]. An important moment in demographic process is the ageing of the very old adults group. In 2009 people aged 80 and over made up 1/7 of the 60-year-old and over world population, but due to the rapid growth of the oldest group of the population it is forecasted that in 2050 they will make one fifth of the 60-year-old and over world population [5, 17]. According to Statistics Lithuania, in 2003 over 20 percent of the population of Lithuania was 60 years old and older, and, if current demographic trends persist, it is predicted that by 2030 the share of the population that is 60 years old and older will have reached over 27 percent [21]. As many authors [10, 17, 18] have pointed out, a longer

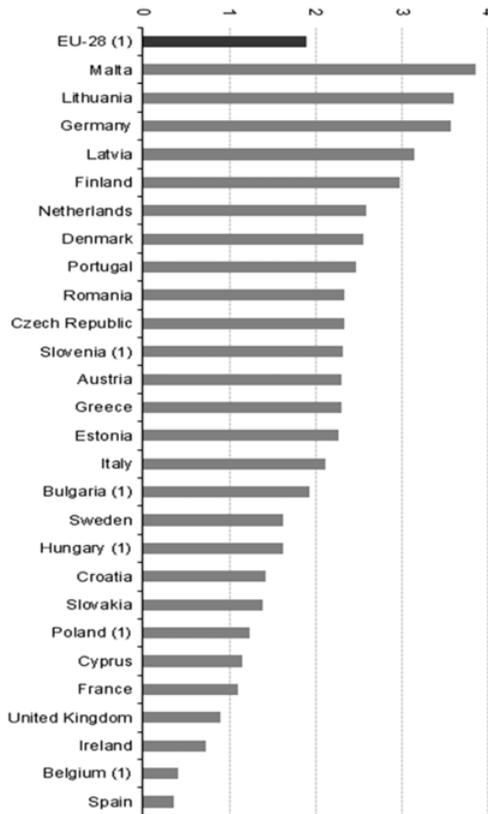


Figure 1. Increase in the share of the population aged 65 years or over between 2002 and 2012, in percent points. *Source: Kanopienė, Mikulionienė, Česnuitytė, 2015.*

average life expectancy has caused changes in many domains of human life. Longer lives are accompanied by changing behavior, norms and values, changing of the family institution (family relationships, increasing duration of family members' co-survival, etc.), and changing education careers (the need for life-long learning arises along with the increase in lifespan and accelerated social changes). Therefore, it is recognized that, with the ageing of society, more attention should be paid to the quality of life for older people, because it is this group of people that will determine the general standard of living and societal stability of the country [13].

In summary, ageing of the population brings not only challenges for governments, but also opportunities. To be capable to overcome challenges and to use the opportunities, a crucial role in this belongs to the population capacities and possibilities to make use of life-long learning.

The development of Lifelong Learning Policy in Lithuania

In 1990, when Lithuania became independent, the political and economical system of society changed, the integration into the association of democratic states' process began and that raised new requirements for education of adults. Creating of a progressive system of adult education, supported by legal documents, became a task of societal importance since utilizing the potential of adult education is the main guarantor of success, resolving contemporary

problems of Lithuania. The legal basis of adult education in Lithuania is comprised of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, laws of the Republic of Lithuania, resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, its representative institutions, (ministries etc.) legal norm acts and other legal documents.

Especially important for the development of adult education in Lithuania was the Non-formal Adult Education Law of the Republic of Lithuania, approved in 1998 (new version – 2014) [11]. It is important to note that Lithuania was the first of the Baltic countries that approved the law regulating non-formal adult education. The law legalized the term non-formal adult education, defining it and determining its state, activity and management fundamentals.

Adult education policy in post-Lisbon Lithuania is shaped in line with the functioning laws and strategies, i.e. with the:

Republic of Lithuania Law on Higher Education and Research (2009) [16], which provides that the goal of education is to ensure conditions enabling a person to acquire the basics of civic and political culture that embody democratic traditions, and to develop the abilities and experience needed by a person for competence as a citizen of Lithuania and a member of the European and global community as well as of a multi-cultural society.

National Education Strategy guidelines for 2013–2022 (2013) [22], which highlight the mission of education to assist a person in acquisition of professional qualifications, which meet the standards of modern technologies, culture and individual abilities, and to provide for lifelong learning, permanently satisfying the need of cognition; to seek new competencies and qualifications, instrumental for a person's career advancement and for realization of the meaning of life.

Lifelong Learning Strategy (2008) [12], which aims at foreseeing and defining areas for lifelong learning development and measures for implementing these goals with particular emphasis on professional training and adult continuous learning.

At present the most important measure of the policy of Lithuanian State towards older people is the National Strategy to Overcome Ageing Consequences by which Lithuania undertook to take measures to solve the problem of ageing at national level. "Although quite a few measures are being undertaken in order to create conditions for older people to lead a full life socially, professionally and culturally, however, it still does not ensure all the essential changes that are necessary for the well-being of older people, therefore, a necessity remains to make a joint effort to create such conditions that older people would be able to lead a full life socially, professionally and culturally" [23].

The adult education system is marked by complexity and structural diversity – its institutions of education, volunteer organizations, education and cultural institutions, commercial agencies and self-help groups. An important place in this system is held by the mass media and modern information technologies. So, as a system, adult education encompasses all the structures, where formal, non-formal and informal adult education takes place. As a process, adult education is any type of activity, during which adults acquire knowledge, skills and abilities and also where attitudes of mind and behavior are formed. Adult education may provide the required conditions and meet the needs of learners for the positive processes of the change. For this reason the system of adult education embracing older people's education is a part to key changes in the implementing the new ideas and fostering the society's capacity for change.

Educational activities of older adults

The change in the structure of population's age – from the society where the youth dominates the society where all the age groups of population are represented proportionally, according to Mikulionienė (2011) [17], – is and will be a challenge to social, economic and cultural

development of the society in the future. Due to the scope and irreversibility demographic ageing of the population is essentially changing the structure of society's needs and, at the same time, raises new challenges to the social institutes that satisfy those needs. The growing number of older people calls for revision of society resources in the areas of social security, economy, health care and education to the new needs. The increasing average life expectancy requires changes in the development of an individual and the institution of family and education when, due to the acceleration of social changes, the need for lifelong learning and improvement arises. In a competitive and dynamic economy, special attention is given to skills essential for employment. That is why it is especially important to provide people with necessary skills and abilities in today's versatile employment situation so that individuals could apply for broader catalogue of jobs and be able to work in a knowledge-based economy [8]. At this time, the fundamental challenge for Lithuania is to enable everyone to learn and to update their skills. Human resource development is most connected with the growth of the economy and social cohesion. A higher level of education leads to higher employment rates, higher productivity and lower unemployment levels [9], Projections in the Ageing Report (2012) [6] point towards an increasing role for older adults within the EU-27's labour market, as the employment rate for women aged 55 to 64 is expected to rise by 20.9 percentage points between 2010 and 2060, while that for men is projected to increase by 11.5 points.

Vocational training, other active labour market measures for the pre-retirement group and older people, are not yet widely applied in Lithuania. Public perception of the need for pre-retirement persons to continue learning is outdated. The opinion persists that it is counter effective to invest in training and adaptation to the labour market of older citizens. Moreover, even the measures applied do not guarantee jobs for older individuals. On the other hand, some of the pre-retirement persons themselves do not want to or are unable to change their profession, occupation or style of work [9]. In 2011, the Social Information and Training Agency conducted a study of adult education, which analyzed the participation of the older adults in learning. Data from the survey showed that about one-fifth (21%) of the elderly (55–74 years old) have participated in some kind of training in the last 3 years, in which they tried to enrich their knowledge and acquire new skills [24]. Though Lifelong Learning Strategy (2008) [12] admits that a large part of Lithuanian society is indifferent and unmotivated regarding lifelong learning, the survey reveals that there is no adequate network of educational service providers to meet the requirements of adult education institutions and of older adults. A huge challenge as indicated by the survey is that 2 out of 3 (61%) older adults do not wish to study since they consider learning an activity offered too late for their age [24].

To quote Eurostat, in 2012 in Lithuania, 5.2 percent of individuals in the 25–64 age group participated in a learning activity within the period of 4 weeks prior to the survey [20], The Department of Statistics indicates that in 2011 [21], adult education attracted about 39 percent of individuals, age group 25–64. Teaching services were provided by about 3000 institutions of diverse economic affiliation, with different forms of ownership status, as well as by institutions whose direct mission does not include educational services. Adult learning is taking place in work environment, organized by the employers with regard to the market requirements. About 6.7 thousand businesses in Lithuania are potential providers or users of the educational services. The Department of Statistics, in 2008 listed 700 public and private institutions, which administer non-formal adult education [21]. As noted by Punzienė, Dienys (2003) [2], the need for employers to develop learning has become understood as economically useful. The interaction of the world of labour and education became especially important because human resources are a value on which education, preparation and ability to renew continually and independently rests, and on which the social and economical welfare of society and the country depends.

An adult, desiring to learn, enters non-formal education and develops their intellectual and creative strengths, gains broader social acceptance, communicates and self-expresses more dynamically. Such an adult wishes to learn are led by self-educational goals [10]. Self-education as the highest form of individualised cognitive activity helps to develop a comprehensive, balanced personality with a position in society [1]. According to E. Lindeman (1961) [3], adults have a motivation to learn when they feel a need, which learning can fulfil. The adult's view towards learning is realistic: that is – it encompasses the knowledge of the momentum and of the world of labour, that is why adults choose the area of learning themselves and the learning world for adults is the world of meaningful activity. In the education of the elderly, cultural centres, museums, clubs, and theatres list at the top. National population strategy of coping with the aging effects notes that “one of the state cultural policy goals is to enable the society and each and every member of the society as well as older people to participate in cultural life, to choose their favourite pastime activities and provide a possibility for self-expression” [23]. Currently, according to Registry Centre data, Lithuania has more than 32,000 non-governmental non-profit organisations. The number of NGO's is growing every year; about 1,500 NGO's start their function (associations, charities and support funds, public enterprises) [21]. However, about 100 organisations are liquidated every year; many organisations cease to exist or transform themselves or become temporarily ineffective for different reasons. About 60 percent of Lithuanian NGOs refer to educational activities in cultural, legal and economic upbringing of their members. Some, especially the associations working in the field of education, pay particular attention to the education of adults and older people. Alongside traditional educational institutions, new or restructuring non-formal education institutions gain more importance.

Third Age Universities (TAU) are among such new institutions. According to T. Jarvis (1996) [14], TAU is a unique university which does not have any university territory. TAU – is an ever-increasing volunteer association, which supplies non-formal adult education to its members and also allows them the possibility to unite in various interest groups and learn from one another. In Lithuania TAU was established in 1995 in Vilnius. Its initiators and founders were the Experimental and Clinical Medicine Institute's researchers and gerontologists. At this time TAU has its affiliates in Alytuje, Anykščiūose, Druskininkuose, Jonavoje, Kaune, Kėdainiuose, Klaipėdoje, Kretingoje, Kupiškėje, Marijampolėje, Mažeikiuose, Palangoje, Panevėžyje and etc. There are 23 Faculties (often regarded as independent institutes) (Health, Home Education, Music, Folk Art, Human Spiritual Development, Tourism, Literature, Cultural Recognition, History, Languages, Political Sciences and others) where about 6,000 individuals study (data from 2012). Lithuania's TAU belongs to the International Third Age University Association (AIUTA). In 2012 Education Development Centre carried out Analysis of the Third Age Universities System Function (representatives of eighteen out of twenty four Third Age Universities were interviewed) [19]. The analysis revealed that the key reasons why the respondents chose to attend Third Age Universities were self-development, self-extension and a wish to communicate to new people. Learning in TAU is based on self-analysis of the person, planning, reflections, reconstruction and other methods depending on developing one's competencies, undertaken in any type of a person's activity and continuing throughout one's entire life. Another aim of studies is to improve the integration of the elderly into the work force. TAU seeks to form the best conditions for persons to raise their qualification and thereby accommodate themselves more to the changes in the labour market [19]. These types of studies are necessary for older people of working age. Learning programmes try to include as much as possible modern information technology application means thereby attempting to acquaint their students with the possibilities of information technology. In this way TAU students acquire not only a special skill according to the programmes of taught courses,

but also raise their competence in the area of the use of information technologies. The University aims to focus on the older adults, to assist in fulfilling choices, to show that the individuals are not excluded from the community, on the contrary, that they are appreciated more.

The other institution that unites older adults and provides educational activities is Lithuanian Retired People Association “Bočiai”. As of now, the “Bočiai” link 54 communities and 8 independent clubs uniting 45 thousand members in Lithuanian towns and regions as well as municipalities. The main goals and purposes of the “Bočiai” is to represent social, economic and cultural interests of pension and pre-pension age people and to defend them in the governmental institutions of all levels; provide their members and society with information about the situation of older people in Lithuania and around the world, organize discussions, conferences, seminars, involve the members of older age into various cultural activities, promote clubs and classes according to their interests, publish materials, participate in international projects, cultivate healthy life style, mutual help, support and implant national cultural traditions and protect historical heritage [10]. In 2004 the “Bočiai” was accepted to international organization “European Older People’s Platform,” and it actively participates in the activities of the organization. In 2005–2013 Lithuanian Retired People Association “Bočiai” prepared ECDL standard computer literacy programmes supported by EU structural funds. Nearly 7000 older adults members of “Bočiai” (15 percent of membership) were trained in these programmes, among them about only in Vilnius about 40 per cent of “Bočiai” members. As the Head of the Association Butkus (2013) [15] admits Vilnius “Bočiai” sector pays particular interest to dealing with the conflict of the generation interests. In his opinion a part of younger generation think that older adults block their careers in the labour market while elder people feel that they are made retire prematurely. Therefore, it is important to enhance reciprocal understanding and learning in developing the activities of generation solidarity, to promote initiatives, which unite generations for common goals and rest on principles of cooperation and mutual understanding of the generations. One of the most important goals unifying the members of “Bočiai” is the need to stay independent, self-sufficient and valuable members of their communities. By organizing various educational activities and trying to involve participants of elderly age, the Association tries to reduce the social gap, and to respect dignity of older people. It also pursues to achieve that the attitudes of volunteering, goodwill, humanism, tolerance and democracy would dominate in mutual relationships.

By way of generalising it is possible to say that participation of older people in education activities brings about better social integration of older adults into society, it promotes their productive and meaningful life, maintains their ability to work and physical activity, enhances their knowledge and culture. People can exchange experiences and maintain health. The organisation through various activities and involvement of senior participants aims to overcome social exclusion, to respect the dignity of older people, to keep interactions among people characterised by voluntary approach, benevolence, humanity, tolerance and democratic spirit.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Lithuanian population’s ageing rate in the context of EU member states is distinguished by a not-very-high level (now it is slightly below EU-27 average, similar to CEE countries average, and lowest among Baltic states), but this process is accelerating fast. Challenges of demographic ageing lead to an ongoing transformation, not only in individual behaviour, norms and values, but also in all social institutes (economic, education, welfare, leisure, family, kinship).

Analyzing the development of education policy in Lithuania during the last two decades, it could be summarized, that the Lithuanian Government has undertaken the necessary steps of modernization of the education system by introducing new laws. Alongside the new legal context and reforms introduced, Lithuanian researchers in the field of adult learning stress that the attention to the problems of education of older people in Lithuanian educational policy is growing.

In conclusion it is possible to state that the participation of older adults in educational activities reflects possibilities for personal development, socialization and the importance of learning. An older person's satisfaction with life is connected to their ability to keep their social roles, be active, get involved into voluntary and cultural activities, and learn new things. Therefore, active participation in educational activities helps older adults stay independent and valuable members of their communities.

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