

Study Report

Education of Older Adults: Comparing Baltic and Nordic Frameworks



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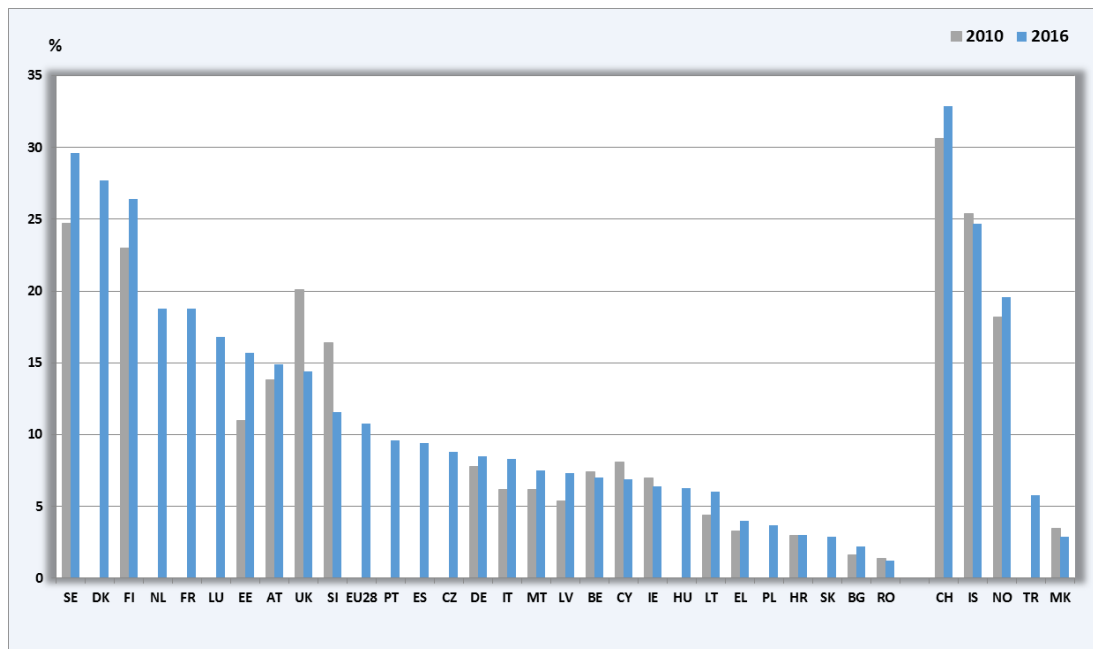
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Preface

In many European countries, education of adults in many ways take precedence over education of older adults. This is especially evident in national and European programmes prioritizing attempts to improve Eurostat’s Lifelong learning statistics, only taking 25-64-year-olds into account. Even though the choice of this particular age group has a sophisticated economical reasoning behind it, associated with the demands of the common market (Panitsidou et al. 2012), at the same time it marginalizes older adults by pushing their needs away from the public debate on planning of overarching education policies. For example, despite political ambitions to create opportunities for older adults to continue participating in educational activities (see for example, European Active Ageing Index), in reality planning of educational policies still relies on economic justifications and largely prioritizes working-age people. Baltic states, still undergoing a post-communist transition and searching for an appropriate education policy framework, are illustrative cases in point.

Figure 1. Lifelong learning in the EU (Eurostat data)



Statistics provided by Eurostat reveal that there is a stark difference between Nordic and Baltic countries when it comes to lifelong learning. For example, Denmark and Iceland are leading

globally with around 25-30 percent of their respective populations aged between 25-64 partaking in educational activities. In contrast, Lithuania and Latvia are struggling to reach the EU average of 10.9 percent with significantly lower numbers (5.9 and 7.5 percent; see figure 1). Judging from this, considerable differences should also exist in older adult education, which so far has remained unmapped.

In the light of these issues, partner organisations¹ of “Education of Older Adults: Comparing Baltic and Nordic Frameworks” project funded by the Nordplus Adult programme came together for the period of 18 months and invested time and resources to prepare a research study, comparing coordination and financing frameworks of older adult education in selected Baltic and Nordic countries: Lithuania, Latvia, Denmark and Iceland. Starting in June 2019, project partners held a number of online and offline working sessions and did their best to adapt to uncertainties brought by the novel coronavirus. Building on peer-to-peer exchange and material gathered during study trips to partner countries, partners engaged in mapping of institutional frameworks, one of the key elements to Nordic success-story (Rothstein 1998), looking to identify ways for Baltic states to “catch-up” their counterparts, and likewise to further improve learning opportunities for older adults in Nordic countries.

The project focused on four different levels: organizational (how is the quality of older adult education programmes assured?), municipal (how do municipal governments coordinate and finance older adult education?), national (which national bodies are responsible for development and implementation of relevant legislation?) and European (how do European structural and other external funds contribute to development of older adult education?) Focusing on one particular level or combining a couple of these aspects the following chapters aim to arrive at relevant and implementable recommendations for older adult education in respective countries. In cases where improvements are more urgent and feasible, recommendations are provided for the broader field of adult education. Therefore, the study report can be read chapter by chapter by the ones interested in comparative aspects of older adult education systems under scrutiny here. Alternatively, readers

¹ Project consortium includes: Medardas Cobotas Third Age University (LT), Latvian Adult Education Association (LV), Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society (DK), The Agricultural University of Iceland (IS).

interested in particular national contexts may pick a case and engage with country-oriented recommendations in more depth.

Consortium partners hope that in the long-term the selection of case studies under this report will serve as an advocacy tool and help (older) adult education organisations to engage policy and decision-makers and push “from below” for more inclusive and effective education policies in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Whichever way you decide to approach this study report, we wish you a pleasant and enriching reading experience!

Lithuania: how to boost a system driven by voluntary work?

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Opportunities to learn at an elderly age are particularly important for health, well-being, and social integration of any individual (Schmidt-Hertha 2005). Older adult learners are less likely to fall ill, they require less additional social and care services, whereas working pensioners, who have reached the retirement age, but remain in the labor market, create greater added value when continuing to engage in educational activities. Based on this, one would assume that older adult education should be prioritized by both governments and businesses. However, Lithuania still lacks not only a comprehensive strategy for education of older adults, but also empirical studies mapping the *status quo*. Thus, this chapter seeks to briefly overview the existing mechanisms for coordinating and financing older adult education in Lithuania, points out the main challenges and provides several recommendations, based on good practices, identified during study visits and consultations with project partners from Latvia, Denmark and Iceland.

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MCTAU was founded in 1995 and operates in Vilnius, Lithuania. It is a non-governmental organisation, focusing on non-formal education and social integration of older adults.

Currently, MCTAU has over 2,200 members/ students of different nationalities. Based on the principle of peer-exchange, MCTAU encourages older adults to act as social leaders in their communities, volunteer and give lectures in 13 thematic faculties.

Since 2015, it is the coordinating organisation of the National Association of Third Age Universities in Lithuania, uniting 48 Third Age Universities with more than 14,000 members/ students nationwide.

www.tauasociacija.lt

(L-)earning patterns of Lithuanian older adults

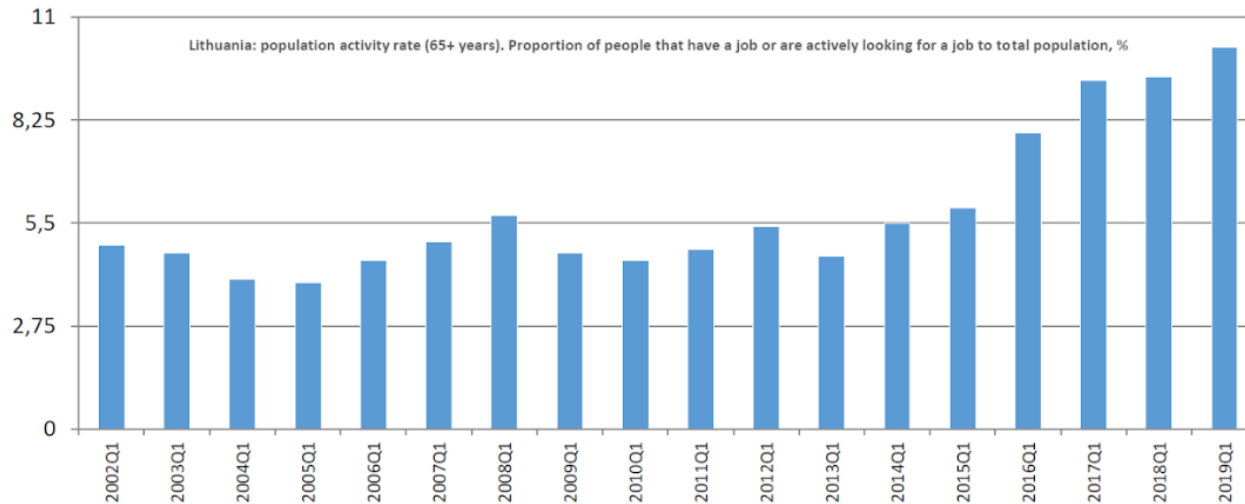


Figure 2. The group of working adults is growing in Lithuania (Source: Besagirskas 2019)

As of 2020, the official retirement age in Lithuania is 64 for men and 63 for women. It is planned to push the pension age up to 65 years for both men and women by 2026. According to SoDra, the Lithuania pension system, 11.9 percent of pension recipients - almost 70 thousand - continue to work. Some estimate these numbers to be on the rise (see figure 2). Most working retirees are in the 60-70 age group. Retired men are more likely to work than women - about 14 and 10 percent, respectively. The earnings of working retired men are higher, averaging 961 EUR per month, while women earn around 928 EUR a month. Working retirees typically have a longer length of service (41 years) than non-working retirees (36 years) and receive higher pensions. For example, in 2019, the average pension of a working pensioner was 444 EUR, and of an unemployed pensioner – 367 EUR.² These trends are better understood looking at the statistics of educational levels in the group of older adults (see figure 3). One of the reasons why Lithuanian older adults are able to stay in the labour market after turning 64 is that this age group has relatively more people with high qualifications. In the light of this demographic data, the fact that Lithuanian elderly do not engage in educational activities is yet more puzzling.

² All wages are presented in *bruto* terms.

Lithuania: High qualification dominates all elder groups

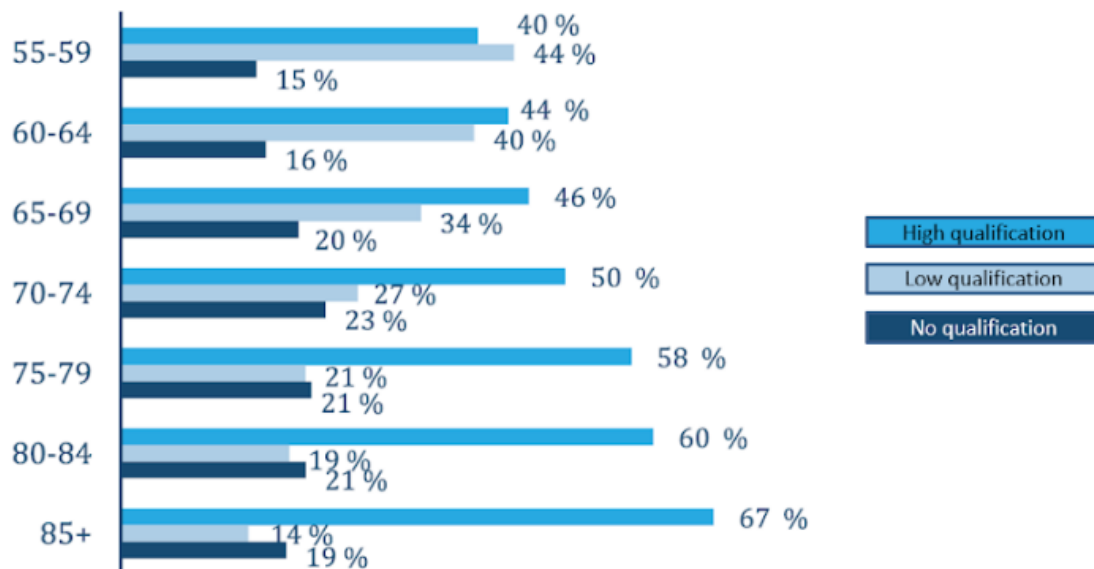


Figure 3. Source: European Commission 2019

The most frequently cited indicator for adult education is the Eurostat’s Lifelong learning (LLL) index. However, it is aimed specifically at 25-64-year-olds, and thus excludes learning needs and habits of people above this threshold. In 2019, considering the shortcomings of these official statistics, Lithuanian National Education NGO network employed the same Eurostat methodology to calculate LLL levels for Lithuanian older adults for the very first time. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, during 2014-2017 LLL 65+ indicator in Lithuania increased, but still has not reached 1% of all older adults. Compared to the average LLL index for working age people in the EU and even in Lithuania, which reached 10.9 percent and 5.9 percent respectively, the involvement of older adults in learning activities in Lithuania is exceptionally low. Recent studies also support this and find that lifelong learning activity rate falls after the age of 50 and that the biggest obstacle in this field is a belief that “it is too late to learn.” More than 70 percent in the 60+ group agree with the latter statement (Strata 2020).

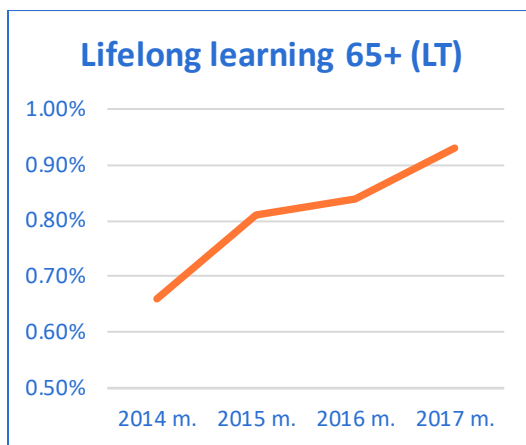


Figure 4.

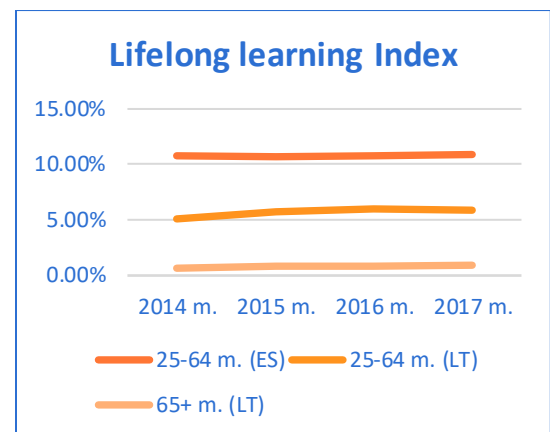


Figure 5.

Main challenges for older adult education

Lithuanian National Education NGO Network (2019) has identified four crucial institutional issues affecting coordination and financing of older adult education in Lithuania. On the 1st of January 2015, a revised version of the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education entered into force. It refers to a unique role of Third age universities (TAU) in the provision of educational services to older adults. This regulation implies that TAU activities and senior adult education are an integral part of the overarching system of non-formal adult education. Nonetheless, document analysis, representative survey of TAU managers, and analysis of allocation of EU structural investments in the period between 2014 and 2020, as well as a focus group with representatives from relevant government institutions revealed that implementation of the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education is not thorough as one would expect.

Lack of sustainable national funding. Although in 2015 the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education and its by-laws provide for the need to create instruments for financing of non-formal (older) adult education programs through open calls, budget funding was not provided as a separate line, but *ad hoc* taken from savings on higher education. This resulted in discontinuation of open call funding in 2018 and the only targeted opportunity for national TAU funding disappeared.

National and local coordination. Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre, an agency under the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, is formally responsible for coordinating questions of (older) adult education at the national level, but its track record shows that it is not its priority area, as the institution focuses on other project activities related to the development of vocational qualifications.

A network of municipal non-formal adult education coordinators, foreseen in the 2015 revision of the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education, has not been successfully formed. For many coordinators, non-formal adult education is often one of the many functions assigned without additional funding, although formally established, coordinator positions remain vague, there is no model job description or operational guidelines. In addition, cooperation with other non-formal adult education organizations is fragmented. The analysis of the population's needs for non-formal adult education takes place in only a few municipalities, mostly due to the personal initiative or the coordinator's contacts, and previous experience of cooperation with certain organizations (National Education NGO network 2019). This was confirmed by a survey of TAU managers, 'users' of the services of this network of coordinators.

As many as one-fifth of the respondents indicated that they had no contact with the coordinator in their municipality. Some respondents mentioned that there was a lack of proactivity of coordinators, continuous cooperation, which is not limited to the technical transfer of third age university activities to the municipal planning documents. Moreover, during different focus group discussions, municipal coordinators themselves have voiced discontent with the *status quo*, feelings of helplessness and lack of decision makers' attention at the local, as well as the national level (Penkauskienė 2017; National Education NGO Network 2020).

Ill-programmed EU investments. One of the more general issues affecting Lithuanian (older) adult education is dependence of the national education system on EU structural funds (see figure 6). Education in Lithuania (lith. *švietimas*) is half-dependent on EU structural support (41-69 percent).

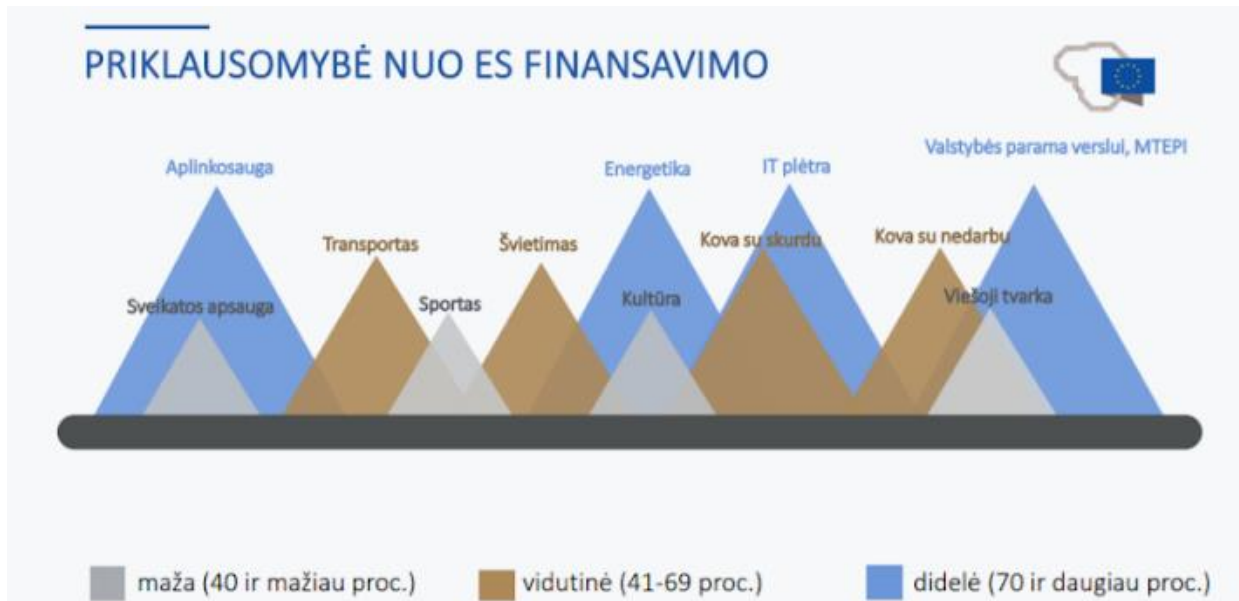


Figure 6. Lithuanian dependency on EU structural funds per sector (source: Ministry of Finance 2019)

In this context, effective allocation of EU support to build capacities of coordination and financing mechanisms and non-formal adult education organizations, which could independently function once EU investments diminish, is crucial. However, neither EU support has been disbursed effectively, nor a long-term exit strategy how to sustainably finance older adult education has been formulated to date.

In the 2014-2020 period, instruments including elements of non-vocational non-formal education that are most relevant to third age university students were earmarked for 40 million EUR, slightly more than 24 percent of all EU investments in non-formal adult education in Lithuania (BGI Consulting et al. 2018). However, funding conditions often prevented securing the necessary funding for organizations working specifically with older adults. One clear trend is that investments of EU structural funds that could be allocated to older adult education have been reprogrammed to make up for government liabilities to other groups. For example, the majority of investments administered by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport went to the training of health specialists or civil servants, groups that the state has committed to train at its own expense, allocating a certain percentage of the salary fund for this purpose (see the Law on Vocational

Training). Other relevant programmes financed by EU structural funds were ill-programmed, as excessive conditions made it simply too complicated for implementers. As a vivid illustration, the project “54+” of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and the project “Development of the Adult Education System by Providing Learners with General and Basic Competences” administered by Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre were ruled as discriminatory by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2018).

Summing up, the brief overview suggests that Lithuania has not been able to leverage on opportunities provided by the 2015 revision of the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education. Moreover, EU structural investments have neither successfully targeted older learners, nor have been disbursed effectively. In this context, successful voluntary ‘bottom-up’ work of Third age universities should be applauded for upward yet minor changes of older adult participation in lifelong learning activities. Reflecting on how these efforts could be meaningfully supported, we further turn to good practices identified during “Education of Older Adults: Comparing Baltic and Nordic Frameworks” project.

Recommendations

Experience of Nordic partners suggest that inclusive, broad-based older adult education is rather a ‘bottom-up’ than a ‘top-down’ phenomenon. Based on good Danish and Icelandic practices, Lithuanian older adult education organisations and relevant institutions should:

- 1) **Engage in active outreach.** Individual attitudes remain one of the main obstacles for older adult education in Lithuania. Latest survey indicates that 70 percent of Lithuanians in the 60+ age group believe that it is “too late for them to start learning” (Strata 2020). In this light, Iceland serves as a best practice example how older adult organisations can speak for themselves and raise the awareness about the benefits of active aging and older adult education. For instance, recently a webpage ‘[Lifðu núna](#)’ (*live now*) has been launched aiming to make lives and work of elderly Icelanders more visible. Three retired journalists own the web page, as well as the concept. Though only funded by small grants and advertisements, the website is highly effective in reaching a wide audience and introducing Icelanders to quality of life issues, and rights of older adults. **Applying a similar ‘bottom-up’ outreach strategy, rather than**

relying on EU-financed state-procured commercials on older adult education, would create a sense of authenticity and attractiveness of Lithuanian older adult education.

- 2) **Combine voluntary civil society work and lifelong learning.** The second pillar to Danish success story in adult education lies with broad-based civil society organisations, integrating elements of lifelong learning for active participation in voluntary associational work (e.g. museum friends, cultural heritage, arts associations). In 1993, a quarter of the population did voluntary work outside their own household and family network. In 2005, it was about one third of Danes volunteering, 17 hours a month on average (Centre for Research in Sports, Health and Civil Society). The biggest increase in participation was recorded specifically among older adults. **Highlighting the participatory aspects of older adult education in Lithuania, empowering the elderly to contribute to associational work** of active Lithuanian NGOs (for instance, by cooperating with Red Cross, Maltese order, election watchdog initiatives) should increase attractiveness of both older adult education and Lithuanian civil society organisations.
- 3) **Explore opportunities of cofinancing.** To achieve sustainable financing of (older) adult education, organisations and institutions should also approach the private sector, employers and labour unions. In Iceland, employees are obliged to pay a certain percentage of their salary, which complemented by employer's contribution goes to the educational fund of labor unions. The latter either run courses themselves or cooperate with local lifelong learning centers to deliver programmes to the employees. In the light of the recently growing interest in the so-called "silver" economy, **Lithuanian (older) adult education organisations should leverage on opportunities and approach employers and labor unions to set up similar funds, which would also be accessible after employee's retirement**, eligible for financing memberships and activities of older adult education organisations. Initiating such a discussion would increase the visibility and agency of (older) adult education organisations in the "silver" economy debate, also create prospects for more financial independence from state and municipal support in the long run.

Latvian Adult Education Association

LAEA is non-governmental organisation, founded in 1993. Currently, it unites 64 adult education institutions in Latvia.

LAEA's main goal is to promote development of non-formal education system in Latvia and participate in drafting of national life-long learning policies: LAEA partakes in creation of development plans and strategies of adult education, represents non-governmental sector at the Supervisory Board of European Social Fund.

The Association draws its expertise from a network of experienced trainers, approbated programs, methodological and educational resources.

www.laea.lv

Latvia: survey of lifelong learning possibilities for older people

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According to the data of the Central Statistical Bureau, in 2019 61.7 percent of the Latvian population is of working age (15-62 years), while 22.5 percent are above the working age (Central Statistical Bureau 2019, 8). Increasing life expectancy and the demographic situation have contributed to a rapid increase in number of pensioners. At the beginning of the next decade, compared to 2002, there will be twice as many people over the age of 80 in Latvia (Certus 2017, 10). The number of pensioners in Latvia in 2020 is 548 417 and many of them are ready to learn further, including under employment (Latvijas Avīze, 2018).

The involvement of senior citizens of Latvia in education and other outside activities is dependent not only on the quality of the activities offered but also on numerous other factors, such as health, financial security and social care offered by the state and local municipality, as well as opportunities offered for learning and being involved in diverse activities of interest and need of senior citizens. Involvement in outside activities also depends on living conditions of a senior whether being single and living on his/her own or sharing a flat or house with their children, which might influence involvement in outside activities of the senior.

The Central Statistical Board of Latvia has surveyed senior citizens above the age of 62 who constituted 22 percent of the older population in 2011 and concluded that 39 percent of seniors are living together with their children, 15 percent of senior citizens are living alone on their own (Portrait of Latvian seniors, 1).

In 2018, the Central Statistical Board of Latvia surveyed the Latvian population with regard to their satisfaction with life and concluded that the least satisfied with life were seniors after the age of 75 (9.9 percent) with an exception of the seniors immediately upon the retiring when there is slight growth in the satisfaction level (13.1 percent). Furthermore, seniors disregarding their financial situation are the least satisfied. It was also concluded that the satisfaction level with life is dependent upon the person's education level: the persons with higher education are more satisfied with life than the persons with elementary education (7,5 points and 6,7 points respectively on a 10-point scale).

The authors of the survey indicate that a great part of the Latvian seniors are dealing with such problems as insufficient resources for the maintenance of their household, health care and everyday living: 38.1 percent of the seniors in the age group of 65 and older are under the threat of inequality. Furthermore, if a senior is residing on his/her own, then the risk of poverty increases dramatically, even more – 74 percent of this senior group are under the risk of poverty (CSB data).

To cope with the financial situation the seniors in Latvia are among those of most engaged in employment: 66 percent of those aged 15 to 74 are participating in the labour market. This is slightly higher than in EU15 (65 percent) (The World Bank, 35).

Along this conclusion it was also assessed that loneliness is the hardest and greatest seniors' problem. The authors of the survey indicate that opportunities to socialize or learn in interest groups help to remedy the situation. Local governments, non-governmental organizations organize a wide range of different activities: education seminars, excursions, thematic evenings, visits to cultural institutions, senior society activities and others. Nevertheless, the range of opportunities for such activities are greatly limited in rural areas.

Support at the state level

With support of European Structural funds, the State Education Development Agency is managing programme [“Growth and employment.”](#) Adults (25 and older) who are employed (including retired persons, regardless of their education either completed or not) may apply for a non-formal or formal training course. The conditions for application specify that in case of excessive application the preference will be given to the employed of the social risk group, which is the age group of 45 and older with a low education level – not completed elementary or secondary education, and older than 50 who have received recommendations.

The State Education Development Agency in cooperation with local governments, educational institutions and Public Employment Service is implementing project “Support for Longer Working Life.” The aim of the project is to promote the preservation of working capacity and employment of older employed persons. The tuition fee is covered 90 percent by the EU funds and the national financing, but 10 percent are covered by the employed person and is free-of-charge for those under the risk of poverty or low-subsistence persons. There can be selected professional further education programmes of 480 to 1280 lessons with the provision of awarding professional qualifications and certificates, professional development programmes of 160 to 320 lessons with the provision of professional development certificate, non-formal education programmes with the provision of a certificate, assessment of attained competences and skills if the employed person has obtained them at work.

The Public Employment Service offers a programme [“Measures to Increase Competitiveness,”](#) which offers a free-of-charge courses without restrictions of either on age or status of the unemployed. State Revenue Service helps seniors and teaches them how to upload income declaration electronically, how to create email box, how to search for information etc. Numerous other opportunities to study are being offered on the Home page of the National Education Centre, where under the heading [“Professional Development and Courses”](#) using the tag “senior” it is possible to search for programmes in different fields and on different levels, in the respective region and the respective language.

(Older) adult education is supported by local governments

In local communities' development strategies there is stressed importance of lifelong education of every resident, regardless of age and previous education, although senior education is not mentioned separately.

Local governments support seniors in many ways. Different local government projects involve free of charge activities for seniors. There are offered free of charge premises for senior association offices and for organizing different events. The co-financing is allocated to projects implemented by Pensioners' Associations. Local libraries help seniors to do payments via internet bank, help in searching for information on the internet, working with email, printing etc. The training centres under the local governments offer diverse non-formal education courses, such as: English, Computer courses, Baltic signs, Photography, Herbal plants, Embroidery, Knitting etc. In digital weeks Adult Education Centres offer free of charge classes or individual consultations about IT skills. Everyone can learn new technologies, smart devices, install new and useful applications on smartphones (for example, Smart ID). To control the quality and satisfaction of educational events, after completing courses AEC conduct a questionnaire-based survey of participants.

Senior or retired persons' associations in all towns and many villages also offer different educational courses, cultural activities, fellowship evenings, anniversary celebrations, excursions, exhibitions, gymnastic, dancing, art-based classes, educational seminars, meetings with local and also national political representatives and more. For these activities, seniors can apply for financial support in local, national or EU project competitions. Seniors use these possibilities not too often.

For example, in Jaunpils Municipality there are several societies: "Jaunpils Pensioners' Association", "Dzīpars", "Vīgriezes", Jaunpils Regional Development Center "Rats", "Gardeners Association", "Kamenes", etc., which implements various projects involving seniors and others. Associations carry out various activities for members, monthly fellowship parties, theatre visits, and more. Seniors can sing in a choir, ensemble, dance line dances, play theatre, participate in soles, darts, Novus annual tournaments, do gymnastics. They participate in the annual retirement party as well.

In Jaunpils it is possible to attend different educational courses, for example, "Healthy in Jaunpils Municipality." Jaunpils Municipality covers expenses of lecturers and different requisites

for choir, ensemble, line dancing, theatre. Municipality organizes small project competition “Doing it yourself”, where there is possibility to get funds for different NGOs activities. There are two libraries and a museum in the municipality, where seniors can participate in a reading club, different educational activities, and exhibitions.

Senior activities organized by NGOs and other institutions

Many higher educational establishments offer opportunities to study in non-formal education programmes in the capacity of a listener of the course. Any retired person can participate in the selected course or just some lectures. Such attendance does not provide one with a certificate, but it offers opportunities to study for free or a small charge anything that has been desired in one’s lifetime. Some higher educational establishments issue certificates for participation in the course, or if a person has worked all the working life or much of it in a profession without formal education certificate, it is possible to apply for a test or exam in the respective further education establishment and take the test or exam and receive the respective certificate of education. Furthermore, many higher education establishments have branches in regions which offer the same learning opportunities in rural areas.

Banks are continuously offering training for the use of bank technologies being conducted in libraries, local government buildings or schools (e.g., [Swedbank](#)).

Seniors are engaged in diverse sports activities. For instance, the Latvian Sports Senior Society (LSVS) organized its 55th [Sports Games](#) under the umbrella of the Latvian 100th anniversary. The Latvian Volleyball Federation organized its 3rd [senior championship](#) in Valka in 2019. In 2010, in order to cater for socializing and integration processes of Riga’s inhabitants, a retired persons’ society (RASA) was organized – with participation of more than 700 retired persons in [different activities](#) - educational seminars, exchanges of experiences, cultural events and excursions, also a coming together of those seniors who have reached the age of 100 and above.

Seniors are also active in participating in different choirs and dance ensembles. For example, there is a [special senior mixed choir](#) founded under the Latvian Society, whose mission is to engage in social events, sharing with other seniors and society at large, maintaining cultural

values and traditions and with the help of songs creating the feeling of happiness for all generations. The choir participates in different competitions, produces theatrical and creative programmes, engages in concert tours both in Latvia and abroad.

The Latvian Pensioners' Federation with an aim to enhance the life quality of older people, unites branches and organizations in all regions of Latvia: (In Kurzeme – 18, in Latgale - 19, in Zemgale - 17, in Vidzeme – 56, in Riga - 14 organizations). Recently, it has implemented a project [“Age is not an Obstacle,”](#) which aims at improving seniors' life quality in the Baltic Countries. The target audience are seniors in all Baltic countries shortly before retiring or in the early retirement age, specifically those residing in multi-storey houses in the cities and towns. The project aims to elaborate programs, methodology and learning materials to train the trainers who will further work with the identified target audience. The materials are being developed in the following modules: how to survive after retirement, what assistance can be received, how to start a small business; how to maintain physical health, how to maintain mental health and acquire new knowledge and skills, how to avoid and overcome loneliness. In addition, [Latvian Rural Area Women Association](#) provides different activities in different regions and rural areas.

At the end of 2019, in three regions of Latvia - Jelgava, Riga and Mālpils - with several courses the first Senior University started to work. Educational courses are supposed to be truly diverse - digital skills, languages, creativity - everything that a person can use in life and what makes life brighter.

Recommendations

Proportion of senior citizens in the population according to demographic statistics is increasing in Latvia and we must treat seniors with dignity, respect, and honour. It is important to support seniors remaining in labour market, as well as improve their living standard. Another important issue for seniors is socialization. Adult motivation to study increases if they see new opportunities related to that. Therefore, it is reasonable to **provide seniors with idea about specific opportunities that will open for them because of learning** at work, in the family (health maintenance, hobbies and interests etc). One more important issue is **digital skills and online safety**. Seniors need effective tailor-made education programmes in these areas.

We in Latvia can learn from huge voluntary work of seniors in Denmark and highly active Third age universities in Lithuania, where this work gives satisfaction and meaningful life for many seniors. There are **effectively used premises of schools in local municipalities**. We must develop volunteering in Latvia, to use senior experiences and expertise to improve the life conditions for other citizens with more needs for help. We have to learn from Iceland about effective use of funds allocated by the state for LLL activities.

Senior education in general must be supported by the state and local municipalities as well as education institutions and centres. It is essential to look for the support of separate ideas to business companies, as well. In the next planning period in Latvia there is a need to **plan finances from European/National funds for developing and supporting network of senior schools to raise capacity of management and fundraising of senior organizations.**

Local municipalities should actively encourage seniors to form small societies of 20-25 people. In smaller societies there can be more active engagement of each senior in different activities and closer internal communication with each other. **Municipalities should provide opportunities for seniors to learn by providing facilities, equipment, materials, and some rewards for teachers.** Senior associations must propose relevant and interesting topics for them. **Seniors have to contact politicians to discuss their issues in more detail.**

Denmark: revolutionizing the third age through associational work

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The project addresses the issue of possible marginalization of older adults in the access to life-long learning possibilities. However, in this minor national survey of the lifelong learning possibilities in Denmark for older people, we have not found indication of marginalization of older people from being active in lifelong learning opportunities, neither in the member-based associations in the civil society, nor in the private or public non-formal or formal adult education services.

The Third Agers in Denmark are in general not discriminated as learners, so we do not see any need to recommend initiatives that can improve their learning possibilities compared to other age groups. Instead, we see a need for an adjustment of the legislation regarding the general access to lifelong learning in two main areas:

- One in the area of liberal adult education (Evening Schools, Peoples University, etc.), where the overall support has been reduced a lot the last decade and there is a need for a general improvement of the public support for all adult students, including older.
- Another in area of civil society associations, where the legislation only state public support to educational activities for young citizens up to 25 year, while adults

Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society

Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society is a Danish non-profit and non-governmental association and private research institute, founded in 2008. The overall aim is to promote humanistic and democratic learning capacities in a civil society context.

The main objectives are:

- ❖ to promote lifelong learning with focus on personal autonomy, active citizenship, social inclusion, and cultural cohesion.
 - ❖ to create partnerships with Nordic and European associations within liberal adult education, NGO activities and voluntary art and culture.
 - ❖ to ensure the objectives of lifelong learning adhered to by the European Commission and the Nordic Council of Ministers continues the best of the intentions of the Nordic-European tradition of enlightenment and Bildung.
- www.interfolk.dk/

and older don't get support; which is a form of age discrimination, and we recommend that the legislation must be extended, so the support becomes equal for all grown up citizens: young, adult and older.

Methodology

Scope of the survey

This minor national survey of the lifelong learning possibilities in Denmark for older people³ are based on desk research of the overall lifelong learning possibilities for adults, including older people,

- where the main area for informal and non-formal adult learning take place as volunteers and members in the huge number of member-based associations in a civil society context,
- while a lesser part of the non-formal learning takes place in the adult education organisations, such as evening schools, day schools, people's university, folk high schools, etc., and an even lesser part takes place in the formal learning offerings at basic adult education, Gymnasium courses, labour market training, Open University courses, etc.

Outline of the survey

The survey outlines:

- The overall situation for older people in Denmark, where they live longer, have more money, are more active and engaged as active citizens as ever before.
- The lifelong learning in the Danish civil society that includes both the member-based associations and the liberal adult education institutions.
- The increased importance of older people in the civil society associations, where older people represent a still increasing part of the leaders, members, and volunteers.

³ N.B. The normal pension age in Denmark is 65 both for man and women but will be increased gradually to 67 years in the period 2019-22 and to 68 in 2030.

- The increased importance of older people in the liberal adult education area, where older people represent a still increasing part of the learning providers and learners.
- Concluding recommendations with country-tailored proposals for changes to policymakers and other multipliers.

Results

The new generation 60 plus

A survey made by the Confederation of Danish Industry in 2010 presented the situation for older people in Denmark as the new golden age (Nørr and Dannemand 2010). In the future, Generation 50+ will become one of the most powerful, veteran, and reworked age groups.

It seems difficult to find a suitable term for this new generation of older people. The politicians, lifestyle experts, the advertising business, the industry, the retail firms and, not least, the media have struggled with this for years. They have tried to come up with names like: Elderly, Seniors, the Grey Gold, Generation Plus, the Free Independents. Some have even used the term 'elder burden', which nobody at their full five does anymore.

For the rapidly growing age group of 60+ in Denmark is far from a burden. On the contrary, they are on their way to not only become the largest and fastest growing population, they are also sitting on more than 70 percent of total personal wealth in the Danish society, and are more than willing to spend their money, according to several studies. (Keissner 2015)

Likewise, observers of the demographic development in Denmark point out that there has been a tendency to focus on the “weak” elderly, the resource-intensive who need help. And while everyone agrees that they should not be forgotten or neglected, there is a significant group of people in our society who are in a favourable and privileged situation that they revolutionized being young, when they were young, and now they are doing it again - just with their own old age.

The new position of the new generation 60 plus is especially seen in their still more important role as active citizens and volunteers in the Danish civil society sector.

The tradition of being active in civil society associations

The associations and lifelong learning in the civil society have a long history and strong position in the Danish society. The last three decades of the 19th century is often called the “period of associations” as well as the “the Grundtvigian golden age”, because it was during that period that a large number of associations and folk high schools were established throughout the country.

In Denmark, the high legitimacy of the third sector was expressed in 2001, when the government, municipalities and voluntary organizations together presented a Charter for Interaction between the volunteering Denmark / the Association Denmark and the public (Charter, 2013).

The most comprehensive study of the Danish associational life was conducted in 2003 - 2005 by a number of Danish research institutions (Ibsen 2006; Ibsen 2004; Ibsen and Habermann 2005). The surveys were part of the international comparative research project: The Johns Hopkins Comparative survey of the non-profit sector, which comprises approx. 50 countries.

Data from the big national survey indicated that there are more than 100.000 civil society organisations in Denmark, and in average a Danish citizen is member of 3.5 associations, and nearly all citizens are members of one or more associations. In general, the survey from 2003 - 2005 stated that the civil society had progressed since the 70s and especially the last decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The voluntary engagement:

- In 1993 a quarter of the population did a formal voluntary work (outside their own household and family network), In 2005 it was about one third.
- They were doing it for 17 hours a month on average.

Number of memberships:

- The average number of memberships has grown from 2.9 in 1979 to 3.5 in 1998, and nearly all citizens are members of one or more associations.

Number of organisations:

- Every fourth of the member-based associations and self-governing institution has been formed within the last 15 years and half of all existing organizations and institutions were formed after 1975.

- The strongest growth in associations, members and activity were in the field of arts, culture, and heritage.

Older people are still more active as volunteers and leaders in the associations

For some time after the John Hopkin's survey there has been some concern among researchers and the public as to whether Denmark's strong tradition of participation in association life and voluntary work could be maintained.

But the concerns have proven to be groundless. In 2017, the report "Uncertain Modernity" (Henriksen and Levinsen 2017) could mitigate the expected crisis in the participation in associational activities. The studies have been carried out by 19 researchers from all Danish universities with a faculty of social sciences. The data is based on the latest Danish Value Survey from 2017, that is conducted every nine years and describes the development of Danes' values from 1981 to 2017.

The proportion of Danes, who are members of at least one association has generally increased during the period, and today more than 90 percent of Danes are members of an association. The researchers concluded that voluntary engagement remains a cornerstone of Danish society and that the Danes still use the form of association to promote activities and interests.

The overall tendencies are that the older people are becoming more active in civil society associations, while people of working age fall. At the same time, Association Denmark is more equated today - both in terms of gender and social divide.

In the past, the mainstay of Danish association life was the large group of Danes of working age. The 27-53-year-olds were the group that previously both drew heavy weight in voluntary work and were most active through association memberships, while the younger and older were less active. Today, the trend has changed, and the associations must therefore approach a whole new age composition among both members and volunteers.

The associations must now deal with a new reality in which the elderly are getting still more active in the life of the associations. The group of older people over 72 has thus quadrupled

their voluntary involvement since 1990. In total, it is estimated that over the past 18 years alone, approximately 179,600 more elderly volunteers over 65 years have come.

“The elderly have historically good retirement opportunities, good pension schemes, live longer and have better health, and so the group of elderly people is far better educated than they were 30-40 years ago, and we know that the level of education and association participation are linked. So, there are many good explanations that the older spend their resources on volunteering,” says Professor Lars Skov Henriksen.

An exemplary case - more seniors in sports associations

The above outlined tendencies for older people in the associations has been confirmed by a new survey of tendencies in the sports associations made by Centre for Research in Sport, Health and Civil Society (CISC) at University of Southern Denmark.

The survey indicates that older people over 60 now make up a large and sharply increasing proportion of sports associations' coaches and leaders. From 2004 to 2015, the share of coaches and instructors from the age of 60 and up has grown from 4 to 19 percent. In the sports associations, while the share of managers has increased from 9 to 26 percent.

The great progress is offset by an equally significant decline in the age group from 20-39 years, with the proportion of younger adult coaches having fallen from 50 to 32 percent since 2004, while the proportion of managers has gone from 39 to 24 percent. Among the other age groups, there are only minor fluctuations.

Thus, from a relatively small proportion of the volunteers, the elderly have become a significant force in the life of the association. This trend is reflective of an aging population, where the generation 60 plus has more resources than former elder generations.

Tendencies for older participants in adult education

The latest comprehensive survey of older citizens participation in adult education was published back in 1997 (Udviklingscenter 1997), where we still had valid statistic reports from the municipalities to base the survey on.

This survey substantiates that almost 20 percent of the 60-69-year-olds participated in the general public education and competence-giving adult education in a broad sense, i.e. courses provided by evening schools, day schools, folk high schools, peoples university committees and basic formal adult education and gymnasium course providers.

At the courses held by evening schools and liberal adult education providers 55 percent of the participants were more than 50 years old.

At that time there were no nationwide statistics about the participants at the peoples universities, but we know that 1/3 of the activities of the peoples universities took place in Copenhagen, and here at least 1/3 of all the students were more than 65 years old; and furthermore, more than 2/3 of the participants at the daytime teaching were more than 65 years old. The survey from 1996 also showed that at the competency-giving basic adult education, which corresponds to primary school level, 20 percent of the students were 50-59 years old and 8 percent were over 60 years of age in 1995-96. At the gymnasium level, 13 percent of the students were 50-59 years old, and 8 percent were over 60 years old.

Current trends in adult education

We cannot find reliable data for the changes of the type of students at the different adult education institutions the last two decades since the late 90s, mainly because the liberal-conservative Government decided back in 2002 to cancel the previous statistical reports from the municipality to the Ministry of education; but a recent study (Bjerrum and Thøgersen 2018) shows that the evening school leaders are on average significantly older than the evening school leaders in a similar study in 1998. In 1998, the age average of the leaders was 52 years (Løvgreen & Nordentoft 1998), but in 2018 it had increased to 63 years.

At the same time, cultural habit studies (Nielsen & Pilgaard 2014) show that the average age of evening school students has risen by 12 years in the period 1993-2012, and it indicates that the average age of students at the evening schools now is more than 60 years.

So even though the liberal adult education sector has experienced a decrease in public financial support from the municipalities, where the state legislation has been changed from must

support' to 'can support,' it seems that the older students have an increased participation in most parts of the adult educational activities, both in relative and absolute terms.

Recommendations for third agers

Recommendations for third age and not fourth age

In developed countries, including Denmark, the present and future cohorts of older adults can, on average, expect to live longer than previous generations; and for most people, these extra years, in principle, can be characterized by a positive life quality.

However, in this context it may be useful to **consider old age as involving not one but more life phases and to ask whether these life phases exhibit different qualities**. Proposals have been made, for example, to distinguish between the Third Age and Fourth Age (Baltes & Mayer 1999)

Laslett, famous for his theory of the Third Age (Laslett 1987), mentions that the Third Age generally is an era after retirement with health, vigour, and positive attitude to being older, except for particular cases. He also described that the Third Age emerged in only developed countries with both population aging and excellent economic conditions.

Yet, in developed countries with the potential gradual aging and longevity, some elderly live longer and healthier without any major physical or mental issues, whereas other seniors suffer from immobility, dementia, or other aging-related problems. In gerontology, the former are third agers, and the latter are fourth agers. Laslett also strongly insisted that these four ages did not begin or end at one's birthday or a year having that birthday (Laslett 1991). He argues that persons have their own lifespan; and despite the same age, some seniors are healthy and thus in the Third Age, whereas others are frail and thus in the Fourth Age.

Characteristics of the Third Age are according to Laslett:

- Being mentally and physically healthy.
- Enjoying life freely (i.e., without obligation to work).
- Living without economic difficulties due to sufficient pension.

However, the older you grow, the more likely you will be to reluctantly lose your mobility and to come under the care from family or others due to age-related diseases, such as cancers, dementia, Alzheimer's, and osteoporosis. Even though you luckily escape these diseases and live long and healthy (i.e., have a long Third Age), you will eventually grow senile and pass away. The final dependence, decrepitude, and death are characteristics of the Fourth Age (Laslett 1987).

In this report we only consider the lifelong learning possibilities for the Third Agers, and even though such possibilities also can be important for Fourth Agers, the context for such possibilities are very different, and we will not consider them in the following recommendations.

Recommendations for third agers

As indicate above, the Third Agers in Denmark have a Golden Age and they are in general not discriminated, rather contrary most of them have a favourable and privileged situation, so we do not see any need to recommend initiatives that can improve their life learning possibilities, because they are already better off than most of the other age groups of the population. Instead, we see a need for an adjustment of our legislation for the area of adult education that includes two main parts:

- one for the lifelong learning in the area of adult education (Evening Schools, Peoples University, etc.), where the overall support has been reduced a lot the last decade and there is a need for a **general improvement of the public support for all adult students including older.**
- Another for lifelong learning in the civil society associations, where the legislation only state public support to education activities for young citizens up to 25 year, while adults and older don't get support; and that is a form of age discrimination, so we recommend that the **legislation must be extended, so the support becomes equal for all grown up citizens: young, adult and older.**

Overall, we don't see a special need to improve the possibilities for older people to get more offers as students or learners, but rather to **motivate the older to be more engaged as leaders members and volunteers in civil society associations**, so they can use their experiences and expertise to improve the life conditions for other citizens with more needs for help.

The Agricultural University of Iceland

AUI is an educational and research institution in the field of agriculture and environmental sciences. Besides awarding B.Sc. degrees in these fields, AUI also provides continuing education courses, where over 2600 persons participated in 2018.

In the field of adult education, AUI offers short programs, focusing on rural planning, rural community, wool working, herding etc.

In previous NordPlus and ERASMUS+ projects, AUI has been working with issues of vocational secondary education and adult learning, mainly at Hvanneyri and Reykir and rural areas where the university is located.

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Iceland: dealing with generational changes to come

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The project offered three different study trips, the first one in fall 2019 to Lithuania and Latvia, the second to Denmark in March 2020 and the third was planned in May 2020 to Iceland. But due to the pandemic, the Icelandic trip was postponed to Fall 2020 and then cancelled. In September 2020 we arranged a few online meetings with Icelandic specialists in the field of adult education.

In Lithuania, the Third age university idea is strong and well known, whereas in Latvia other elderly associations are active. The education that is offered is particularly suitable for the 3rd age generation. Short courses which focus on language learning or handcraft making with very low course fees. The value of these courses has also a strong social impact for individuals and is more focused on each participant's interests and entertainment.

An important part of the Latvian visit was a presentation and discussion on quality standards in adult and older adult education. Many reactions were also provoked by Dr. Iveta Circle presentation on the recently established [Senior University in Latvia](#), based on a model of social business.

In Denmark, we have inspected a system that is more similar to the Icelandic one. Many senior citizens are active in associations,

and in a way, providing themselves education and activity within the community. Some educational centers are offering various courses built on cultural themes, such as music, literature, and visual art.

National adult education policy

Iceland is one of the countries in Europe that has revised its educational policy and adult education is a part of that process⁴. Because of the revision, new laws of adult education took effect on 1st October 2010. With the laws, a new sector of education was added to the formal school system, the 5th sector. So, it can be maintained that the purpose of the laws was to fill a gap in the legal framework, and to strengthen the formal foundation of lifelong learning in Iceland. Regulations attached to the laws have confirmed the right of the target group (people without formal education) to access educational guidance and competence evaluation. These laws are under revision from the year 2018, with various stakeholders participating in the progress and involved in the development.

Evaluation of the adult education system

In June 2013, The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture requested that Capacent Iceland would make a comprehensive assessment of the adult education system in Iceland. The evaluation, which focused on roles, division of labor and cooperation between The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC), Education and Training Fund, educational partners, other stakeholders, and the Ministry. The main goal of the assessment was to evaluate the development of the adult education system, the efficiency and utilization of funds and to check what results it has produced over the past five years and to examine the relationship between stakeholders and decision-makers. Special emphasis was placed on assessing the impact and effectiveness of the system.

⁴ N.B. The normal pension age in Iceland is 67 both for man and women.

A parallel evaluation survey was conducted among the users of the service in the adult education system and a parallel survey was conducted among the users of the service to evaluate their experience of the project.

The main conclusions of the evaluation were that users are generally satisfied with the adult educational system. Funds allotted by the state are put to effective use and intended results have been obtained in most fields. The most promising opportunities lie in increased promotion of the adult education, enhancing guidance and counselling, but also in clearer transferability of learning outcomes between systems. Common vision of future adult education is that adult education would become the veritable fifth pillar of the Icelandic educational system.

General financing of adult education

In most cases, working people who pay union fees can apply for grants from the lifelong learning educational funds within their union. These grants can partially cover the courses' fees. However, it is interesting that as people move into retirement age, they lose their rights to apply for these funds.

There are different schools, companies and NGO that offer education in Iceland for adults/older students. They can be divided into the following categories listed below:

- ❖ **Lifelong learning centers.** There are 11 centers with 41 facilities around Iceland. They receive funding from the government that covers part of their operation; the rest is covered with course fees and other grants. They mainly focus on the ones without formal education or lower education, tailoring courses in cooperation with companies and/or the Directorate of Labour, evaluating competence skills, teaching Icelandic as a second language and recognition of formal and non-formal education etc.
- ❖ **Continuing education within the universities in Iceland.** Seven universities in Iceland are offering adult education, all of them have course fees that cover their operation and all of them are non-profit organizations. Their target group is people with education above the 3rd level of the quality frame.

- ❖ **Third sector.** There are various companies and NGOs offering courses for adult students, e.g. The Red Cross and The Icelandic association for search and rescue. Their adult education is offered through course fees as well as donations from locals and grants from bigger companies. They also sell their courses to different companies in Iceland. The Red Cross is obligated to provide first aid training to first aid teachers as well as offering their continuing education. Most volunteers of the Red Cross need to undergo some kind of training before beginning the voluntary work. Many associations such as Lions, Rotary and Kiwanis offer education for their members.
- ❖ **Company schools** – The majority of the bigger companies in Iceland run their own school in one way or another. In terms of their educational needs and company policy, they offer various courses to their employees, sometimes in cooperation and with the lifelong learning centers or others that offer adult education.
- ❖ **Labor unions.** Each employee in Iceland is obligated to pay a certain percentage of his salary each month which partly sums up in the educational fund. The employer pays a complementary contribution as well. With this money, unions either offer courses to their members or reimburse partly the fee for courses taken elsewhere. Some of the bigger unions run their own educational centers, while others work with local lifelong learning centers.
- ❖ **Private schools.** Numerous private schools in Iceland are offering all kinds of education, charging full course fees. You can find schools that are offering courses regarding language, computers, personal skills, art etc.
- ❖ **Reykjavik University of the Third Age.** U3A Reykjavík is an Association of people who are no longer employed or are considering leaving the labor market. U3A Reykjavik offers a variety of forms of learning and dissemination of knowledge. There are no requirements for participating and no tests are taken. About 650 members are involved in U3A and each of them is charged 1.500 Ikr (approx. 11 Euros) per year. This fee includes admission to all lectures, but other expenses such as transport, material and coffee charged separately. U3A does not get any other formal funding but has been actively participating in Erasmus and other similar projects. At the moment we have two third age universities, one in Reykjavik and another smaller one in Keflavik, Reykjanes peninsula.

- ❖ **Retirement homes.** In every retirement home in Iceland, residents are offered help and guidance with handcrafts of every kind. There are also various happenings related to culture, literature, and music to entertain the residents. This is covered with the expenses that each resident pays for while living at the retirement home. Costs of the courses are therefore always kept to minimum.

If you are above 18 years old, you can attend courses offered within all the schools and companies listed above, except at the U3A Reykjavík where there requirement is 60 years of age and at the retirement homes, one has to be a resident.

Adult students

It could be argued that teaching is the same at any school level - sharing of knowledge. However, teaching is so much more than just sharing knowledge. Therefore, teaching at various school levels can be very different and challenging. Dan Spalding made a statement in his book “Teaching grownups is more fun than teaching kids” (2013). He supports this by saying that, as a teacher, he can engage in cognitive and reciprocal communication with his students. It is easier to fit in their footsteps than in the footsteps of a 10-year old elementary school student. He says that adults make better contributions to the learning environment, have more experience, and just have a lot more to give to each other than children have. Obviously, one has a completely different relationship with a group of adults that are attending an English class than a group of fifth graders in Iceland that “needs” to learn Danish and mathematics. As a direct result of this, anyone can realize that it is not possible to assume that the same teaching methods will work in the 5th grade and in a group of adults.

One of the biggest differences when it comes to teaching adults compared to other study groups, is that more often than not, we have students in adult education who come to study voluntarily. The self-image of adults is shaped by their own responsibility and independent thoughts that each person takes regarding learning (Knowles 1990). However, it is not only the internal urge that encourages adult students to continue their studies, but also to external circumstances such as changes in the labor market, command from a supervisor, retraining, etc.

There are also external impulses such as grades, promotion, higher salaries, better well-being, and recognition. For most parties it is most appropriate if all this can go together in the right proportions. (Merriam & Bierema 2014).

Older adult students

It is important for all those involved in adult education to build interesting and practical courses. It has often been found that students value their time and want to receive practical education (Knowles 1990).

But what happens when people leave the labor market, what education is available for that group? Have we pre-classified pensioners exclusively into crocheting, crafts, and bookbinding? Could it be that this group of 65 years and older is not included when talking about the behavior of active adult students? Alternatively, when we are talking about the number of applicants for retraining grants? Is this group not included when figures are added to various databases, Icelandic and foreign, to monitor the situation?

In many European countries, adult education has been more dominant than education of older citizens and pensioners. This can be seen by looking at information from Eurostat, all figures there are referring to adult education at the age of 25-64 (Eurostat, 2020). Similar trends can be seen when statistics from Iceland are reviewed, all results relating to continuing education are based on two age categories: 25-64 years and the age range of 16-74 years. The later age range does not reflect the group that can be classified as senior citizens or adult students. Students under 25 years have also been classified as “young people” or students at school age. Nevertheless, we can not look at the age group above 74 years old as an individual group of citizens that are not seeking for new knowledge or new skills.

This is interesting in many ways when you consider that this age group, above 65 years older, is usually the generation that has the most time to use for something extra, like further education. This is also the generation that is more often in a better financial place and this is also the generation that is more effective in seeking for new friendship and company as well as new knowledge. The average lifespan of the human being has risen in the world in recent years as well

as levels of public health; therefore, we can expect that this 3rd age period can last for years or perhaps decades for the next generations to come.

This generation that would fill the 3rd age generation today, have often been referred to as “baby boomers.” The generation was born in the years 1946 to 1964 (55 to 74 years old today). This generation grew up with the privilege and rights related to increased wealth, the strengthening of the welfare and the social systems. This generation had easier access to education and technological development, than the ones before. This generation is also generally in a better physical shape and therefore with a longer lifespan (Sheehan 2011). The group that was born in the years 1946 to 1964 are entering the retirement phase generally with a higher education than the generation before and generally better technical knowledge. The “baby boomer” generation came after the “silent generation” born in the years from 1928 to 1945 (74 to 92 years old today). The “silent generation” that is known for being demographic. Generation that took part in the civil rights movement but at the same time recommended not standing up and speaking out.

The names that we use for those two generations explain it extremely well and metaphorically the difference and expectations between those two generations.

Foreign (immigrant) adult students in Iceland

Immigrants in Iceland have grown in number over the last two decades and are now 15.2 percent of the total population, compared to 2.6 percent in 2000. Therefore, one should not expect many elderly immigrants in Iceland but according to official statistics of Iceland (*Hagstofa Íslands*) immigrants older than 60 years are 4.95 percent of the total age group which means that 95.05 percent of seniors living in Iceland are Icelandic (*Hagstofa Íslands* 2020).

As with the increasing number of immigrants, the percentage of older immigrants will rise in the future. No official plans or strategies are in progress regarding this group, neither in education nor in other matters concerning their specialties.

Are we ready to welcome the next generation into the 3rd age of adult education in Iceland?

The system that we work with in the adult education in Iceland is quite efficient, well known among people and has the status of public recognition. There is high percent of older adults seeking for further education, knowledge, and companionship through adult education in Iceland. More **support and funding from the public sector** could however be accepted in both Iceland, Denmark, as well as in the Baltics.

There are numerous ways to increase funding for the third age generation when it comes to adult education. Since the needs from one person to another can be and will be quite different depending on their own mobility and needs, the funding must come from different sources to different sectors. We might also want to investigate new ways for financing adult education for elderly students. Each labor union in Iceland offers individual grants that their members can apply for. However, as soon as an employee leaves the labor market those grants are no longer available. **It would be a great benefit for the third age generation if they could retain their membership in labor unions after retirement, including the access to lifelong learning grants.**

Moreover, we have to continue the work that has already started in Iceland with powerful grassroot groups like '[Lifðu núna](#)' (*Live now*). We need to raise awareness about the possibilities and availability of education programmes for the third age generation. We could do that by being willing to **communicate more on the topic and engage different actors** from formal, non-formal and informal education sectors, as well as social workers and NGOs. Nevertheless, most of all we need to make the third age generation as a formal focus group when we are developing and offering education programmes in the field of adult learning.

New challenges are facing the Adult educational system in Iceland, where higher educational status among senior citizens is a fact, as well as more **diverse group of adults with different background in education, culture, ethnic, financial, knowledge, languages** etc. Leading us to the fact that our senior citizens in near future (generation X, born 1965 to 1980) will demand different choice of education than the generations before. So, are we ready for these changes?

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