

## BENEFITS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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*The aim of the presented paper is to indicate the role of education with regard to the concept of active ageing as a phenomenon which is stimulating and determining sustainable development. The presented deliberations are mainly of theoretical character, extended with literature of the subject and statistical studies. The main conclusion coming from the paper is the conviction that systemic and long-term education is an opportunity and guarantee of active ageing, it favours the social inclusion of an individual and conditions the implementation of sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** *adult education, ageing, development, lifelong learning, participation.*

*Scopul lucrării constă în descrierea rolului educației în cadrul conceptului de îmbătrânire activă ca fenomen care stimulează și determină dezvoltarea durabilă. Deliberările prezentate sunt, în principal, de natură teoretică, bazate pe analiza literaturii de specialitate și datelor statistice. Concluzia principală a studiului se rezumă la faptul că educația sistemică și pe termen lung este o oportunitate și garanție pentru îmbătrânirea activă, favorizează incluziunea socială a unui individ și creează condiții pentru dezvoltarea durabilă.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *educația adulților, îmbătrânire, dezvoltare, învățarea pe tot parcursul vieții, participare.*

*Цель работы состоит в анализе роли образования в рамках концепции активного старения, а также как фактора, стимулирующего и определяющего устойчивое развитие. Представленные результаты носят в основном теоретический характер, основаны на анализе литературы и статистических данных. Главный вывод исследования состоит в том, что системное и долгосрочное образование является возможностью и гарантией для активного старения, способствует социальной интеграции индивида и созданию условий для реализации устойчивого развития.*

**Ключевые слова:** *образование взрослых, старение, развитие, непрерывное обучение, участие.*

**JEL Classification:** *P46, I19, I29, N30.*  
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### Introduction

Traditionally formed values, life, social and professional experience are the foundation of human life. In the postmodern world, however, we experience so many changes that they force us to undertake intensive update of our own identity, which may lead to uncertainty, anxiety, insecurity or doubt. Such new experiences can be particularly difficult to an elderly person who faces challenges he or she has never faced before. The patterns of ageing and experiencing old age differ from those fixed in our awareness, which may make experiencing one's own old age extremely difficult. On the one hand, the average life expectancy is increasing, as a result of which the period of experiencing old age is increasing in a natural way. On the other hand, acquired lifelong experiences will generate the quality of ageing thus contributing to sustainable development.

I define education as a complex process which should prepare an individual and society to the ageing process. It is not only the matter of being aware of changes taking place in life but also being able to adapt to such changes ensuring the longest possible independence and self-reliance to oneself. Therefore, education is an inherent part of active ageing, and its role in individual stages of human lifecycle is becoming

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more and more important. In the concept of active ageing learning is perceived as a lifelong and continuous process comprising all areas of human life. In such a dimension education is implemented in the formal, informal and non-formal system. Each of those systems aims at teaching so that it could be possible to live together and participate in social life, to know how to participate in this life and derive as many benefits from it for oneself and for society as possible.

### **Education for old age and in old age - the update of knowledge, qualifications and skills**

It is assumed that education can facilitate seniors' adaptation to social, cultural or economic changes which accompany contemporary societies. It is important for it to start at an early period of life, owing to which "meeting old age" will be less acute. Special significance of education should be assigned to middle age, when the first signs of the ageing of the body appear. It is usually the time of reconciliation with the fact that children are gradually leaving home and becoming independent, and the time of care for ageing parents. Thus, a necessity appears to accept conflicting trends arising from biological, physical, mental or economic changes [1].

Therefore, youth and old age, activity and passivity, integration and isolation can occur simultaneously, and the acceptance of these trends will be the sign of wisdom and maturity towards the experienced changes. In middle age we should consolidate and develop competences acquired previously, and acquire new ones which will enable to keep balance between the past, the present and the future, which will be the testimony of the implementation of specific developmental tasks [14].

Taking the above into consideration, we can assume that preparation to old age will consist in maintaining life activity as long as it is possible due to health reasons with the simultaneous maintenance of previous interests and discovering new areas within family and social contacts. Such activities may serve the limitation of the social isolation of seniors and primarily their loneliness, but this requires high awareness of one's own needs and habits, as well as the ability to adapt to changing conditions [10].

Education, as a system of learning and acquiring competences, has such varied areas of influence that it can be implemented both in educational institutions and outside them, for example in the family or social environment [11]. Elderly people use mostly informal and non-formal forms of education, implemented outside the institutional education system. Thus, in the process of seniors' education a lot of importance is attached to practical activities which are often implemented during conversations and social meetings, where the exchange of information is the source of knowledge and keeping in touch influences the perception of the world surrounding us. This learning affects better understanding of the world and oneself [16], which translates into a better quality of living.

The civilisation progress and the dynamic social development impose permanent learning on an individual, which is defined as a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, qualifications and skills. This form of education, along with formal and informal education, plays a special role in the process of the preparation to old age, and its advantage is a lot of freedom in the choice of tools and methods responsible for a change in the perception of old age and the role of an elderly person in society [6].

A characteristic feature of the elderly population is high variety in terms of the level of education, family or economic situation, because of which their educational needs will be also varied. It is also related to life experience they have acquired all their life, to habits and expectations towards the approaching or just experienced old age. In the period of late adulthood and early old age there is the reduction of opportunities to extend one's competences, because of which the sense of rejection, isolation and uselessness may intensify [21]. Therefore, it is very important to create an educational offer for seniors, which would consider their resources and individual needs. Thus, it indicates the necessity to design educational activities for the elderly that would take into consideration changes taking place in their lives [17].

The elderly, through the participation in education, more and more often find not only intellectual and cultural entertainment but also mental training which is the path to permanent development and maintaining self-reliance and independence as long as possible [5]. Therefore, the concept of lifelong learning, according to which education is an open and never ending process, is becoming more and more important [13]. In such an approach, it is implemented through all aforementioned forms of education which are undertaken throughout one's life in order to broaden one's knowledge, develop skills and competences in the individual and social context. Via lifelong learning an individual has an opportunity to become the source of competitiveness not only on the labour market but also in the sphere of social and family life. Thus, promoting the lifelong learning concept serves to support active and productive ageing.

Contributing to the continuous development of an individual, lifelong learning meets the assumptions of sustainable development, which aims at self-improvement of an individual, the prevention of social exclusion and an increase in the value of human capital [3]. Ultimately, it translates into economic growth and the improvement of the quality of living of citizens. Therefore, we can assume that by raising educational awareness and expenditure on education it is possible to create innovative economy guaranteeing the responsible development of future generations.

#### **Active ageing in the context of sustainable development**

The problem of undertaking activity by elderly people inscribes into the concept of successful ageing, which defines three basic criteria authorising to claim that this is the type of ageing we have to do with. The most important determinants are considered to be low level of disability, high level of independent physical and mental functioning, as well as active participation in life [6]. According to the adopted concept, it means the use of all available human resources for the optimal preparation to the ageing process. Ageing is a natural process and valuable experience for the vast majority of people. The way of going through old age will depend on external and internal factors complementing each other. In terms of internal determinants, a significant role will be played by in-born psychological predispositions, responsible for the state of will and mind, as well as individual qualities of an individual. External factors always depend on an individual's living environment, including, among others, place of residence, housing conditions, professional and family situation, social position, accessibility to medical services and their quality [8].

In accordance with the sustainable development concept, also the EU, referring to the problems of ageing, is developing the promotion of active ageing which is defined as a tool of prevention against population ageing by influencing individuals and making them aware of the necessity to prepare to long individual old age. The preparation involves job, health, education, social activity or securing proper level of life [19]. The main assumption of the promoted concept of active ageing is the belief in the necessity of the longest possible maintenance of social utility of an individual, which refers to all areas of an individual's area of activity with the exclusion of housework, care and assistance to family members and friends [20].

In the context of active ageing, attention is paid to human life as a process in which an individual should properly prepare to old age. Any forms of activity condition meeting human needs, fulfilling specific social functions, functioning in a group and in society. Lack of activity in this case may bring about the loss of the acceptance of the environment up to isolation and social exclusion, and, in consequence, loneliness [18]. Therefore, the theory of activity remains naturally the opposition to the withdrawal theory according to which with age elderly people give up previous forms of activity. The condition of successful and satisfying old age may lie in long-term implementation of all kinds of activity which will translate into seniors' quality of life and their self-assessment. All possible forms of activity may be regarded as a very important psychological and physical need in any age, and lack of patterns of spending free time actively is a consequence of common and passive lifestyle [7].

Acquiring patterns of active ageing is conditioned by adequate traits of an individual, which will play important cognitive functions in everyday life. Among them there are: courage, optimism, honesty, hope, insight, ability to engage and struggle against difficulties. They will be responsible for increasing the well-being of an individual, even when accompanied by the worsening health or occurring unfavourable changes in an individual's life. Positive ageing being a pillar of active ageing is a specific state of mind and specific strategy of activity [12]. Experiencing old age and shaping this process actively require internal discipline and individual work consisting in the use of motivation and possessed resources to accept age-related changes. It also seems purposeful to adjust choices of a specific lifestyle to physical and mental abilities of a person so that it could be possible to experience satisfaction from the quality of one's own life. Moreover, the ability to notice positive aspects of own life by keeping distance to difficulties being the consequence of the ageing body is also significant. Also the technique of adaptation to changing conditionings and the ability to make use of various forms of support in the situation when independence becomes limited is also necessary [8].

In the course of research works, the concept of active ageing spread to all aspects of human life and began to be identified with social productivity expressed as abilities of people to live productively in society and in economy, during the whole ageing process, thus contributing to sustainable development. In such an approach the elderly should have the ability to make choices as for spending their free time or the dynamics of professional and social activity. On the other hand, when choices are limited by health, architectonic, urban barriers, maladjustment of the workplace, then systemic solutions eliminating such limitations should work. Such an approach becomes an inseparable part of the multidimensional concept of active ageing created by

the World Health Organisation, which draws special attention to the necessity to optimise complex activities influencing the improvement of the quality of seniors' life. Therefore, there is an indication to health, participation and safety, owing to which people should learn all their life, retire gradually and in later age, maintain activity taken on previously. Good physical condition and high fitness is supposed to serve this goal, which will enable to perform family functions, pursue life passions and creative activities, do sport and tourism, participate in the life of local community, develop voluntary work [9].

In addition to the concept itself, the World Health Organisation defined the most important determinants of active ageing, of which it regarded gender and cultural conditionings as the most significant. The pattern of ageing will be defined by norms, values and customs which operate in the family environment and local community with the simultaneous social acceptance for individual stages in human life, and most of all the last stage, related to old age and ageing. The other important factor responsible for ageing is considered to be gender which sets male and female roles in this process. Women are more often endangered with poverty and social exclusion in the old age stage, as a result of greater involvement in the household. It is often related to the necessity of providing care to other family members, including children, grandchildren, dependent or disabled relatives. On the other hand, men are more frequently exposed to diseases and occupational risks, as well as bad health being the consequence of using stimulants or the lack of proper preventive medicine [9].

Therefore, active ageing is a multidimensional process for which detailed activities aiming at the raise in the quality of life of the elderly are responsible, and this will translate into the reduction of public spending related to retirement benefits, health and care provision services.

Ultimately, also the reduction of burdening with seniors should be expected. In order to achieve such benefits, active ageing should consider all activities activating seniors, and its main task should be the prevention of social exclusion of this group. It means the necessity of education until old age, which should be acquired in each stage of human life, and education in old age, which will facilitate overcoming difficulties arising from the ageing of the body. We learn activity all our life so that in the last stage of life active ageing could be the consequence of active participation.

#### **Educational activity of elderly people in Poland and in the European countries**

Seniors in Poland are characterised by low educational participation measured with the participation in formal and informal education. Educational activity of seniors is characterised by a significant level of diversity in terms of gender, place of residence and education. Unfortunately, also age significantly affects the level of participation in education, the older people are, the less frequently they take part in raising competences. Among people above 50 in 2011 more than 67% did not participate in any form of education. Informal education, most popular among seniors, dropped from 24.5% in the group of 50-54 year olds to 15.6% in the group of 65-69 year olds. A dynamic decline is also observed in the case of non-formal education which in the case of the population of people aged 65-69 was only 2.8%, and among people aged 50-54 the percentage was 17.9% [2].

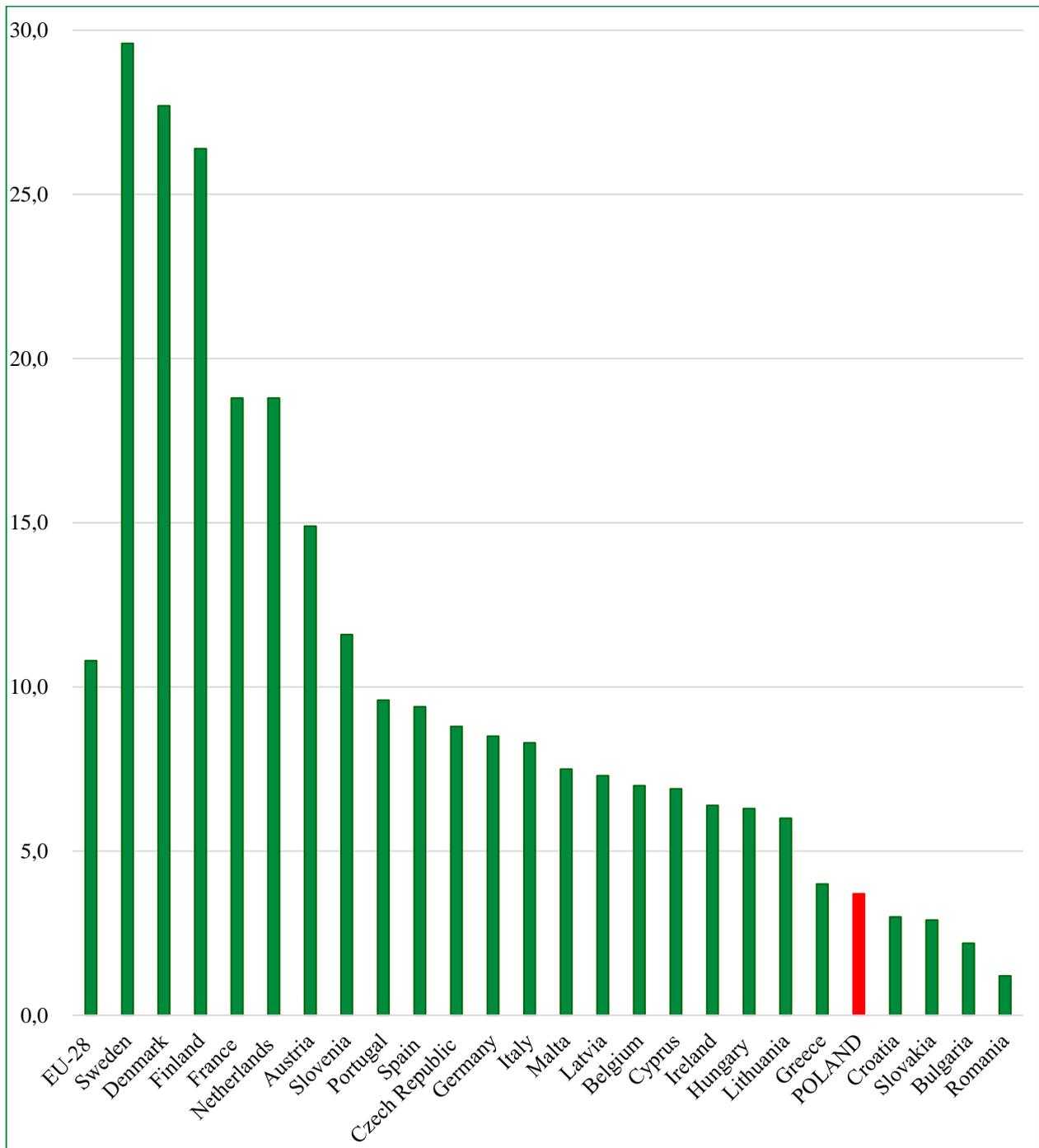
**Table 1**  
**Adults (aged 25-64) participating in education and training in Poland in the years 2012-2016, %**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Poland</b>	4,5	4,3	4,0	3,5	3,7
<b>Female</b>	5,1	4,9	3,6	3,3	4,0
<b>Male</b>	3,8	3,8	4,3	3,8	3,4

Source: GUS 2017, *Kapitał ludzki w Polsce w latach 2012-2016*, p. 150.

Low educational participation of the elderly in Poland is the consequence of passiveness of the involvement in the life-long learning process. The analysis of the scale of participation in education of people aged 25-64 shows that the participation rate in this age group in any form of education has been decreasing since 2012. Higher educational activity is presented by women but over the recent years, unfortunately, also in this group the percentage of participants in forms of education and learning has gone down. For comparison, the percentage of adult Europeans (EU-28) taking part in education and learning in 2016 was 10.8% and it was by 1.7% more than in 2011.

The European countries in which the participation rate in life-long education has exceeded 20% include Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Island. On the other extreme, in addition to Poland, there are Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia and Greece [4] [Eurostat, 2017].



**Figure 1. Participation of people aged 25-64 in education and learning in Europe, in 2016**

Source: Own compilation based on: Eurostat 2017, *Adult learning statistics, Lifelong learning, 2011 and 2016*, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Lifelong\\_learning\\_2011\\_and\\_2016\\_\(1\)\\_\(%25\\_of\\_the\\_population\\_aged\\_25\\_to\\_64\\_participating\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training\)\\_YB17.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Lifelong_learning_2011_and_2016_(1)_(%25_of_the_population_aged_25_to_64_participating_in_education_and_training)_YB17.png) [15.12.2017].

We reach similar conclusions using the data of *Labour Force Survey*, conducted by Eurostat in 2015, which analyses participation in education or learning of people aged 15-74. In Poland the participation level of the elderly aged 55-74 in education and learning is among the lowest in the EU countries and is as low

as 0.6% in comparison with the average of 4.8% in the studied countries and 22.0% in Denmark – the country being the leader of the studied activity. Such low educational activity of seniors in Poland is a permanent phenomenon and in the last decade the participation level never exceeded 1%. What is also surprising is high discrepancy between the participation level in education and learning of people at the threshold of adulthood, aged 15-19, and elderly people, aged 55-74. In Poland, educational activity of young people is the highest among the EU countries and makes up 92.5%. With 0.6% of activity of seniors we are on the last position, with the highest difference in the participation levels of the youngest and the oldest age groups included in the study<sup>1</sup>.

### Conclusions

The participation of elderly people in educational projects is one of the areas of the active ageing concept. Regardless of deficits which occur in the human lifecycle, we can prepare to old age and ageing. However, we should learn positive and active ageing before we grow old, and in fact it would be the best to be able to learn all our life. Yet, to do this, adequate education is needed which will be addressed to individuals and the whole society. Taking into consideration ageing people, education in old age will facilitate their "adaptation" to changes undergoing in their lives, in the personal, health and social spheres. This area of the impact of education will also involve taking new social roles and preparing to individual old age. The confrontation of acquired competences with the future stage of life should enable partial maintenance of the possessed areas of activity and discovering totally new ones.

Due to very low participation in lifelong learning in Poland, the development of education in the active ageing process requires numerous systemic actions. First of all, a group of participants should be defined, which would consider elderly people, teenagers, entrepreneurs and employers, social and educational institutions. An important task is also striving for the growth of the awareness that the development of education in the lifelong learning process will be one of the determinants of the quality of life. A proper educational offer is needed for that, adjusted to the needs and abilities of each group of participants. Only then can such long-term and systemic actions contribute to the development and reinforcement of specific educational culture which will strengthen its position in the active ageing concept. Today, the population ageing process is posing new tasks to the education system, especially the lifelong one, and it is expected that the development of this system will contribute to better experiencing old age and preparation to it.

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<sup>1</sup> MRPiPS 2016, *Informacja o sytuacji osób starszych w Polsce za rok 2015*, Warszawa, 2016, p. 71.

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