CONTENT

Are Universities Really Open to Adult Students?

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Abstract

The topic "Adult Education in Universities" is not new, as people might argue that in fact in universities we are dealing only with adults. It is true, the focus is mainly on young adults, however for the older ones, the so called "non-traditional students," offers and services are more limited. This situation tends to become even more sensitive, once the different university ranking systems put more emphasis on the research aspect than on the didactic and social function of the university. This is the focus of this thematic journal, trying to bring together papers and reflections about the extent to which universities have become more open to "non-traditional students". The paper discusses efforts done at the European level to push member states and universities towards more systematic efforts, and reflections on how they can widen access to higher education for non-traditional students.

Key words: widening access to higher education, lifelong learning, adult student

Preamble

"Widening access to higher education for more mature adults is a tool for social and economic development" (EC, 2011, 2012, 2014) – this is an argument based on which universities within the European higher education area (EHEA), policy makers, researchers around Europe and beyond, and the academic community as a whole have introduced into the policy agenda issues like *opening access routes* to higher education and *providing adequate student services, lifelong learning (LLL)* in universities, integrating *non-traditional access routes* to higher education, *recognition of knowledge and skills* as an alternative route, *flexible part-time studies* etc.

This argument is complemented by one of the main goals to be reached by 2020, agreed upon by the 47 ministers responsible for higher education: "maximization of talent". Thus, the social dimension of higher education is seen not only as social justice, ensuring equity and equal opportunities, in order to create a better and more socially cohesive society, but also as a way to enhance social capital, maximizing talents (Orr, 2012, p.173). We might add, based on research findings (Manninen & all, 2014), that widening access to higher education and LLL creates benefits in a broader way, regarding "attitudes and social capital", "control of one's own life", "well-being", "mental health", active ageing etc., once the "universities respond positively to diverse demands from a broad spectrum of students – including adult learners, professionals who seek to up-grade skills for the workplace, senior citizens taking advantage of their increasing longevity to pursue cultural interests and others -, but all looking for high quality and relevant higher education throughout their lifetime" (Orr, 2012, p.174).

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Nevertheless, in spite of the policy discourse and the policy documents, a lot of countries still have no alternative route of access to higher education (Romania being amongst them). This contrasts somehow with the fact that LLL is a recognition mission in all HEI, but the restrictions of implementing it or the low effort made by universities in providing adequate educational offers and services, contribute to this remaining a limited rigid provision. On the other hand, there are countries reporting the existence of at least one alternative entry route to higher education, with little or no restrictions for provisions and services meant to attract "non-traditional" students, but "they are often unable to provide information on the proportion of students entering the system on the basis of alternative admission procedures. Such a situation indicates that in the majority of countries this area is not subject to a regular system-wide monitoring" (see EC 2012, p. 86), in spite of the BFUG (Bologna Follow-up Group) periodic reporting exercise.

Also, the universities do not yet have effective solutions and adequate offers for attracting their graduates back to further education, for upgrading their knowledge and competencies. The relationships with the alumni community are not vivid ones. Most of the indicators ask for data related to the relevance of the studies, counting the jobs taken on the labour market by graduates, but transversal records are less available. As M. Gallo (2013) underlines, the alumni community is "the only constant – and constantly growing – stakeholder group of higher education institutions (HEIs)", analysing, therefore, the wide range of interactive opportunities offered by universities to alumni over their lifetime.

Increasingly, universities have to face the pressure of academic ranking, of increasing their research performance (see Ciolan, 2013), and didactic and social dimensions tend to be neglected, in a risky way. The Emerging Global Model of Elite twenty-first universities worldwide (with their eight characteristics: global mission, research intensity, new roles for professors, diversified funding, worldwide recruitment, increasing complexity, new relationships with government and industry, and global collaboration with similar institutions) favours economic development, but the "social obligation" of the universities, the social function, is more contextualized to the region they belong to, so the concentration of elites only in some regions is favouring the respective regions (Gidley, 2012, p.1020). The tension between elite institutions and mass higher education, and also the changing views of quality in higher education with regard to social inclusion and widening participation are among the factors determining the re-imagining of the role and function of higher education in the future (Gidley, 2012, p.1019-1037).

Recent studies on the motivation of adults to learn (see Manninen and all, 2014) offer universities one more argument for opening up more offers for older adults, as "motivation to learn seems to play a crucial role for almost all participants, although they do not always mention their motivation explicitly" (p. 51). Such findings, from large scale research (more than 8000 adult learners involved in non-vocational adult education in the last 12 months, from 10 European countries) are strong arguments not only for increasing the educational offers for adults, the usual formal ones of further education, but also for diversifying them, by offering non-vocational educational programs and courses as well. Such offers are also responsibilities for the universities fulfilling their roles in contributing to spreading knowledge, cultural values, in acting in their communities as critical and cultural forums. Is there an increase in such offers, or a decreasing concern for such services?

In considering this paper, and the whole thematic journal, one should keep in mind the meaning of lifelong learning (LLL) in universities, as agreed by the members of the European University Association while launching the Charter of LLL in Universities (EUA, 2008), and committing to follow it:

'Widening access to higher education is not about introducing less qualified students, but rather about supporting all learners with the potential to benefit both themselves and society through participating in higher education. This means reaching out to an increasingly broad range of learners with different motivations and interests: not only offering programmers for professional development adapted to a fast-changing labour market, but also catering for the growing demand for personal development opportunities through the cultural enrichment that universities offer" (p.4).

In the following pages we will try to identify recent developments and critical issues concerning offering friendlier, more adequate, flexible and attractive courses and educational services for older adults (over 25 years old).

Recent developments, trends

The lifelong learning issue has accompanied all the reflections towards setting up the European Higher Education Area, as well as the ones for implementing the Bologna Process. The discourse can be synthesised thus:

"Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life." (Prague Communique, 2001: Towards the European Higher Education Area")

Discussions have taken place at the European Level amongst Member States, on the future of the Bologna Process and on the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) including, as distinct possible policy priorities, "lifelong learning", "adult learning", "diversification of the students population" etc., under the "Social dimension" – these are also accompanied by the "Development of National Access Plans/measures" of acting, for the period 2012-2015[1] (EHEA, 2012). However, in spite of this development trend, and the other dimensions included[2], when the actual development taking place is studied, the progress towards including more older adults into HEI remains rather modest.

The strategic aim of "Providing quality higher education for all" can be reached (as shown in the Bucharest Communique, 2012) by making greater efforts to attract underrepresented groups to higher education as well, and by "widening access to higher education as a whole, as a precondition for societal progress and economic development" (ibid, p.1).

Systematic effort at the European level, in the last decade, aimed at increasing/ extending the social dimension of higher education (see EC 2011, 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2014) under the coordination of the European Commission, can be noticed not only from policy documents, thematic reports, efforts for data gathering, instrument launching, peer reviews, but also from the monitoring activities and systematic mapping of existing developments in the member states regarding both the participation of underrepresented groups, and lifelong learning in universities. This yearly mapping exercise is also a way to push universities and national bodies not only to record the developments on

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[1] The Erasmus project ALLinHE - *Access to Lifelong Learning in Higher Education for All* (2011-2014; nr. 517978-LLP-1-2011-1-NL-ERASMUS-ESIN) was coordinated by Inholland University, and run together with 8 partners and 2 associate ones, from nine countries, with West University of Timisoara as a partner: www.allinhe.eu

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different indicators related to lifelong learning, but also to get used to them and to reflect on them, and on how they can improve the existing situation.

The reporting exercise coordinated by BFUG since 2009 however shows that countries still do not make enough effort in improving the data reported: to the contrary, some even have registered a decrease in the participation rate of older students (EC 2012, p. 127-149). There are big differences between countries both in terms of allowing access to higher education in more flexible ways (through validation of previous learning –VPL, support services, alternative courses etc.), and in terms of attractiveness for and inclusion of the older students.

For instance, in Romania, the percentage of older students (over 30 years old) attending higher education in 2009-2010 (more updated statistics are not available) was 14.25%, with 2.5/% less than in the previous academic year (UEFISCDI, 2013, p.25). The point is that Romania does not have a national strategy regarding the social dimension of higher education, with clear targets and ways to implement it. Furthermore, in spite of developing a set of instruments for widening access to higher education, there is not a systematic monitoring of their use, so there is no updated data about their impact, neither is there available data in general for judging the social dimension, lifelong learning and widening access for older students. There is not enough stimulus for universities to increase the social dimension, and lifelong learning is not amongst the quality criteria for evaluating higher education. Neither are related resources available for universities to develop lifelong learning programs, the experts recommending separate budgets in the financing of higher education for lifelong learning programs and services, and data collection, as well as launching procedures for accreditation, for recognition of prior learning, for using transfer of credits, as well as guidelines for implementation (UEFISCDI, 2013, p.27-37). In most cases students pay the whole study fee, with no covering from other public sources, and there is no available data in this respect. Such a situation contradicts the recommendations from *rethinking education* (EC, 2012b, p.13), as greater sharing between public and private funds should be considered, to stimulate access to higher education for underprivileged groups. Such a recommendation is in line with the social dimension aspect and with the need to improve the skill level mainly of those with no qualifications at higher level. Furthermore, the RPL is not recognized as a possible way to get some credits from practice, to access higher level, and there is no specific focus in HE policy on promoting the flexible provision of HE studies/programmes, as the last reporting exercise for Romania shows (2014). The Romanian higher education system remains one of the most exclusive systems in Europe, with the lower educational level group underrepresented, and high education with relatively high overrepresentation. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the inclusive systems of higher education from Finland, Ireland, Switzerland, or Holland (EC, 2013).

Contrary to the situation in Romania, in the universities in Sweden, the majority of students have a working background, being over 25 years old (Anderson, 2014: 43). Such a situation might be a source of increased quality and enriching for the universities as well, as such students bring more experience, updated developments from the labour market/ from their working place, and their experience allows them to go to a higher level of more pertinent solutions and developments, which they bring into their studies and graduation papers. We might argue that reducing the duration of academic studies (mainly at BA and PhD levels) is a solution which mostly addresses those with working experience, and with a clearer view about what do they want to do, to update, to improve, in a more specific and focused way. Therefore, the universities should reconsider ways of removing the institutional barriers related to these issues. To name only two of them (Anderson, 2014: 44): the way of organising the provision of education (for example the form of instruction in terms of distance courses vs. on-campus courses could influence participation), or the system of admission, with requirements of eligibility and selection instruments (i.e. the Romanian universities have, most of them, as the main/ only criteria for access to MA level the results from graduation, without taking into account relevant experience or anything of this kind).

Among the measures reported by member states increasingly used for improving the opening up of higher education to older students (see EC 2013), the **VPL** is one of the most often quoted, a wider use being expected due to the implementation of the *national qualification frameworks*. It is well known that VPL "in the context of higher education can have two different purposes: firstly, to allow students to gain admission to a higher education institution and, secondly, to allow students to demonstrate that they have met, partially or completely, the requirements of a higher education programme" (EC, 2011, p.47). In some countries, legislation refers to alternative access to higher education in a relatively open way, i.e. it does not refer to any specific categories of non-traditional learners or to any approaches to be used in alternative admission procedures (e.g. Finland and Sweden). The United Kingdom represents a specific case, as there is no legislation referring to alternative entry into higher education, but higher education institutions commonly accept non-traditional candidates who do not comply with standard entry requirements. This is related to the fact that universities are autonomous institutions responsible for the quality of their qualifications and the recruitment of their student population. They can therefore set their own admission criteria and conditions (EC, 2012, p.85). Such a solution can be adopted into the Romanian HEIs, as a bottom up initiative, based on the universities' autonomy (Sava/Borca/Danciu, 2014). As was shown in ALLinHE project[3], the situation is very different in different countries. It is quite easy to implement such a tool in countries like The Netherlands, Denmark, or Portugal, since the regulations allow this, but for other countries it can be considered that the bottom-up approach is experimentation. The arguments for such a solution are synthesised as follows:

« It is expected that the shift to clearly identified learning outcomes will support alternative entry pathways in two different ways: First, clearly identified knowledge, skills and competences needed for study at higher education level could allow the implementation of measures to recognise non-formal and informal learning as a part of standard admission procedures. Second, national qualification frameworks are also expected to clarify the content of different national qualifications, which could allow certain "non-traditional" certificates and qualifications to be better understood and potentially accepted by higher education institutions as an alternative to standard upper secondary school leaving qualifications. Further studies are to be done, to explore the impact of such a measure.» (EC 2012, p.88)

If implementing such solutions might be delayed, due to further regulations, trust, cultural patterns, novelty compared to existing practices, and the efforts required to implement a new solution in a qualitative way, then a more accepted and easily implemented solution for universities is that of making the study programs more flexible. Some further possible solutions are presented below, mapping different good practices.

Possible solutions

Peer learning activities and the possibility of learning from the experiences of other countries are encouraged. In this respect, in 2013 the European Union launched the thematic study on "Opening up Higher Education to Adults" (EU, 2013), with a series of case studies and examples of good practice.

Some examples of good practice:

-    Setting up *targets* for widening access to higher education for older adults, and other specific group of adults (i.e. trying to maximise talents also for the ones belonging to the underprivileged groups – see EC, 2011b) and put in place *adequate measures, monitoring their impact* (EC, 2014). VPL is one the measures to be addressed.

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- *Making study programs more flexible* is one of the most often-used solutions, keeping in mind the limited time volume of the older students and their professional and social constraints, but also their experience. D. Orr (2012) makes a clear distinction between the different ways of making study offers flexible, according to the types of students (i.e. highly skilled autonomous learners vs. students needing for a lot of support in their academic study, after a long period of time out-of-studies), but also connected to the institutional philosophy. All types can exist, but students should be informed from the beginning about these "entry requirements", to be able to self-evaluate, to adapt their expectations, in this way avoiding drop-out. Irrespective, we are talking about flexibility in terms of time, content, entry requirements, instructional approach and resources, and delivery and logistics (EC, 2014, apud Collins, 1997/ 2001). The new technologies for information and communication offer universities a wide range of tailoring the delivery mode of courses, which is to be explored by universities more intensively, even with large scale delivery, through inter-institutional consortia, and MOOC delivery. This trend is definitely recommended as one way towards modernising higher education, being somehow surprising that it is not followed and integrated more intensively by universities. Another way in which programs can be made more flexible is through offering study in modules. Designing study in modules allows a better connection to the labour market, and also addresses more specific needs of the adult learner.

- A possible solution to support the access to higher education is to offer *preparatory programmes* for non-traditional higher education candidates (EC, 2012, p. 85), as a *second chance* facilitating one step up (a situation existing for instance in Ireland and England). Such preparatory programs should be accompanied by services for educational and career counselling for students.

- One more solution to point out, as an illustration of different possibilities the universities can choose in order to be more inclusive, attractive and "friendly" to the adult students relates to the *flexibility of governance and control structures* (EC, 2013). In other words, universities, based on their autonomy, can set up the infrastructure of services towards older adults as they consider fit, the main standard being quality of provision and satisfaction of the students. Further aspects of flexibility are therefore to be kept in mind: flexibility in the development of practice- and occupational-related HE programmes, flexible (open) access and entry routes, flexibility in terms of space and time, financial flexibility and flexible lifelong learning processes (EC, 2013).

Some of these solutions can be found explained and analysed in a more detailed way in the pages of the thematic journal.

This **thematic number** covers, in a balanced way, considerations about the degree to which universities are open to the world of practice, with views and experiences from the USA, Australia and Europe, underlining the benefits for practice/ universities from such collaboration, but also the obstacles to setting up and running such a collaboration. To illustrate such considerations, a more in-depth analysis of the Hungarian higher education and their understanding and practice in opening up to older students is also included. Solutions are also debated concerning the enrolment of older students in universities (even for the third age, or students with special needs), but also solutions for all adults to return to higher education/ further education, by the validation of their previous learning experiences (VPL). The issue of validation of competencies comes up more often in the articles selected for this thematic journal, as a solution for the individual to reflect and build upon the learning outcomes of his learning in all life and professional contexts, to stimulate self-investment in learning and return to learning (see A. Osoian). The VPL is a suitable solution for meeting the demands of higher education in widening access to higher education, in improving the retention of students, increasing efficiency by improving completion rates, and reducing the time taken to complete degree courses (European Commission, 2013, p.35). Therefore, universities have to reconsider their

practices and to offer more diverse and tailored programs to non-traditional learners. Such practices are to be measured against indicators for quality assurance, with items related to the openness, inclusiveness and adaptation of the university offers to "non-traditional" adult students. Not only are such indicators analysed from a technical point of view in the journal, helping traditional higher education institutions to implement a functional internal quality assurance system and make a shift toward an orientation of adult education (see the article of Anca Prisacariu), but there are also practical solutions offered for enhancing the quality culture by means of validating competences of teachers and students involved in quality assurance (see Mihai Vilcea). Such solutions come more and more into the debates for the scientific and professional community as a whole, two related events of this kind being presented in the journal (the first VPL Biennale and the 4th International conference on adult education, with the focus on adults in university), as well as the books launched at these events.

However, these are just some of the possible solutions and approaches. It is up to each university to set up its own strategy of opening up to older students, with clear targets, as the older students are as important as the younger ones for fulfilling its mission. The number of traditional students is decreasing continuously, so the older students are a strategic option, both for their experience allowing them to keep a high level of expertise and quality of teaching, and for their potential and needs for up-skilling.

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University Adult Education Related to Practice

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Abstract

The relation between universities and practice is complicated and sensible. This is true also for the discipline of adult education as science and as practice of universites as teaching organisations.There is a wide range of tasks for adult education as scientific discipline to support and develop the practice of adults learning, but also a challenge to contribute with appropriate offers in this field. In this article there are given some examples of concrete relations between universities and practice regarding adult education and learning. Coming from these examples there are pointed out the main obstacles as well as the prior benefits of such activities. The article is based on the discussions in a panel during the conference on lifelong learning at the university of Iasi in April 2014. The author was chairing this section.

Key words: lifelong learning, adult education

The following article gives some conclusions of discussions at the international conference on adult education at universities, which took place in Iasi (Romania) in April 2014. A special panel dealt with examples of activities of universities towards adults, based on examples from different countries there were discussed benefits and obstacles – for the universities and for the adult learners. In his conclusion the author points out the importance of adult education activities at universities, but also the difficulties of realization. Nevertheless he is encouraging further approaches in all disciplines, a wide range of universities and in many countries.

Introduction

One of the most difficult and sensible questions in the educational system is the relation of universities to the fields of practice. Or, to put it even more general: to society. On the one hand universities need a certain distance to practical problems and proceedings to carry out scientific work; on the other hand they need to be acknowledged by the society, which is financing them, and they need to "produce" qualifications, which are useful for the survival of a human, healthy and wealthy community. Scientific research as well as scientific education underlies thus always the critical reflection, which practical aspects are in which way regulated and integrated in the academic world.

Theoretically spoken: the society separated science and scientifical education from all other fields of society in an special organization to allow a critical, reflective and innovative perspective on all the relevant matters, social and natural ones. This has of course the danger of an "ivory tower", which is far away from the needs and the questions of society, which exists on its own with a special internal dynamic. This can be partly observed in developed countries with a long academic history and a traditional understanding of scientific production. Normally this does not only mean internal rules and self awareness, but also problems of communication with the world outside. It became even more difficult with the development of scientific knowledge, which is nowadays extremely specialized and

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transferable to the public. Initiatives and programs such as "PUS" (Public Understanding of science) and "PUSH" (Public Understanding of Science and Humanities) tried in the last decades to close the gap.

But it is not only a problem of language and understanding. The problems of the relation between universities and society, between theory and practice vary according to the discipline, the status of science in the society and the difference of research and education. A university professor for political science, who is involved in concrete activities of a political party, underlies always questions of scientific independence. The same is true for a professor for chemistry, who is partly working for a big enterprise in chemical business. But quite often the line is difficult to draw. A close relation to practice is needed for research as well as for a curriculum, which fits to the needs of the labor market.

In this generalized picture of the relation between universities and society plays adult education, since some decades in many countries also an adademic discipline, a threefold role:

- (1) As an academic discipline adult education has a field of practice, for which it gives a scientific background, contributes to its development and qualifies professionals – more or less comparable to the role of pedagogy for schools. And like pedagogy in general it is an applied science, which aims to the improvement of this field of practice.
- (2) As educational activity it is one of the main tasks of universities (beside research and academic qualification), in many European countries legally fixed for the universities. That means, that all disciplines have to contribute to public education by offering courses and measures for adults, mainly of course for the academic professionals as updating and further specialization.
- (3) In terms of research Adult Education has to contribute findings about adult learning, about the difference of knowledge, qualification and competence, about motivation and learning strategies in adult age. These findings prepare the basic knowledge for the development of a scientific society; practically they are often integrated in programs between university and institutions of practice such as enterprises and liberal organisations.

In the international conference on adult education at universities all these perspectives were taken in consideration, many examples and argumentation were exchanged. Some of them are of high relevance for the future of societies.

Examples of University Adult Education Activities

To the most important examples of collaboration of universities with the practice in adult education belongs the qualification of teachers and other professionals in this field, one element in function (1) as academic discipline. There are different variations of curricula at university, from classic pedagogical studies in teaching to more modern models of managing institutions and learning processes. It can be seen that the diversification in the practice has its equivalent at university education, and it is still and ongoingly changing. The most recent elements of curricula for adult education professionals are the competences for media teaching, the management competences for quality assurance and the wider competences of counselling, counselling in case of learning difficulties as well as finding an appropriate offer.

In the recent years in some universities adult education qualification made a big step forward in modularizing the curricula an mainly the master program, thus giving a model for a future more flexible and better to practice adapted system of teaching and learning. In the field of adult education are working many very qualified people coming from other disciplines, needing an academic additional qualification in educational topics like teaching, counselling, human

resources and so on. Study offers beside work are the suiting approaches for them, combining working and learning in a holistic perspective.

The examples of qualification given in the conference in Iasi put it in a wider frame. Qualification of professionals in adult education were not only seen as the improvement of the competences of the professionals, but more directly seen in relation to the learners. One of the examples pointed out the relevance of competences in adult education for the concept of learning cities. Learning cities are mainly based on the development and the learning of the adult inhabitants, not only individually, but as a social network. This network creates more than the mere addition of the individual learning outcomes, has an added value for all. Thus the investment in the competences of adult education professionals pays directly back in the development of the cities, their competiveness and future perspectives. Consequently the curricula are shaped more in the direction of networking and local and regional development. And the university offering this qualification is the regional one, thus playing a direct role in the local setting.

In another example the qualification of adult education professionals is split in learning about general teaching on the one hand and learning in concrete environments, mainly VET (vocational education and training), on the other hand. Like this the professionals working in enterprises and for vocational aims learn about the procedures and needs in general education – and the other way round. This fosters a mutual understanding of different approaches and contexts of adult learning. To make it real it is needed a close collaboration not only of the university with enterprises and educational institutions, but also amongst them – the creation of a working institutional network with the university in the centre.

Another given example is the development of curricula in collaboration with enterprises or other institutions and universities, in the case of adult education mainly regarding concrete fields of practical applicability. In one case it was about the competence of human resources development, which was integrated in the curriculum of an university; this element of curriculum was taylor made for the needs of a collaborating enterprise, but at the same time keeping the scientific distance by generalizing and enabling the students to work also at other places.

In the middle between education and research (role 2) are the examples of doctorate schools, which are in the given examples set up by a group of universities in different countries, in Asia as well as in Europe. The European example, ESRALE, started in 2013 and combines the scientific graduation in adult education at nine European universities out of nine countries such as Germany (coordinator), Romania, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands and others. In these doctorate programs the students deal – in a comparative way – with questions and demands of different societies, finding causes and solutions by a common analysis. Like this the doctorate curricula are enlarged by the international dimension, the students learn from and work with each other, and concrete problems are in the focus of the research. In the ESRALE doctorate program there are topics like illiteracy, integration of older people, migration and the follow up, unemployment and ecological sustainability; practically all these topics are subject of intensive discussion in all member states. Like this the doctorate schools are not only good examples for links between qualification and research, but also – and this is important in adult education – for the link between scientific work and practical questions.

An example for research with an increasing importance is the evaluation of learning processes and the accreditation of study courses as well as pedagogical institutions on the basis of empirically relevant criteria. Adult education as well as the higher education pedagogy did a lot of analysis in this regard in the last years, with a high level of evidence and acceptance. Most of these evaluation and accreditation researches were carried out together with their specific objects, which caused a high expertise and a high acceptance at the same time. A participative and discursive way of empirical research seems to be a typical part of the research methods in adult education.

Related to the research activities in adult education at the universities is the fact, that actually adults are learning in all contexts of society, of work and daily life. Even many of that is not considered to be adult education, it fundamentally is. Guided tours in museums, participation in conferences, discussions and work in voluntary associations are part of adult education. The border lines between formal, non-formal and informal learning are slowly disappearing, learning of adults is more and more an integrative way of improving individual competences. The policy of the European Union, stressing lifelong learning as crucial element of a competitive knowledge society, is based on this fact and is strengthening it at the same time.

Thus, regarding the role of adult education in the third respect (3), the future development of society depends to a high degree on research in learning of adults and on the special activities, which are part of adult education in theory and practice. The universities are playing an important role in this context, if and as far they have a department for adult education and if and as far they are involved in adult education activities. This might be via collaboration with other universities and institutions (like in the case of university of Bucuresti and the Romanian Institute for Adult Education – IREA – in Timisoara), this might also be in the development of bigger departments and collaborations in one university. Above all is counting the collaboration of universities with practical institutions and practitioners.

Benefits and obstacles

Describing the benefits of activities in adult education for the universities as well as for the practice the votes in the conference were unison. Whenever universities are active in Adult education research and teaching they open up opportunities for practitioners and academic staff to share experience, to find common ways of analyzing and to come closer to solutions of practical problems. Combined with the European dimension of education in the line of lifelong learning this provides a new approach to individual and societal development.

For practitioners the existence of adult education in the universities is a necessary support for their reflections, a kind of mirror for the daily work. And the comparative aspect of lifelong learning means, to learn from others, universities in other countries and further progress in adult education in solving social problems and those, which are related to the quality of the work force and the individual wellbeing. Like in other disciplines the link between theory and practice is fundamental for the future of the field.

The upmost benefit of university activities in collaboration with practice is the wider perspective of adult learners as the basis of societal development. Intercultural understanding f.e. in times of migration is supported by adult education, mutual understanding of generations in times of aging society as well. The benefits for the people and the society through adult education at universities are obvious and empirically proved. Inside the universities the benefits might also be of high value, but – and here are starting the obstacles – some of the aspects of adult education are not streamlined to scientific disciplines. Mainly the practical view of adult education brings difficulties, since other disciplines are more in distance to society – for several reasons. Some of them do not have a practical "field" in society with people working, with institutions, aims and tasks. Others are so much specialized that it needs a big transfer (by adult education….) to make their work be generally understood. In some cases (that differs from country to country) the academic language in the respective discipline is so much specialized that it needs for a real "translation" (another task of adult education).

A big reason for so far not very much developed collaboration between universities and practice with means of adult education (open university at its best) is the widely missing pedagogical competence of the university teachers. Professors are specialists in their topic, not specialists in teaching, and they consider themselves like this. It is in the teaching where can be clearly seen the difficulty of relation between the world of science and research at universities and the world of practice outside. The problems are clearly visible in adult teaching: the adult learners have in most of the cases a lot of experiences in the topic, practical experiences and knowledge. University professors have only little competence in making use out of that, taking it as material in the teaching-learning process. And they hardly know the relevance of the practical test of the adult learners, who compare all theoretical input with their own experience and do not accept it, if it is not "empirically" proofed like this.

In this sense adult education as task of the universities is a challenge for their internal organizational development, more (and better) teaching competences for the professors, more flexibility and openness in the didactical arrangements. Also the management of courses in non-formal learning is quite different from regular lectures, needs advertisement, open access and motivation of the learners. Many universities are confronted with these new demands, since the organization of studies too is more and more comparable to open and modularized adult education forms.

From the part of practitioners, of institutions in the field of practice, there are obstacles mainly regarding the usability of theoretical offers from universities in concrete contexts. They consider quite often the contributions of universities to the field of practice as little helpful, not precisely shaped for use. In models of collaboration with universities the practitioners and their organisations sometimes are not seriously enough acknowledged, their questions, demands and problems not enough responded. Another fact hindering collaboration, mentioned in Iasi, were finances and status of universities. Compared with most of the educational enterprises and organizations the universities are rich, they don´t have to fight and struggle for money like their practical equivalent, and the status of universities (formal and legally) is not as fragile as in many cases of pedagogical institutions.

The collaboration of adult education at universities with the fields of practice became more intensive since there are programs of the European Union supporting both in that direction. In these projects can be seen once more one of the most basic elements of collaboration between theory and practice: trust in each other and mutual respect. The participants in Iasi underlined the need to improve reliable structures and networks to allow this trust and respect.

Comparative and evaluative aspects

A last phase of the discussion was oriented towards the role of comparison and evaluation for a better relation between theory and practice.

By several participants was pointed out the difference of the theory-practice-collaboration in different countries. Some countries and universities have a stronger tradition in that regard, universities in UK f.e. started with the concept of open university and collected a lot of experiences in opening academic studies for the people. In other countries there is less tradition and a different understanding of academic teaching and research. So, it has to be pointed out that there is still a big need for common reflections in an international, at least European, perspective to improve this relation. Umbrella organizations like EUCEN are a good step in that direction, they might be supported in a better and more sustainable way. Also research networks on a European level in adult education such as – above all – ESREA deserve a stronger support in influencing the opening of the universities to the fields of practice by the means of adult education.

Another point, quite a weak one, is that in hardly any evaluation concept for universities occurs the indicator of "successful collaboration with the practice", neither an indicator such as "improvement of teaching competences of professors". The evaluation concepts focus mainly on publications in reviewed journals and on the acquisition of money beside the public funding. Since the evaluation of educational institutions has become more and more important there would be a big impact of the integration of indicators regarding the relation to the practice.

In the end of the discussion one representative of an university came back to the view of an practitioner, that the universities are the reflection body for practice and kind of a mirror for practical work. Resuming the discussion he pointed out that the "practice", the practitioners and their institutions are providing in the same way a mirror for the universities. In the opinion of the practical institutions and their interests in collaboration the universities can clearly see whether they are still an important and integrated part of the society or whether they are more existing in the direction of an ivory tower.

This mutual exchange of views between university and practice was considered to be one of the most important elements of collaboration. And adult education was considered as one of the most important and most appropriate means to establish a working and fruitful collaboration between theory and practice.

Hungarian Higher Education and Adult Learners

Prof.PhD. Balázs NÉMETH *

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Abstract

This paper is to analyse the state of art in how higher education in Hungary is prepared to open up to adult learners wanting to extend their knowledge and develop skills at an advanced level of education. Also, a detailed description of the roles and functions of higher education in adult learning will demonstrate some particular aspects of quality development of higher education and learning focusing on better performance and raising participation.

Key words

Lifelong learning, adult learning, higher education, validation of prior learning,

Key concept and short introduction

Definition of the term "adults" in higher education

The term „Adult" is not directly defined in the Act of Hungarian higher education[4] as the minimum age for entering into higher education studies is 18, therefore, all students and learners must be at the age of 18 or over, regarded as adults, when entering into universities and colleges (generally in levels of ISCED 5a and 5b) regardless of the level and forms of their education within higher education. Another marker to underline one identical precondition of entering into higher education, and that is *maturation*, which is formally accessible through a set of exams in secondary schools and secondary vocational schools at the age of 18 and afterwards. However, the Act on Adult Education[5] clearly defines *who is an "adult"* and this adult person, apart from being able to enter a variety of adult education and training programmes, can officially learn at HEIs in Hungary for either a BA and MA level diploma or a vocation-oriented certificate available through special accredited post-secondary Higher Vocational Training (Higher Education provided VET in ISCED 5b) as *an adult learner by holding a certificate of maturation.* One must also bear in mind that students having finished their studies in HVET are entitled to take relevant credit points into their BA level studies (up to 60 credits as maximum!).[6]

A general process of her/his entry to higher education to Bachelor, Master and Post-Graduate studies is achieved through a formal entry exam and this status enables the adult to become a student of the university or college and hold special rights attached to that status. One can directly enrol to full-time or part-time/distance studies, either at

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[4] Act on Hungarian Higher Education - CCIV./2011.
[5] Act on Adult Education - LXXVII./2013./Point 2. – Definitive orders). – According to the Act, „*an adult is a person who has already completed her/his compulsory education"* (defined in the Act of National Public Education - CXC./2011.)
[6] http://www.ofi.hu/kiadvanyaink-110630/aims-and-types-of-study

ISCED 5a or 5b. *Students learning in non-full-time formats are recognised as students and adult learners* most of whom are *considered by higher education institutions, according to the former HEAD-survey's typology, in majority as recurrent learners, some deferrers or returners*.

The above listed types of adult learners are the ones which Hungarian higher education institutions consider as relevant in functioning and operation of colleges and universities. Again, they are dominantly recurrent learners, some deferrers and returners. There are still no available statistics related to special grouping or types of adult learners other than those with reference only to sex and form/mode of education within the HEI (e.g. full-time, part-time, evening or distance education).

One must note that higher education in Hungary developed and has maintained some special roles in the education of adults in special part-time, evening or corresponding forms/structures of education during the last six decades. This kind of rather varying and changing partial role in adult education and learning has not yet turned most universities and colleges to recognise such actions belonging to their mainstream functions until the very end of the twentieth century. The mere emphasis to open up higher education to adults has been there for that period, however, some follow-up policy changes have not constrained academic cycles to step forward a more flexible and adult learner centred structure of higher education which stayed rather closed, in educational functions and orientations, for adults.

Criteria (e.g. age, life course) to define "adults" in HE in Hungary according to major groups of relevant adult learners

The OECD categories to define adults in higher education cannot be automatically used in the Hungarian context for the following reasons:

- all students above the age of 18 in higher education studying for a Bachelor, Master or a Doctoral degree are formally considered as adults in legal terms;
- people learning in higher education for a vocation are officially considered as adults learners in higher education in Hungary;
- the European statistical data collection system (Eurostat) applies the age cohort of 25-64 as an indicator to measure participation of adults in lifelong learning and it generates several questions and issues whether students and adult learners who start learning in higher education under the age of 25 may not be counted into/reflected by any lifelong learning indicator;

The OECD categories have not been directly used in Hungarian higher education, however, those categories are reflected in the changing concept of an "adult learner" in higher education from 2005. (OECD, 1987)[7] That was the time when the newly accepted strategy on lifelong learning of the Hungarian Government heavily influenced law-makers to recognise each and all students in higher education who study in part-time, distance or in evening

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[7] OECD (1987) *Adults in Higher Education.* Paris: OECD.

educational formats both as students and adult learners.[8] The peculiar aim was to make higher education institutions turn towards growing the number of their non-traditional students with more care, better provision and services as part of university lifelong learning.[9]

Recently, the situation in academic cycles has moved attention to raise the research quality of higher education institutions through some top "research universities" (from 2010 and onwards) and to shift the problem of raising the number of non-traditional students to more "teaching-oriented universities". The biggest twelve universities in Hungary applied for the status of "research university", but only the best five was ranked to receive the label in 2010 from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Another five of them were ranked to receive the label of "excellent university". The process itself was a kind of paying more attention to research excellence instead of moving forward with the Bologna- process, as it is considered as a task formally having been completed by most higher education institutions. Universities and colleges, however, have started to show more attention and interest towards university lifelong learning and adult learners through their short-cycle programmes, vocational training programmes and peculiar distance/e-learning courses. Yet, the number of such programmes have been growing rather slowly and reflects the lack of overall institutional interest, the lack of adult training skills of most lecturers and the lack of appropriate and flexible curricula, proper teaching methodology and technical facilities.

Prevailing concepts of adults in HE in Hungary

Adults learners in higher education programmes are defined as those who have completed their compulsory education period (according to the new Act on Public Education, it is the age of 16 until which compulsory public education lasts!) and have enrolled to any vocational training, Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programme of the university/college; The age cohort of of 25-64 matters in the context of the EC, Eurydice, Eurostat surveys of lifelong learning.

The issue of participation of non-traditional students to represent underrepresented groups as minorities, disabled matters from the point of view of equal opportunities guaranteed by the Act on Higher Education.[10] Most students, studying for a vocational certificate, a bachelor or a master degree, or even for a Doctorate degree in part-time, distance or evening course formats, can be described as persons who continue their studies which often paired with a family biography.

In the area of access and admission, one must recognize that access is formally open to any adult who holds a certificate of maturation and collects enough entry points through an entrance exam to Bachelor or Master programmes. Vocational programmes are open to all adults holding a Certificate of Maturation. Doctorate programmes require, as part of their admission criteria, a Diploma of Master studies and a successful entry exam. No

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[8] Strategy of Lifelong Learning of the Government of Hungary – Govt. Decree 2212/2005.
[9] The approach of university lifelong learning has been effectively represented and demonstrated by the Hungarian Universities Lifelong Learning Network Association/MELLearN since 2003. Please find more at: http://www.mellearn.hu
[10] Act on Hungarian Higher Education - CCIV./2011.

alternative entrance and admission is available to accredited programmes of higher education institutions in Hungary. The only exception is the field of short non-degree courses, programmes for adults who want to upgrade their knowledge, skills in special continuing education for lifelong learners, for example in the programmes and courses as part of the university of the third age.[11] This point clearly underlines the orientation of universities and colleges to widen their Bachelor and Master programmes in part-time and distance formats of education for non-traditional courses, and, moreover, some exceptions show that particular universities and colleges open access and admission to non-traditional adult learners into their adult continuing education programmes or non-degree/non-credit courses also in pat-time, evening and distance education, week-end, etc. forms. Since recognition and validation of prior learning has just taken some early experimental forms in higher education, it is just about to accelerate special admission or entry in its testing phase.

On the other hand, the typology of Slowley and Schuetze for lifelong learners can be partially and very cautiously applied in the context of Hungarian higher education. (Slowey and Schuetze, 2012.)[12] In Hungary, a second chance learner is a person who wishes to take or to complete her/his public education in special schools offering second chance programmes. Therefore, the notion is not used in that direct meaning, or to reflect an alternative way of access/admission through special examination or assessment. This would, on the other hand, require a rather sophisticated RPL or VPL system in higher education which is still in experimental and early phase.[13] In Hungarian higher education recurrent learners and returners are the majority of lifelong learners, but refreshers and learners in later life are people who expand the number of new learners entering into higher education for gathering either scientific knowledge or practical skills.

Background information

Information on important regulatory issues and policies

So far as the regulation of higher education is concerned, it is the Act on Higher education that clearly regulates that only accredited degree programmes can be advertised and be accessible for candidate students within Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels. The Act also describes the number, forms (universities and colleges) of higher education institutions (state-funded, and private) and defines what makes a higher education institution. The Act demonstrates the process of accreditation of degree/credit programmes at Bachelor, Master and Doctorate (PhD) levels and describes how the state finances state universities, colleges and regulates the forms of financing of

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[11] The Programme of King Sigismund College is identical in this context. List of courses for elder learners is accessible at: http://www.zskf.hu/nyugdijasok

[12] Slowey, M. & Schuetze, H.G. (eds.) (2012) *Global perspectives on higher education and lifelong learners.* London: Routledge

[13] A latest project to focus on the development of validation system in higher education is described as follows (only in Hungarian!): http://tamop413.ofi.hu/validaciorol

studies at higher education institutions. This law regulates participation and defines entry forms and processes to degree and non-degree courses at Hungarian universities and colleges.[14]

Most relevant regulatory issues at national, regional and/or institutional level to stimulate the participation of adults in HE in Hungary (e.g. access and admission to HE, funding of HEIs, student grants/ loans)

Hungarian higher education is regulated by the Ministry of Human Resources and its State Secretariat for Education.[15] The main goal of the Ministry is to regulate higher education, as part of the educational policy of the Government of Hungary, so as to properly generate and disseminate quality knowledge. This approach is also connected to the Science-policy of the Government so as to help higher education become competitive by paying a significant attention to quality education and research through partnerships with key stakeholders in research-development, and in innovation. The Higher Education policy of the Ministry is to help higher education maintain and develop its education and research activities and services. This policy supports the orientation of candidate students towards all sciences, especially to natural and technical sciences and engineering. This approach is also reflected in the rate of state-funded places for students in higher education. The Government of Hungary supports the freedom of students to decide in which subject area to study, however, the state-funded places are limited to state-interests referring to the scientific area/major. Students can self-finance their studies in case of insistence on a major the state does not fully support according to its policies. The funding system is orientated mainly to support full-time students as part-timers are financing their studies from individual sources in most cases. However, part-timers can also have financial difficulties to cover the costs of their education and training. In that case, a special social support starts to make the student pay his/her fee in monthly instalments and not in one sum. A special state-owned student-loan system is also in operation and that is the only system to officially help students cover the expenses of the studies and pay back the loan in monthly payment.[16]

Another important aspect of higher education in Hungary is the Hungarian Rectors' Conference which is a highest platform for university and college leaders to demonstrate a common view and position in each and all issues to influence the status and future development of higher education in the aspect of regulations/law, financing and national development plans and EU-funded/co-funded programmes and initiatives.[17]

Participation in Higher Education is formally regulated by the Act on Higher Education, namely, any person who enrols to a certain university must pass an entrance exam, by holding a certificate of maturation, on the other hand, anyone can decide which major to enrol and choose what available format of education to take (e.g. full-time, part-time, distance or evening teaching). Another route is to take non-degree higher level vocational training, post-graduate specialisation, partial trainings, summer university courses which can also be accessed depending on the

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[14] Act on Hungarian Higher Education - CCIV./2011.
[15] Description of the Ministry of Human Resources: http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-human-resources/news
[16] http://www.diakhitel.hu/index.php/en/10-key-features-of-the-student-loan
[17] Major Source on Hungarian Rectors' Conference: http://www.mrk.hu/en/ A short description of Hungarian Higher Education and its institutions is accessible at: http://www.mrk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/mfi_angol_2012.pdf

current level of education of the person. Such courses and trainings open *flexible learning for adults and imply innovative methodologies and the use a certain VPL and recognition of prior experience in workplace environment.*

The basic principle for degree courses is that they are to be accredited, namely, only accredited programmes/courses can only be advertised to adult learners. They may be accredited by the Hungarian Board of Accreditation (MAB), based on the Act on Higher Education, referring to degree-courses (BA, MA and PhD levels) or through the Adult-Training Accreditation Board (FAT), based on the Act Adult Education. This approach, on the other hand, allows higher education organisations *to provide their accredited courses with flexible provision and methodologies* referring to time (e.g. part-time, evening or distance forms of education) and new ways of knowledge transfer (e.g. e-learning, blended-learning, m-learning, etc.). Moreover, universities and colleges are autonomous to provide non-accredited non-degree courses in any format they recognise as beneficial to adult learners and, form another angle, they are responding either to current adult learning needs or local/regional stakeholders' claims. There are no other specific laws to regulate this area with any particular orientation and claims.

The existing regulations give way to autonomous universities and colleges to provide flexible learning opportunities through either accredited degree-courses or non-degree courses, or even attend the varieties of informal learning programmes provided by higher education institutions focusing on the dissemination of scientific knowledge or to develop social skills in dominantly community learning formats either within the institution or in extramural environment. A more *specific strategy on adult and lifelong learning would be of social benefit*, on the one hand, to help raising participation, and on the other, to get universities involved into local and regional learning partnerships for better learning performance.

National policies and trends in HE as well as in adult education, vocational education and training to overcome barriers between the sectors (e.g. cooperation between HE and adult education sector and NGOs, strategies for RPL)

A significant policy element and trend, as part of the one-step up orientation, is to urge students to learn for vocations, BA and MA/MSc and Doctorate degrees and gain knowledge, develop competences, and skills which are needed in the labour market. Higher education policy in Hungary has turned towards trying to raise the number of students in higher education, in accordance with the goals of the Education and Training 2020 programme of the European Union, referring to attainment in higher education by 2020.[18]

However, demographic trends and the direct involvement of the Government to raise the number of state-funded places of full-time programmes in higher education in natural and technical sciences, engineering, and to radically reduce state-funded places in social sciences, humanities, economics and law will eventually make it difficult to raise

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[18] Source: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/general_framework/ef0016_en.htm

the overall number of students in higher education. Additionally, the number of graduating students in higher education fell after 2010 from 38.000 to 35.000 in 2011 (a 6.5% fall).[19]

It is seems fairly difficult to overcome barriers amongst sectors of education and training, as most adult education and training programmes are organised in the non-formal sector and consider higher education as a separate actor in the education of adults. Co-operation amongst higher education, vocational education and training and adult education is very rare and mainly demonstrated, within higher education, by departments and/or institutes of adult education/andragogy through their education and training programmes for the development of adult learning and education through the followings:

- accredited education and training of adult educators within BA and MA programmes;
- research and development initiatives, projects in adult learning and education through partnership with major stakeholders, like labour market key actors, employers, chambers of commerce and industry, local councils, labour offices, training centres, adult training enterprises, civic organisations, churches, etc.;
- accredited adult training programmes for adult learners.

Universities having a rather strong adult education/adult training orientation have their own partnerships/consortia with VET and adult education organisations to appear in joint development or research projects for quality adult learning and education targeted in the national development plan or maintaining partnerships for raising practice-oriented education and training dimensions of their own portfolio. Since the application of RPL, VPL mechanism is at a very early stage, most Hungarian higher education institutions have no or limited practice in the validation of prior learning, however, the new model for universities will be launched from 2012 and onwards at state-owned universities at least, and this can be regarded as a strategic development. One can find an existing practice of RPL in non-formal initial (iVET) and continuing vocational (CVET) training programmes.[20]

Specific conditions/events/policy decisions shaping policy in the field of opening HE to adults (e.g. national policies which specifically mention the openness of HE to adults)

The new Act on Higher Education of 2011 urged for a better higher education developing its educational and training provision to support adult learning, as universities and colleges ought to open for new adult learners' needs in their localities and should develop partnerships with several institutions and organisations of education, culture, enterprises so as to raise joint actions of knowledge transfer by applying new ICT –tools, methods, curricula and identifying new needs of learners, organisations where higher education may play a significant, leading role implementing, developing and expanding quality leaning. Such efforts can go along with place management, social capital development, local and regional development programmes, interregional projects, like that of the cross-border

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[19] Source: http://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng/xstadat/xstadat_long/h_wdsi001b.html
[20] Please find examples of the validation of prior learning in Hungarian vocation training centre and second chance school at the Observal project website of EUCEN (European Universities Lifelong Learning Network):
http://www.observal.org/country_profiles/hungary and http://www.observal-net.eu/node/50

partnerships within higher education, local and regional councils, joint ventures, chambers of commerce, etc.[21] Basically, one has to acknowledge that the conditions are provided for opening higher education for more adult learners, as, formally, each and all university and college lectures are open for adults to visit. Several universities and colleges organise their own actions by involving people from several age-groups to disseminate their services, their education and training portfolio through various programmes, festivals, projects, web-based contacts, public events, adult learners' weeks, third age university initiatives, city-region festivals, summer universities, etc.

Most universities' and colleges' websites offer several programmes, lectures, training-packages for adult learners at a bargain price or even for free. Universities and colleges are promoters of the dissemination of sciences through open lectures, public speeches in lecture halls combined with broadcasted events, labelled as open university programme.[22]

Disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of adult learners in HE

There are some disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of adult learners in higher education in Hungary, like the members of the Roma minority, however, universities and colleges make every efforts to turn their institutions easily accessible for those groups and raise the number of Roma adults to learn and study in various programmes in higher education. Students from social disadvantages families can apply for additional social support from the university and it is a tool to compensate a significant part of social disadvantage. Such students can apply for being accommodated in halls of residence for the time of higher education studies. Also, students with disadvantaged family background can apply for a reduction of any occurring tuition fees or to state-funds in order to cover a proportion of or the total of their tuition fee. This approach applies to part-time students as well!

Successful policies in regard to opening higher education to adults

An analytical approach must underline that successful policies for opening higher education to adults are to cover up and measure the learning needs of adults and their own communities in the localities of the higher education institutions. Therefore, policies, missions of universities and colleges must focus on needs-oriented programmes as part of their education and training provisions. Also, universities and colleges are to demonstrate and maintain open access to several forms of scientific lectures, programmes and organize new forms of knowledge and data-bases where adult learners can decide which programme or service to take through a more formalised way. Higher education institutions may not consider themselves as places for adult learning, as they are, and not necessarily understand or rather slowly move in the direction of what makes an university a place for lifelong learning. The

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[21] Please find the example of Cross-border development programme for Hungary and Croatia with university participation and partnership-based educational, development and research orientation in the intercommunity human resource development dimension: http://www.hu-hr-ipa.com/en/funded-projects

[22] The example of the Open University Programme of the University of Pécs is available at: http://www.nyitottegyetem.pte.hu/
Another good example for open university programme in the media is the „University of all Knowledge/Mindentudás egyeteme": http://mindentudas.hu/

Hungarian Universities' Lifelong Learning Network (MELLearN) and its actions, annual conferences help universities and colleges to explore their potentials how to expand their education and training provision towards adult learners.[23] A significant dimension of a successful policy is how an institution can become learner-centred, can turn to become a lifelong learning university. That means a new conception of organising the university/college into a flexible learning space where the organisation itself learns how to fulfil its missions in open and flexible ways through quality mechanisms and actions with monitoring of all actions and functions connected with education and training.

Important measures that have been initiated to increase openness of HE

Some initiated measures for widening the openness of higher education in Hungary are widening access to courses in part-time, open-distance and evening course formats for adult learners, establishing and developing new distance/e-learning programmes of non-degree programmes for adult learners, introducing and developing new higher vocational training programmes for adult learners and increasing new and effective methodologies of teaching and assessment. Universities and colleges have widened their collaboration with local and regional stakeholders, NGOs, etc. to collect some peculiar feedback upon which dimension and direction to expand provision and services in order to attain more learners from the local public. Therefore, institutions and organisations of adult education and training were also asked to give advice on how to increase openness of HEIs. One specific aspect has been the website-based virtual openness of the institution, and another has been the capability of recognising the corporate role of the university to respond effectively to local needs of adults, with new learning spaces, methods, contents amongst those needs.[24]

Finally, universities and colleges have had to turn their physical infrastructures as open learning spaces to adult learners and demonstrate an open and partner mood of mutual actions and communication so as to get rid of the unsuccessful mood of the academia by closing science into an ivory tower of academic cycles and, instead, disseminate quality knowledge, based on research, to the public through several open ways by, for example, the "night of researchers" which brings research and science closer to adult learners.

Main particularities of Hungary in comparison with other countries (e.g. special characteristics of modes of study; exceptional features of adult HE)

One must recognise that there is not too much difference in the modes of studies in comparison with other Central-East European countries, however, one exceptional feature is the relatively low number of private universities and colleges (in comparison with Poland), and the limited educational policy orientation towards university lifelong

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[23] MELLearN website demonstrates, through conferences and publications, the policy orientation of higher education towards adult learning and opening up to adult learners with quality services, accessible tools and effective methods. Source: www.mellearn.hu

[24] Please find more on corporate roles of universities at Jarvis: Jarvis, Peter (2001) *Universities and Corporate Universities.* London: Kogan Page

learning, other than some individual university initiatives, and the positive impact of European projects funded by the European Commission.[25]

Main data on adults participating HE

	Number of adult learners		
Year	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1990/91	11536	68162	31775
1995/96	5205	75891	62589
2000/01	2940	91700	143413
2005/06	3613	89950	192679
2010/11	10100	75434	120620
2011/12	12660	74204	118210
2012/13	14903	72808	114789
2013/14	14727	70793	96520

Source: http://www.ksh.hu/stadat_eves_2_6

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Slowey, M. & Schuetze, H.G. (eds.) (2012) *Global perspectives on higher education and lifelong learners.* London: Routledge

http://www.mellearn.hu

http://www.zskf.hu/nyugdijasok

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[25] Source: Tempus Public Foundation – http://english.tpf.hu/pages/content/index.php?page_id=22; http://english.tpf.hu/pages/content/index.php?page_id=14

http://tamop413.ofi.hu/validaciorol

http://www.mrk.hu/en/

http://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng

http://www.observal.org/country_profiles/hungary

http://english.tpf.hu

Selected elements of the learning culture at Universities of Third Age in Poland

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Abstract

The article presents the results of analyses regarding some elements of a learning culture of seniors taking advantage of offers of institutions promoting knowledge. Selected elements concerning lifestyle have been analysed for example involvement in activities after classes at Third Age University, values which, as senior citizens argue, can contribute to a successful life, the level of satisfaction resulting from selected areas of life. Data collected in 2013 relating to 9673 people aged over 60 living in Poland selected at random were used for the analysis. Data gathered as part of *Diagnoza Społeczna* Project (*Social Diagnosis* Project www.diagnoza.com) were used as well. Seniors using offers of educational institutions have been compared with seniors not making use of those offers. It has been stated that the differences in terms of a level of activity concern the establishing of interpersonal relations and social activity, participation in culture, a level of life satisfaction. The differences in terms of seniors' opinions in the groups being compared about *Friendship* and *Optimism* as values which are a requirement for a successful life have also been identified.

Key words Senior citizens, Third Age University, learning culture

The concept of successful ageing

Over the last several decades a number of various theories related to the so-called successful ageing which can be described as "optimal ageing" have developed. Bowling and Dieppe having analysed 170 scientific articles about the above mentioned subject, have identified the following theories of successful ageing found in literature: biomedical, sociopsychological and lay views[26]. The biomedical theories tend to focus on the absence of chronic diseases, minimising the risk of physical and mental disability. The sociopsychological theories hold life satisfaction,

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[26]A.Bowling, P.Dieppe, (2005), What is successful aging and who should define it? , in "British Medical Journal, 331, 1548-1551. http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1559/1/1548.pdf

social participation, personal development to be key elements of successful ageing. Health, psychological factors, fulfilment of social roles, activity, as well as finances and social relationships are elements of lay views which are the most popular among senior citizens. The sociopsychological concepts assume that an individual can decide on how to age. Some concepts have revealed that adopting a specific lifestyle has an impact on successful ageing[27]. There is however no common understanding about what lifestyle is required. The activity theory[28] has numerous supporters among both the elderly, politicians and individuals involved in providing institutional support in the field of education of senior citizens. According to the activity theory, the different forms of activities undertaken by seniors on a day-to-day basis and their involvement in new forms of activities affect successful ageing. The disengagement theory is based on a different concept[29]. The theory argues that ageing is a process in which older people no longer participate in society. Both the activity theory and the disengagement theory are subject to criticism resulting from a life model, imposed by the theories, which ensures successful ageing not taking into account different personalities, preferences and older people's experience[30]. The continuity theory is a kind of compromise[31]. In accordance with the theory, successful ageing involves a continuation of lifestyle chosen some years earlier. In scientific studies while searching for determinants of successful ageing, an effort was made to distinguish positively correlated factors with the variable under consideration as follows: the absence of symptoms of diseases and infirmity; active participation in society, a high level of cognitive and physical functioning[32]. Furthermore, it has been noted that the spiritual dimension can have considerable importance[33]. Successful ageing means healthy ageing and it has been defined by WHO according to its broad definition of health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as "*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*"[34]. The documents of the European Union and the World Health Organization refer to the need to encourage the concept of active ageing as the remedy for an ageing European population to improve the health of older people. Active ageing is understood as the "*process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age*"[35] as defined in 2002 by the World Health Organization. It is assumed that a healthy person is active in different areas of life such as social, economic, cultural, spiritual and public life, whereas successful ageing is the result of an active lifestyle.

[27] L.Zając-Lamparska, (2012), *Psychologiczne koncepcje pomyślnego starzenia się*, in "Rocznik Andrologiczny", 89-105.

[28] R.J.Havighurst, (1961), Successful aging, in „The Gerontologist", 1, 1, 8-13.

[29] E.Cumming, W.E.Henry, (1961), Growing Old, Basic Books, New York.

[30] L.Zając – Lamparska, (2012), Psychologiczne koncepcje pomyślnego starzenia się człowieka, in „Rocznik Andragogiczny", p.93.

[31] R.C.Atchley, 1989, A Continuity Theory of Normal Aging, in „The Gerontologist", 29, 2, p.183-190.
http://gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/content/29/2/183.abstract

[32] J.W.Rowe, R.L. Kahn, (1999), Successful aging, in „The Gerontologist" 37, 433-440.

[33] M.R.Crowther, M.W.Parker, W.A.Achenbaum, W.L.Larimore., H.G.Koenig, (2002), Rowe and Kahn's model of successful aging revisited: positive spirituality – the forgotten factor, in "The Gerontologist" 42, 5, 613-620.

[34] http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html

[35] WHO: Active Ageing: A Policy Framework World Health Organization, (2002),
http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002who_nmh_nph_02.8.pdf

Social and cultural perspective of learning

Researchers who deal with education note that people learn through participation in the community, or their activity in society. It has also been noted that "*a learning process is put between a biography and social and cultural space in which they live and their experience is shaped (...) Learning tends to be characterized by tensions occurring between what is individual and what is social"*[36]. Such knowledge is not the theoretical one, but it is a part of identity of individuals based on experience gained, which means that it is closely related to biographies of individuals. Gert Biesta[37] explains *learning cultures*; and the concept of culture is used in anthropological terms – culture is considered as the way of acting, the way of being. Learning culture of the community is related to the lifestyle of its members. A lifestyle means "*culturally determined ways of life: life models, reasons for certain behaviour values, directives and measures serving their objectives* (...)[38]. According to Biesta, learning cultures are not contexts in which people learn, but they are social practices through which people learn. They can be characterised by describing how people understand and value learning; in what circumstances they learn; what forms of activity they participate in; how they organise a learning process (a teaching process); what forms of learning they undertake; how learning is supported in the community; what examples of interpersonal contacts are. It should be noted that specific learning cultures can allow, support, hinder or exclude some types of learning. While describing a learning culture it should be taken into account which learning opportunities are available for people from a specific culture and which learning opportunities are blocked.

Learning cultures at Polish Universities of Third Age

Educational institutions for senior citizens such as Third Age Universities (TAUs) play a key role in the process of promoting the concept of active ageing among the elderly. Their educational offer includes not only health, law, economy, sports activities, but also the use of new technologies as well as they encourage older people to take up self-study. The stated objectives of TAU are[39]:

- dissemination of educational initiatives

- mental stimulation of the elderly as well as their intellectual, social and physical involvement

- expending seniors' knowledge and skills

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[36] K. Illeris, (2006), Trzy wymiary uczenia się. Poznawcze, emocjonalne i społeczne ramy współczesnej teorii uczenia się, DSWE TWP Publishing House, Wrocław, p.131.

[37] G.Biesta, (2013), Od kultur uczenia się do kultur edukacyjnych. Wartości i sądy w badaniach pedagogicznych oraz w pracy nad postępami w kształceniu, in „Teraźniejszość. Człowiek. Edukacja" 61, 1, 47-58.

 P. Hodkinson, G.Biesta., D.James, (2004), Towards a Cultural Theory of College-based Learning, British Educational Researcher Association Annual Conference, http://education.exeter.ac.uk/tlc/publications.htm

[38] A.Tyszka, (1971), *Uczestnictwo w kulturze. O różnorodności stylów życia,* Warszawa: PWN, 1971, p.104.

[39] http://www.utw.pl/index.php?id=10

- facilitating relations with institutions such as: health care service, cultural centres, rehabilitation centres and other institutions
- engage students in activities for the surrounding environment
- maintain social ties and interpersonal communication among seniors

Therefore, the aim of TAU is to create conditions for successful ageing of people making use of their offer.

In 2012 there were about 400 TAUs in Poland and their number is increasing[40]. To compare, the number of TAUs was 60 in 2005. Each of these universities has its own specific learning culture, but there are also some noticeable simplicities occurring at all Polish TAUs. Hence, in my article I would like to focus on those elements of learning culture that are not related to methods of teaching or a kind of educational offer. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize elements concerning a lifestyle of students from Third Age Universities, their way of perceiving the world, the value system which may undoubtedly create the learning climate, support and promote certain types of behaviours of participants of TAUs.

As can be seen from the report *Zoom na UTW* (*Zoom to TAU* Research Report), Third Age Universities in Poland operate within structures of other institutions, for example higher education schools, libraries, cultural centres. TAUs share rooms where classes take place with other users, so seniors cannot use places on their own terms. The analysis of the use of space, conducted by authors of the report, leads to the conclusion that "University of Third Age does not stand for a place, but mainly for people"[41]. Seniors "colonise" places not related to classes, for instance they meet in local cafes after lectures. Interviews with participants of UTA[42] reveal that apart from acquiring knowledge during lectures, workshops and classes, a wide range of other benefits should be taken into consideration. The attitude of participants towards studying is an element which makes a learning culture at TAU different from a learning culture at other higher educational institutions. Above all, a sort of celebration of a lecture day (an upbeat atmosphere and neat clothes) as well as taking part in classes enhance the importance of senior citizens. They are proud to be able to take part in lectures and lecture topics inspire them to have a conversation as well as they feel that they are aware of current social issues. In opinions of the respondents, attending classes at TAU has an impact on re-evaluating old age and improving the image of the elderly. While interviewing, seniors emphasized that it is time to make friends and it is also time of personal development. They noted that the elderly become more open-minded and energetic. The educational offer of TAUs usually includes lectures and classes (in groups or selections), works hops, courses. Moreover, a range of events is organized as part of the activity of Universities of Third Age. Classes are often given by teachers as well as professionals such as doctors, lawyers, employees of local institutions (e.g. police officers). People working for TAU do volunteer work. In addition, almost one third of participants of TAU engage in work for the benefit of other participants, e.g. support in times of illness, spiritual support, help in everyday life. 50% of Polish TAUs carry out actions for the local community and people who are not students of Universities of

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[40] Zoom na UTW. Raport z badania, http://zoomnautw.pl/wpcontent/uploads/2012/05/Zoom_na_UTW_RAPORT_calosciowy_www.pdf
[41] Ibid. p.39
[42] Ibid. p.53

Third Age. Women, especially widows, tend to predominate among participants[43]. The research conducted by B.Ziębińska indicates that students of TAU have a higher level of formal education compared to the total population, 45% of them possess higher education qualifications and they are in a good financial situation. A half of senior citizens attending classes had worked as officials before retirement, one out of 5 people was a teacher. Participants of TAU are people who remain socially active. More than a half of them are members of other social organizations[44].

The objectives of the paper and its method

Presenting some elements related to a learning culture in a group of students of TAU is the objective of the article. Selected elements connected with a lifestyle: involvement in forms of activity after classes at TAU, values which, as seniors argue, can contribute to a successful life, the level of satisfaction resulting from selected areas of life were considered. A group of students of TAU was compared with regard to studied variables with seniors who were not students of TAU.

The following issues have been raised:

- What is lifestyle of Polish seniors making use of educational institutions such as Universities of Third Age, or to what extent they differ from seniors who do not use the offers of educational institutions?

  A) Are there any differences with regard to social life?

  B) Are there any differences with regard to participation in culture?

  C) Are there any differences with regard to spiritual life?

- What is a satisfaction level of seniors taking advantage of educational offers concerning the quality of life?

- What are values, according to seniors in compared groups, of a key condition for a successful, happy life?

Data made available in the framework of the *Diagnoza Społeczna* Project (the *Social Diagnosis Project* www.diagnoza.com*)* have been analysed in order to answer the questions. The objective of the project is a diagnosis of the conditions and quality of the Poles. The research is regularly conducted [at intervals of several years] on a random sample of the Poles and is based on a panel form. Two rounds of research have been carried out so far: in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013. "*The results of the Social Diagnosis reveal not only the current state of Polish society, but allow us to follow how it has changed over the last 10 years. What is more, taking into account earlier research on the quality of life in Poland, it even gives us an insight into nearly the entire process of system*

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[43] Ibid.
[44]B. Ziębińska, (2007), Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku jako instytucje przeciwdziałające marginalizacji osób starszych (Univeristies of Third Age as institutions preventing the marginalization of older people) , http://www.sbc.org.pl/Content/7028/doktorat2757.pdf

transformation"[45].   The *Social Diagnosis* is public in nature and a database collected during the research can be downloaded free of charge from the website: www.diagnoza.com.

The data on Polish senior citizens [people aged 60 or above] gathered in 2013 by means of a questionnaire have been used by me.

Table 1. A characteristics of surveyed people

Gender: Female Male Total		N=5586 N=4087 N=9673
Age: Females	M Median SD	71,5 70 8,9
Males	M Median SD	69,9 68 8,09
Participation at TAUs or other institutions promoting knowledge	Yes No	N=68 N=9606

Source: own analysis based on Social Monitoring (2013). Social Diagnosis: an intergrated database. www.diagnozaa.com, access 13.02.2014

The data relating to people who were 60 or above in 2013 have been chosen to conduct analyses. There were 9673 people, that is 5586 women and 4087 men. Students of Third Age University and other institutions promoting knowledge constitute about 0,7% of the surveyed group. A statistical analysis has been performed using the Statistica 10.0 software. Due to the failure of the assumption of normality of the distribution, in some cases, *U* Mann Whitney test has been used for examining the difference between layout of variables [in table 2 and 4].The test was chosen as a nonparametric variant of a t-student test. The two proportions test [table 3 and 5] has been used in order to carry out a statistical analysis regarding differences between the proportions of people meeting a specific criterion.

The style of life of Polish senior citizens

According to a conception of a successful ageing by Rowe and Kahn, successful ageing requires being active from an individual[46]. The authors emphasize the role of forms of activity related to building interpersonal relations and productive activity which has a social value (e.g. as a part of volunteering). In the analysis, regarding the style of life of senior citizens, the collected data concerned issues such as frequency of meeting other people, participation in cultural and religious events (table 2). Moreover, it has been checked as to what extent the compared groups care

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[45] http://diagnoza.com/
[46] J.W.Rowe, R.L.Kahn, (1999), Successful aging, in „The Gerontologist" 37, 433-440.

about their physical condition: whether they exercise or not and how much time they spend watching TV (table 3). The ability to use ICT tools (e.g. a computer, the Internet) may decrease the possibility of social exclusion of senior citizens, therefore being one of conditions of a successful ageing. Taking all of that into consideration, it has been examined whether the compared senior groups take advantage of modern technologies (table 3).

Table 2. A characteristics of selected elements of style of life in the senior citizens group, making use of educational offers as well as those not making use of such offers

A type of activity	Seniors not making use of educational institutions offers			Seniors making use of TAU offers or other institutions promoting knowledge			z	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Participation in social meetings last month	8112	0,9	1,9	68	2,7	1,9	-10,8	0,00
Number of friends	8174	6,3	6,6	67	9	8,8	-3,7	0,00
Number of friends in a family a senior is in touch with regularly	8219	7,7	6,3	68	8,2	4,8	-1,6	0,1
Number of close friends a senior is in touch with regularly	8139	4,3	4,9	68	8,4	8,5	-6,4	0,00
Number of friends a senior is in touch with regularly	8058	4,9	6,3	66	10,6	13,4	-5,2	0,00
Participation in religious services (a number monthly)	8225	3,5	3,9	67	4,6	6,3	-1,2	0,2

Eating out (a number last month)	8015	0,2	1,1	66	1,1	1,7	-10,5	0,00
Going to the cinema, theater, concert (a number last month)	8013	0,1	0,7	67	0,98	1,3	-12,8	0,00

The data in table 2 show that the style of life of students of TAU differs significantly from the style of life of the rest of members of Polish seniors population.

The results of statistical analysis presented in table 2 and 3 show that TAU's aims have been achieved. The seniors participating in activities organized by TAU have a more active lifestyle than the others. They have a bigger number of friends and acquaintances whom they are in touch with, they take part in cultural events, they go to the cinema, theatre or restaurant more frequently. Comparing the lifestyle of TAU's students and those not being students of TAU, it can be observed that individuals, making use of educational institutions services, take actions favouring how to remain healthy to a larger extent. For example, they go in for sports or exercise. In a group of TAU students, 24% of students do not exercise at all. In a group of seniors not being TAU students, a proportion of such individuals is 81%.

A situation concerning smoking is quite similar: 3% of smokers in a group of TAU students, and 17% of smokers in the other group. Watching TV for a long time is associated with a passive lifestyle. Considering that, TAU students also differ statistically from a population of other seniors. Those who aren't students of TAU make a group of 26% Polish seniors who watch TV more than 4 hours daily while TAU students make a group of 13%. In a population involved in making use of educational institutions' offers, there is a larger proportion of individuals who do not watch TV at all (17,6%) or watch TV very little (less than an hour daily). They make a group of 6,7% in a group of seniors not making use of such offers. A TAU group is also less affected by a social exclusion related to a lack of computer or Internet skills. Almost 70% of students can use a computer and the Internet. Just to make a comparison: in the other senior group, approximately 20% of seniors used the Internet and a computer in 2013. TAU students are more active in a local community. 66% of them were active in their community within the last two years. In a population of other Polish seniors, it was only 11%. The lifestyle of seniors making use of TAU offer is not less 'familial' than of

those who do not make use of such an offer. They stay in touch with approximately 8 persons from their family circle, and this number does not significantly differ from a number of family members the other seniors in a population stay in touch with. However, TAU students have more friends whom they regularly meet (approx. 10 persons) and close friends (approx. 8 persons). In a population of seniors not making use of TAU offer, an average number of close friends is 4, and friends – 5. In a month preceding the research, the TAU group socialized more often. There are no major statistical differences when it comes to a participation in a religious life. Both compared groups participate in religious services approximately 4 times a month.

Table 3. A characteristics of selected lifestyle elements in a group of seniors making use of educational offers, and seniors not making use of such offers (% refers to those who answered the question)

A type of activity	Seniors not making use of educational institutions offers		Seniors making use of TAU offers or other institutions promoting knowledge		Significance of differences (the result regarding two proportions test)
	n	%	n	%	
Watching TV for max. 1 hour daily	553	6,73	12	17,64	p<0,01
Watching TV for more than 4 hours daily	2142	26	9	13,2	p<0,05
Using the computer	1597	19	45	66	p<0,01
Using the Internet	1613	20	47	69	p<0,01

A number of seniors who do not exercise	6637	81	16	24	p<0,01
A number of seniors smoking cigarettes	1401	17	2	3	p<0,01
Taking actions to promote a local community (during the last two years)	882	11	44	66	p<0,01

The level of satisfaction of Polish seniors regarding their quality of life

A subjective evaluation of various aspects of senior's own life can be one of indicators of a successful ageing. Table 4 presents the seniors' evaluations concerning a level of satisfaction when it comes to selected areas of a personal and social life. The researched group was asked to evaluate the level of their satisfaction regarding the following areas of life on the scale from 1 to 6. The numbers refer to: 1- very satisfied, 2 – satisfied, 3 – quite satisfied, 4 – quite dissatisfied, 5 – dissatisfied, 6 – very dissatisfied.

The results show a higher level of satisfaction regarding the majority of analyzed areas in a group of TAU students. Evaluations made by the respondents present a higher level of satisfaction in a group of TAU students in such areas as: health, relations with friends, a situation in their country, life achievements. The area which does not differentiate two researched populations is a satisfaction from relations among family members, a satisfaction from marriage and having children. The level of satisfaction from those two life aspects is high and similar in a group of seniors both making use and not making use of educational offers of various institutions.

Table 4. The level of satisfaction from selected areas of life in a group of seniors making use of educational offers and seniors not making use of such offers

The level of satisfaction (on the scale from 1 to 6), the higher value the lower level of satisfaction	Seniors not making use of educational institutions offers			Seniors making use of TAU offers or other institutions promoting knowledge			z	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Family relations	8182	2,11	0,9	68	2,1	0,8	-0,53	0,6
Financial situation of one's own family	8178	3,3	1,3	68	2,9	1,04	2,06	0,04
Relations with a circle of friends	7753	2,6	0,9	67	2,1	0,7	3,8	0,00
Health	8213	3,7	1,3	68	3,4	1,2	2,0	0,04
Life achievements	8182	3,0	1,1`	68	2,5	0,8	3,6	0,00
Situation in the country	8164	4,5	1,2	68	4,1	1,2	3,1	0,00
The housing conditions	8216	2,5	1,1	68	1,9	0,8	4,6	0,00
A place of living	8219	2,4	0,9	68	2,2	0,9	2,0	0,04
Future perspectives	7968	3,7	1,3	64	3,3	1,5	2,6	0,01
Sexual life	4144	3,4	1,3	31	2,9	1,2	2,2	0,02

One's own education	8074	3,1	1,2	67	2,4	0,9	5,2	0,00
The way of spending leisure time	8161	2,9	1,1	68	2,5	0,9	2,7	0,01
Children	1753	1,9	0,9	62	1,8	0,8	0,7	0,4
Marriage	5345	2,1	0,9	40	2,1	1,2	0,5	0,6
Safety at a place of living	8188	2,6	0,9	68	2,7	0,9	-1,96	0,05

Source: own analysis based on: Social Monitoring Council (2013). Social diagnosis: an integrated database. www.diagnoza.com, access 13.02.2014

Values conditioning a successful and happy life according to Polish seniors

Table 5 describes values which, according to Polish seniors, condition a successful and happy life. In the first places, both in the group of a TAU population and in the population of all seniors, there is *Health*, and in the next two ones there are *Children* and *A Happy Marriage*. Then there are some differences when it comes to two populations being analyzed: a group of TAU students lists such values as *Cheerfulness* and *optimism* (23%). However, this value is not that important for the group of other Polish seniors (9%). They value *Work* (16%), *Honesty* (12%), and most of all a value that is *God* (23%) more. The group of TAU students appreciates these values too, but in the next places, just after *Cheerfulness* and *optimism*. Statistically significant differences refer to a proportion of respondents listing *Friends* as a condition of a happy life. In the group of TAU students it is 12%, and in the other population of seniors it is almost 5%.

Table 5. Conditions of a successful, happy life in the opinion of seniors making use of educational offers, and those not making use of such offers (% refers to those who answered the question)

Conditions of a happy life	Seniors not making use of educational institutions offers		Seniors making use of TAU offers or other institutions promoting knowledge		Significance of differences – two proportions test
	N	%	N	%	
Health	6219	75,4	47	69,1	Not significant

Children	4337	52,6	36	52,9	Not significant
Happy marriage	4026	48,8	36	52,9	Not significant
Providence, God	1903	23,1	13	19,1	Not significant
Money	1791	21,7	10	14,7	Not significant
Work	1365	16,5	8	11,8	Not significant
Honesty	1008	12,2	13	19,1	Not significant
Kindliness and respect of the people around	700	8,5	6	8,8	Not significant
Cheerfulness and optimism	749	9,1	16	23,5	p<0,01
Friends	401	4,9	8	11,8	p<0,01
Strong personality	349	4,2	2	2,9	Not significant
Freedom	139	1,7	3	4,4	p<0,1

Source: own analysis based on: Social Monitoring Council (2013). Social diagnosis: an integrated database. www.diagnoza.com, access 13.02.2014

Conclusion

In the situation of demographical changes which we have to deal with in Europe, the actions promoting seniors' activation are very significant both when it comes to the life quality of seniors themselves and functioning of the whole society. Third Age Universities and other institutions promoting widely understood education of seniors play a very important role in this scope. The results of analysis regarding the culture of learning of those making use of offers promoting knowledge presented in this article show that seniors making use of such offer differ quite significantly from the group of seniors not making use of educational institutions' offers. They way they spend time, their attitudes towards reality in which they live, create successful practices of non-formal learning. Making use of forms of institutional education of seniors, participation in a community of active people, having an optimistic attitude to life, form the attitudes and styles of life of participants of such a form of education in compliance with all the aims set by educational institutions.

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It is the Romanian higher education ready for the inclusion of students with disabilities?

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Abstract

This study aims to answer the question: *It is the Romanian higher education ready for the inclusion of students with disabilities?* In this context, we intend to approach different issues, educational and social, by radiography issues such as: *the rate of inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education in Romania, if universities develop strategies for including students with disabilities, national strategy that Romania has developed to include young people with disabilities in higher education.*

This subject is topical, considering that the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Council established five major EU objectives for education aiming at increasing to over 40% for the higher education graduates in the population aged between 30 and 34 years. The situation in the year 2013 shows that the number of people with disabilities in Romania was 709.216, of which 14% is people aged between 8 and 35 years.

A comparative study of *Eurostudent* highlights the percentages of students with physical disabilities and chronic illnesses of all students in different countries, in 2008, and ranks Romania 17th place of 22, the young people with disabilities in higher education. Also, in recent academic years, the percentage of students with disabilities did not exceed 0.07% of the total number of students, according to data collected in the university ranking. [1]

Keywords: *people with disabilities, higher education, accessibility, adaptation, inclusion*

The current situation in Europe

Education is one of five pillars which are central to the Europe 2020 growth strategy. Two indicators presented within this article at a regional level are benchmarks used to monitor the EU's progress towards becoming a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. These benchmarks have been set at an EU level and they foresee that:

- The share of early leavers from education and training should be under 10 % by 2020; and
- That at least 40 % of 30–34 year-olds should have completed a tertiary or equivalent education by 2020.

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[1] *Politici publice in invatamantul superior, (2014).The social dimension of higher education in Romania. Accesat la adresa* http://www.invatamant-superior.ro/?p=2122, in May 2014

Note that while both of these objectives have been set across the whole of the EU, they do not specifically apply at a national or a regional level. Indeed, each Europe 2020 benchmark has been translated into national (and sometimes regional) targets, which reflect the different situations and circumstances of each Member State. [47]

One of the most significant trends in European higher education in the past decade has been the noticeable expansion of the sector. Figure 1 presents Eurostat data on student numbers for the period 2000-2008. It shows that, compared to 2000, EU-27 student numbers have increased by 20 percent. However, variations between countries are extremely significant. The Czech Republic (55 %), Greece (51 %), Cyprus (147 %), Lithuania (68 %), Hungary (35 %), Malta (50 %), Poland (37 %), Romania (133 %), Slovenia (38 %) and Slovakia (69 %) within the EU, as well as Iceland (72 %) and Turkey (149 %) outside it, have all experienced extremely rapid expansion in student numbers. In comparison, the growth in student numbers in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy and Austria is relatively low at around 10 per cent. Portugal showed static development and Spain is the only country where student numbers have decreased by 2.6 per cent.[48]

Figure 1: Trends in the number of students in tertiary education compared to 2000, 2000-2008
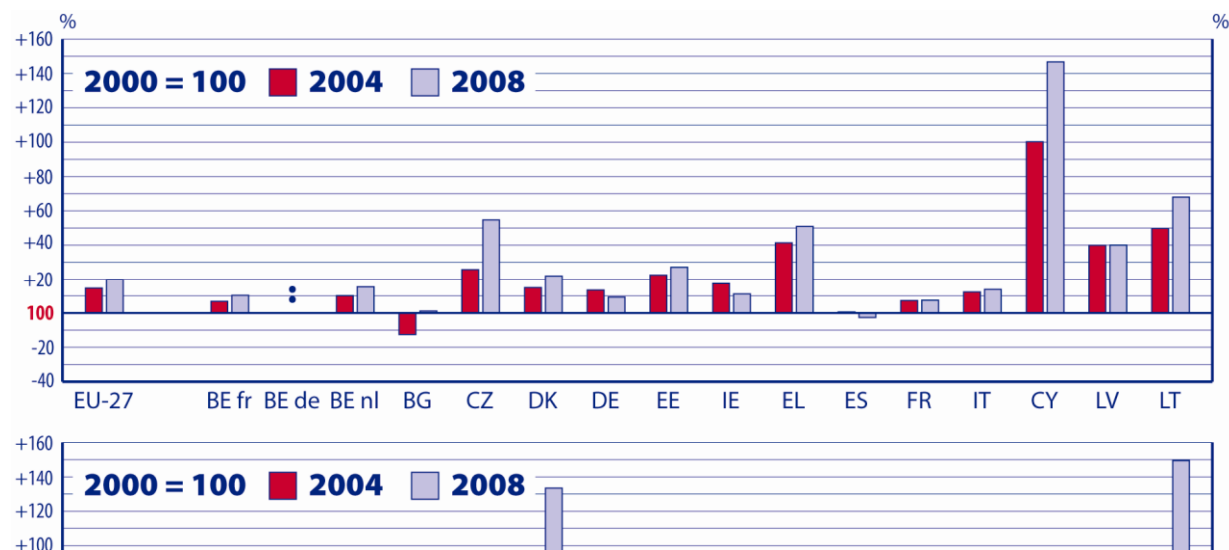
[47] *Eurostat, (2014). Education Statistics at region level. Accesat la adresa:*
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Education_statistics_at_regional_level#Students_in_tertiary_edu
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[48] *EACEA P9 Eurydice (2011). Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and Social Dimension. Accesat la adresa:*
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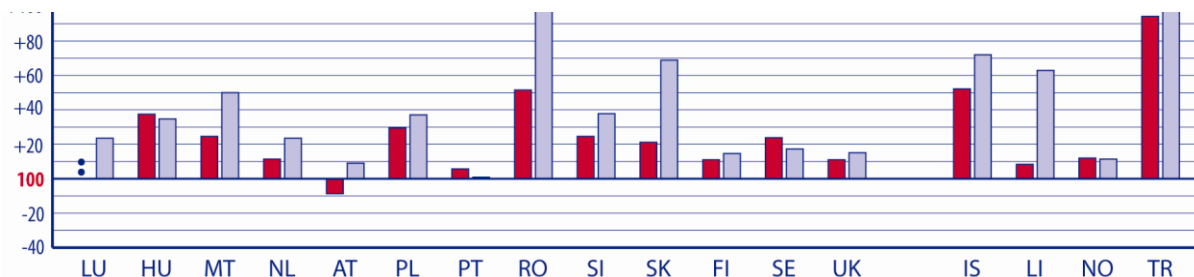
Source: Eurostat, 2014[49]

In 19 regions in the EU less than one in five of the population aged 30–34 possessed a tertiary level of education Many of the regions where tertiary educational attainment among those aged 30–34 was relatively low were characterized as being areas where primary activities or heavy industries (for example, agriculture, mining, or iron and steel) have traditionally played an important role in the economic fabric of a region. There were 19 NUTS 2 regions across the EU where less than one in five persons aged 30–34 had attained a tertiary level of education in 2012. Six of these were located in Romania, five in (southern) Italy, two each in Bulgaria and Greece and a single region each from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Austria. They were mainly categorized as being economically underdeveloped, insofar as 15 of them had an average level of GDP per inhabitant that was less than 75 % of the EU-28 average in 2011; each of the remaining four regions had a ratio of GDP per inhabitant that was also below the EU-28 average.

In 2012, just over one third (35.7 %) of 30–34 year-olds in the EU-28 had completed a tertiary level of education. These latest figures support the premise that a rising proportion of the EU's population is studying to a higher level — in keeping with the Europe 2020 target — as a decade before (in 2002) the corresponding share was 12.2 percentage points lower, at 23.5 %.

In 2012 (the 2011/12 academic year), the number of students enrolled in tertiary education in the EU-28 stood at 20.0 million. [50]

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[49] *Eurostat, (2014). Education Statistics at region level. Accesat la adresa:*
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Education_statistics_at_regional_level#Students_in_tertiary_education, in May 2014
[50]*Eurostat, (2014). Education Statistics at region level. Accesat la adresa:*
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Education_statistics_at_regional_level#Students_in_tertiary_education, in May 2014

Figure 2: Trends in participation rates in tertiary education

Grouped age profile by characteristics of students (in %)
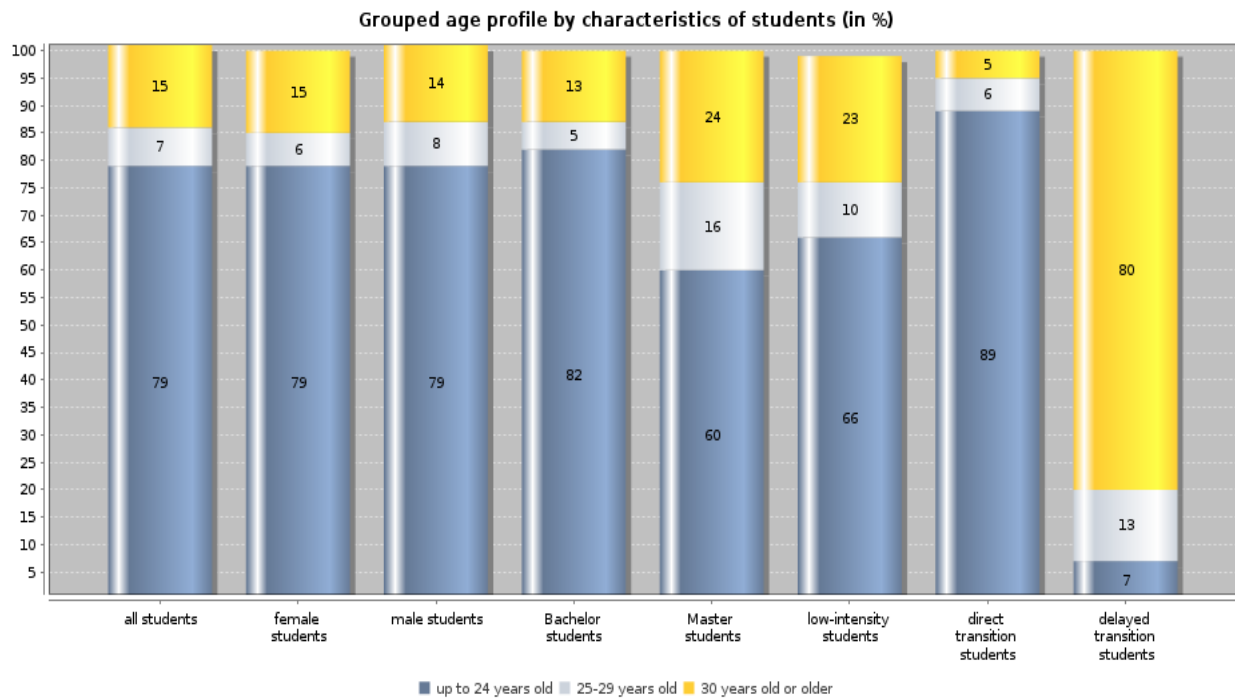
Source: Eurostat, 2014[51]

In the United Kingdom, higher education institutions are under a statutory duty to make "reasonable adjustments" for the specific requirements of disabled students. There is also an anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments for students, and thus plans must be made ahead to address potential barriers impeding disabled students.

However, Estonia expressed a concern that the needs of students with disabilities are often not well understood, reporting that teachers and students generally have a low awareness of needs of people with disabilities, and as a result appropriate measures may not be taken.

Denmark and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) apply an interesting concept whereby students with physical and psychological disabilities can access significant support through the student support system, but only if they take the initiative to identify their individual obstacles and outline their needs. In the case of Denmark, rather than taking general measures for a category of students with disabilities, the student support system aims to be responsive to specific requests for targeted, individual support. The aim is to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to progress and complete their studies on equal terms. In the United Kingdom, meanwhile, in addition to the duty upon institutions to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, specific financial support is provided in the form of a disabled students allowance.

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[51] *Eurostudent, (2014). Demographic Characteristics – country Romania .* Accesat la adresa: https://eurostudent.his.de/eiv/report/data_overview.jsp?ssid=51BF3A96BDE771D2B7A19DBEED0EC599&sel_lang=&cnt_oid=16 in May 2014

Targeted guidance and counseling was also mentioned by a few countries. Many Austrian and German universities have a Disabled Students Officer who gives advice to students with disabilities, supports them in case of discrimination and informs them about additional financial measures. Similarly in Slovenia, the majority of higher education institutions employ a member of staff dedicated to working with students with special needs. In addition, tutoring by both students and teachers aims at strengthening the students' potential. Furthermore, targeted measures are also in place in Greece, where students with health problems are entitled to be transferred to the nearest university to their residence. In the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), the institutional funding mechanism includes a widening access premium which assists universities in improving provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. [52]

The current situation in Romania

The percentage of young people with disabilities, of all young people between the ages of 20 and 29 years old from Romania, was, in 2002, 2,06%.

In a comparative study of Eurostudent, the percentages of students with highlights physical disabilities and chronic illnesses in different States, at the level of 2008, Romania's ranks is 17th from 22, a disabled youth participation in higher education. At the same time, in recent years, the percentage of University students with disabilities did not exceed 0,07% of the total number of students, according to data collected in the process of classification of universities.[53]

According to The Programme of National Reform in 2014, Ministry of Education (MEN) decided to continue the reforms in the field of education and training, in order to ensure the educational and labour market adapted centered on personal and social development, with positive impact on preventing and combating early school leaving. MEN will continue to ensure that the system of opening education and training to all young people and ensuring equal access to education, in particular for specific risk groups. MEN will continue the implementation of social programmes for students (scholarships, grants for accommodation and meals, partial reimbursement of transportation) to assist students from rural areas, disadvantaged groups and non-traditional students in order to increase the rate of participation in tertiary education. In addition, MEN will promote a supplements of 200 euros on the stock exchange of those students received ERASMUS who come from rural areas or disadvantaged groups and will continue the allocation of special places for Roma students in State universities. [54]

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[52] *EACEA P9 Eurydice (2011). Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and Social Dimension. Accesat la adresa:* http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice, in May 2014

[53] *Politici publice in invatamantul superior, (2014).The social dimension of higher education in Romania. Accesat la adresa* http://www.invatamant-superior.ro/?p=2122, in May 2014

[54] *Guvernul Romaniei, (2014). Programul National de Reforma in 2014*, accesat la adresa: http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/21372, in May 2014

The Central Electronic Register for persons with disabilities will provide a unified information system for the collection and reporting of data relating to persons with disabilities. Modernization of the evaluation system of persons with disabilities will lead to the development of new procedures, tools and harmonised criteria for medical evaluation after the model of approach to disabilities.

In addition, Romania has assumed within the framework of the Bologna process a series of goals that relate to increasing the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education and increase graduation rates and scroll in time of studies in higher education. [55]

In Romania ach university senate decides on the level of fees for all programmes. The senate also decides on exemptions based on need or merit. All students pay administrative, registration fees. The overall and maximum fee amounts per student are established by the National Council for Higher Education

Funding and are indicated in the institutional contract of every higher education institution. Fees range from RON 2 840.59 for 11.2 % of students to RON 5 007.54 for technical fields to a maximum of RON 21 304.34 for 0.10 % of students. The average amount is RON 7 481. [56]

Students with disabilities, with the approval of the University Senate, benefits from the exemption of payment of tuition.

Analysis of the way in which students with disabilities are supported in the educational process in universities in Romania, is described in the final report of the project "Development and Integration of a Pilot Program for Increasing Access to Higher Education for Persons with Disabilities", which was co-financed by the European Social Fund through the sectoral operational programme for human resources development:

➢ Romania has not developed and implemented a national strategy concerning the social dimension of education, which include a comprehensive definition of underrepresented groups, clear objectives in connection with their inclusion indicators that relate to assessment of progress;

➢ Romania has not developed and implemented a national strategy concerning the social dimension of education, which include a comprehensive definition of underrepresented groups, clear objectives in connection with their inclusion indicators that relate to assessment of progress;

➢ There is no national system of data collection which will include relevant indicators on the characteristics of the student body, including from the perspective of the social dimension.

➢ Have not been implemented as incentives for universities to focus on the social dimension of education, including through the development of institutional strategies in this regard.[57]

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[55] *Politici publice in invatamantul superior, (2014).The social dimension of higher education in Romania. Accesat la adresa* http://www.invatamant-superior.ro/?p=2122, in May 2014

[56] *EACEA P9 Eurydice (2011). Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and Social Dimension. Accesat la adresa:* http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice, in May 2014

Conclusion

People with disabilities do not have equal opportunities in education offered in universities in Romania and the romanian educational system is not adapted to the needs of educating individuals with disabilities.

However, there are a number of individual initiatives at the level of the two universities in Romania: West University of Timisoara and the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the universities have set up structures to support students with disabilities. Thus, in The West University of Timisoara was founded the 2011 The Center of Psychopedagogical Assistance and Integration (CAIP), which aims to support students with disabilities lead: offering advice, rendering support, curricular accessibility, accessibility of physical environment, etc. Also, The West University of Timisoara, through Department of Education Sciences, was involved in the period 2011-2014 in international project ALLinHE (All in Higher Education) project, with the participation of 10 other countries in Europe and Asia. The project aimed to capture the status quo and existing policies at the macro - meso and micro levels, concerning the inclusion in higher education of disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities and a description of the ways in which it can achieve validation of previous competences acquired by them.[58]

At present, The West University of Timisoara (partner), through Department of Education Sciences and ”Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu (applicant), is involved in European funded project "*E-Inclusion: developing and implementing a programme of assistance based on TIC technologies for increasing access to higher education for persons with disabilities*"

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[57] *Proiect EUPD, (2014). The Final raport.* Accesat la adresa http://eupd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Raport-final.pdf, in May 2014

[58] *Proiect All in Higher Education, (2014). Accesat la adresa:* http://www.allinhe.eu/, in May 2014

Implications of internal quality assurance systems and their impact on adult education provisions

Anca Prisăcariu[*]

Abstract: The purpose of the present paper is to analyses different implications of internal quality assurance systems and their contribution to adult education provisions. To a certain extent, the paper aims at helping traditional higher education institutions implement a functional internal quality assurance system and make a shift toward an orientation of adult education. Following these two purposes, the paper will describe the main characteristics of a functional internal quality assurance system and, at a later stage, offer elements and indicators for adult education in higher education.

Key words: internal procedures, quality assurance, adult education, performance indicators.

Quality of Higher Education

The concept of quality in higher education has become an increasingly important matter for institutions, as well as for public policy and debates on education. Quality assurance has been used for the overall improvement of institutions, their management and the student experience they deliver. As the demand for higher education has increased, so has the demand for its accountability, reliability and value for money (Harvey and Askling 2003). Institutions are responsible for the internal management of their own quality and the effective establishment of procedures which monitor this. Nationally, quality assurance agencies provide an external evaluation of the institution and/or its programmes. From country to country the mechanisms can vary and how quality is achieved and monitored can be very different. However, institutions now face much larger competition from other institutions and providers, both at home and abroad. In order to attract more students, institutions are under the constant pressure of having to maintain their quality, standards, reputation and especially the student experience they provide.

Basing itself on Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 (Council of Europe 2012), the 24th Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (Helsinki, 26 and 27 April 2013), on the theme of "Governance and quality education"(Council of Europe 2013), agreed that quality of education was closely linked to four inter-related purposes, namely:

•   preparation for sustainable employment;

•   preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;

•   personal development; and

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- the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base. (Bergan 2005)

In the same recommendation, Council of Europe places a strong emphasis on a broad understanding of quality, which encompasses system quality as well as institutional quality.

Within the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ESG (ENQA 2005) many aspects of quality assurance such as the quality of the academic standards, the relevance of assessments, and involvement of stakeholders within the governance and the reliability of internal practices are addressed.

Quality assurance agencies have the responsibility to institutions and the public to assure that the education and experience providers deliver is of a good standard, in order to maintain trust in the education system nationally and internationally. Most importantly, however, quality assurance review mechanisms provide valuable recommendations to how institutions can enhance their provision. Undoubtedly, quality assurance has seen many improvements since the launch of the Bologna Process in 1999. However there are many challenges still remaining. Many external quality assurance mechanisms still do not manage to take a holistic view of quality, while the internal mechanisms count on an intrinsic motivation of the institution towards building a quality culture.

When defining "quality education", Council of Europe states as first characteristic that education should give access to learning to all students, particularly those non-traditional, as adult students, adapted to their needs as appropriate.

Recommendation (2007)6 of the Committee of Ministers to the Council of Europe member States on the public responsibility for higher education and research underlines the importance of adequate measures to ensure equal opportunities and financing.

When referring to "equal opportunities" the basic principle we stand for is that quality education should be inclusive. Public authorities have the responsibility for ensuring quality education also for those who are unable to make successful use of mainstream education.

A functional internal quality assurance system[59]

In order to develop and secure quality, the autonomy and personal responsibility of all involved has to be supported: institution management, academic and non-academic staff, students.

Due to the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the increasing autonomy of universities and the development of global competition between universities and tertiary institutions, internal quality assurance has increasingly established itself as an organizational task. More than ever universities are required to make their quality transparent and their achievements traceable. In this respect it is necessary to bear the framework conditions and requirements in mind. The Bologna communiqués and the ESG declare that – due to their institutional autonomy – it

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[59] The chapter describes features of "Karl Franzens" University of Graz (Austria) internal quality assurance system, as contained in the self-evaluation report for the audit of the quality system

is the universities themselves that have the main responsibility for the quality and the evaluation of the educational offers and they determine an obligation for an extensive national quality management.

In educational policy, quality has manifested itself as a leading paradigm of higher education management; the state wants to rely on functioning internal quality assurance systems at the universities. In this sense the systems serve to establish and monitor agreed quantitative parameters and aims to regularly evaluate scientific work in research and teaching, as well as characteristics of the student body, in order to then be able to deduce decisions as to further regulations.

With a functioning internal quality assurance system, partly divergent quality requirements shall be fulfilled. It is not only politics, but also students, the state, society and economy that call for quality in education and research. Thus, depending on each specific interest group, quality management can for instance be directed at excellent achievements in education and research, scientific progress and/or at high numbers of graduates, shorter durations of study and (the students') employability, diversity in the student body.

However, a solemn focus on the targets of one interest group would of course fall short, as it is neither the state nor the society or economy that could pre-set for the highly complex university system from the outside what quality should mean for them and how a once achieved standard of quality should be maintained and developed – this is something that each university will have to define and decide itself. Experience has shown that the more institutional autonomy a university has in regard to its quality management, the more effective are its internal quality processes.

The university internal quality assurance system has to be custom-tailored at the organization's requirements and should be individually arranged in awareness of the organization and particularly of its power structures and influence structures. Thus, the system's key factor of success is the setup of the university's and its employees' competence so that a quality culture can develop in which criticism and evaluation can be taken for granted.

There is continual work on the gradual transformation of the existing procedures and instruments into functioning system. In order to ensure coherency and efficiency, a functioning system has to be further systemized and coordinated.

A functional internal quality assurance system should serve the following purposes:

1. to ensure a comprehensive and systematic quality assurance and enhancement of all university's activities

2. to promote that organisational units and their activities meet organisational objectives defined in the University´s strategy.

3. to demonstrate compliance with internal and external requirements.

Secondly, the system should be based on the following key principles.

The system:

- is aligned with university´s strategy,
- emphasis on aspects of development and not on quality control,
- is based on communication and dialog,

- is designed to serve teaching and research and not to dominate them,
- boosts clear, individual and jointly agreed target setting,
- promotes active participation of all members of the university,
- facilitates systematic documentation,
- is intended to be evidence-based, informed by data.

The key elements of a functional internal quality assurance system describe a cycle from the establishment of objectives through planning to meet those objectives, the implementation and monitoring of actions to meet the plans, followed by the identifications and analysis of outcomes and the subsequent enhancement of processes. In addition to the review on target achievement and its consequences it´s the effects of certain measures and its side effects, which serve as a base for enhancement.

The quality system should comprise a number of key elements, including:
- continuous strategic planning processes with monitoring of operations and feedback.
- performance indicators are used as a mechanism to translate the institutional objectives into expectations for faculties and staff members. The performance indicators and the extent to which targets are reached are an integral part of virtually every resource allocation discussion.
- a comprehensive reporting system that provides key data from the core areas (research, teaching) and the cross-sectional areas (internationalization, diversity in the student body, resources) assists at different management levels, thus it provides an objective basis for communication.
- periodic and occasional evaluations of all fields of activities, (i.e. research, courses, curricula, services and student characteristics).
- strategic human resource development (e. g. quality development of appointment process, internal training and further education development, leadership and organizational development) that is an investment in the University´s most important asset.
- Annual interviews for academic and non-academic staff, involving goal setting and reporting on achievements and information on possible paths for development, requirements and training.
- tracking initiatives on students and graduates (e.g. long term career tracking of graduates, with regard to integration in the labour market status, salary, transition from university to professional life).
- benchmarking initiatives (e. g. in internationalisation, research management, library) to gain new perspectives on performance and further development.

An internal quality assurance system is not meant to be a control system but rather as a means of supporting the continual quality development in education and research. This can only be achieved through the linking of organizational learning with individual learning.

All the quality protections and measures have to be part of the overall university internal quality assurance system which ensures that the quality of resources, structures, processes and results is regularly reflected and systematically

improved. The system is oriented at transparency, verifiability, plausibility and efficiency and ascertains the implementation of necessary quality-improvement activities.

The steps of the a functional internal quality assurance cycle are:

Situation analysis

For a holistic determination of the quality of the university the strengths and weaknesses of the entire university and its subunits has to be analysed and the opportunities and risks for the university are weighed.

Defining objectives and determining indicators

The quality and quality level of the achievements in research, teaching, further education and in management and supporting processes have to be tailored and determined in the form of measurable targets and procedures to ascertain the achievement of the goals are agreed on.

Designing, organizing and implementing the measures

After the quality objectives, framework conditions and responsibilities have been defined, measures and processes to enhance the quality can be planned, organized and put into practice. Here it has to be assured that everyone involved in service provision has to know – and preferably also want – the targets and quality features and has to have the knowledge and measures in order to put these into practice.

Monitoring and feedback

It covers the ongoing observation of a measure or a process that can – if it does not follow the customary process or is below or above a pre-set threshold level – be controlled and regulated. Thus, there can be something like an early warning system that helps to identify undesirable developments and allows the possibility to make adaption in time.

Achievement control and further consequences

The implementation of goals has to be measured and examined with the help of the corresponding agreed indicators, instruments or evaluation methods. This examination can take place by means of self-control and/or by means of field-independent personnel or external auditors. Here, the determination of reasons for possible deviations of the planning objectives plays a major role. The root cause analysis has to be discussed with those involved intensively. The analysis of the target achievement is linked to the derivation and implementation of improvement measures. Based on the results of evaluation, reporting, etc. adaptations and improvements concerning the assurance and development of the quality are made.

Effect analysis

The degree to which targets are achieved, the effects of a certain measure and its side effects are determined and serve as a base for further steps of development.

The system is defined by clearly defined targets, indicators that can capture and analyse deviations from the desired state. For each element of the cycle – depending on the field of activity – appropriate measures and instruments have to be used. In the sense of the quality cycle it is not only about a basic agreement on the aims but above all about defined measures and their implementation and evaluation as well as about actions to be followed in order to

reach the targets and modify them. The main task of the internal quality assurance system is to continually close the quality cycle of planning, implementation, goal verification and improvement.

Indicators for adult education

Higher education institutions around the world in the 21st century are being faced with serving the educational and learning needs of a non-traditional population (older than the traditional age of 18-22). This new population requires different approaches for fulfilling their educational desires. They usually come into the higher education setting on a part time basis, study and take courses for a period of time, and then drop out for a while. They return later, seeking to "pick up" their course of study again where they were when they were previously enrolled. The institutions have to deal with shifting populations, learning needs, and how to work in these situations.

Identifying the elements of such a re-orientation toward lifelong learning was developed by adult education researchers at the University of Missouri (UM) in the Extension Division, and the St. Louis (UMSL) Campus on the North American Continent and the Northern Hemisphere, and by adult educator researchers at The University of The Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town, South Africa, on the African Continent and the Southern Hemisphere. During this process, elements of a re-orientation were adopted in order to address the issue of a higher education institution moving from a traditional orientation toward a lifelong learning orientation. The list of second indicators that we are going to approach is characterized as providing within the institution and community an atmosphere that is people-centred, caring, warm, informal, intimate and trusting. (Henschke, 2007)

(1) Overarching Frameworks – provide the context that facilitates operation as a lifelong learning institution. This would mean that all stakeholders relating to the institution have a financial policy and implementation plan, the legal framework, and the cultural/social sensitivity as a foundation to operating the institution for serving lifelong learners.

(2) Strategic Partnerships & Linkages – form collaborative relationships internationally, with other institutions nationally, and with other groups in society. The indicators needed here will focus on increasing the institution wide concern with promoting and increasing the number and quality of partnerships across multiple departmental, institutional, national, and international boundaries. Decisions regarding choice of programmes, assessment of learning outcomes, curriculum design and methods are a shared responsibility based on collaborative processes among academic staff, service staff and learners.

(3) Research – includes working across disciplines, institutions, investigating what kinds of institutional adjustments need to be made to help the institution better serve lifelong learners: i.e. convenience, transportation, child care services, locations of offerings, library accessibility, computer and website services, etc. In addition, targets are set for increasing and encouraging a broader range of research paradigms: action research, case studies, story telling, etc.

(4) Teaching & Learning Processes – Educators will need to move their teaching and learning processes away from the ―instructional paradigm‖ toward the ―learning paradigm.‖ thus encouraging self-directed learning, engaging

with the knowledge, interests and life situations which learners bring to their education, and using open and resource based learning approaches. They will need to use different teaching methods that respond to the diverse learning styles of lifelong learners, including co-learning, interactive learning, and continuous learning while integrating appropriate technology. The learners and faculty will need to mutually design individual learning programs that address what each learner needs and wants to learn in order to function optimally in their profession. This all means that the institution plans to employ and develop faculty who see their primary roles as facilitators of the learning process as opposed to dispensers of information, thus moving their development toward: knowing as a dialogical process; a dialogical relationship to oneself; being a continuous learner; self-agency and self-authorship; and connection with others.

(5) Administration Policies & Mechanisms – service to learners is the top priority of the administration. The mission statement and allocation of resources, including staffing is increased to reflect the institutional commitment for operating a lifelong learning institution. The operational system in imbued with a belief that demonstrates active and systematic listening turned into responsiveness to meet needs of lifelong learners. Registration, class times, and courses – including modular choices and academics support – are available at times and in formats geared to the convenience of learners.

(6) Decision Support Systems – provide within the institution and community an atmosphere that is people-centred, caring, warm, informal, intimate and trusting. It also maintains a demographic profile on programs aimed at increasing the numbers of: students served, courses offered, locations of offerings, and contracts for educational programs with different organizations.

(7) Student Support Systems & Services – provides learner-friendliness, convenient schedules, and in various ways encourages independent learning. Obligations and responsibilities of the learners, educational providers and administration service are made clear from the beginning. The importance of a positive attitude of those in the institution toward the constituencies and individuals that are being served is also a key part.

Conclusions

The purpose of the present paper is to help traditional higher education institutions implement a functional internal quality assurance system and make a shift toward an orientation of adult education. However, given the great diversity of higher education institutions both internal quality assurance systems and adult education provisions have to respond to the needs of the local contexts.

As we could notice in the previous chapters, crucial elements in building a functional internal quality assurance system as well as shifting towards an adult education oriented institution are the trust, autonomy and responsibility given to universities for the quality and continuous development of their education and other operations. When we use the word trust we refer to several dimensions: reliance on the character, ability, strength and honesty for the

institutions, confidence and reliability in their actions, justified belief that commitments will be honoured and maybe also hope or aspiration. Trust is a key concept in many policy debates as it is crucial for the continuous development of our academic area, it needs to be built up over time, it cannot just be decreed, but can it be lost more rapidly than it can be gained.

A trustworthy system meets all major purposes of higher education, builds on and furthers sound values, allows for different institutional profiles, provides for transparent safeguards and is open about strengths and shortcomings. Also, when referring to the focus adult education, the most important characteristic of a trustworthy system is that it provides quality for all, not only for the select few (Bergan 2011).

The embraced internal quality assurance model above represents the so called "QA soft power" defined by values and approaches which underpinned the ESG at its origins, commitments to collegiality, respect for diversity, strong focus on quality improvement or enhancement, recognition of institutional responsibility and autonomy, stakeholder consensus (Singh 2011).

We cannot guarantee that the two descriptions of characteristics will ultimately lead to a functional adult education focused institutional system, as we are convinced that a successful implementation of the recommendations is strictly conditioned by the motivation and responsibility that institutions have for the institutional quality and for the development of adult education provisions.

We can only speak about good quality education if the social dimension is also of good quality. Ensuring equal opportunities in higher education is not only a question of social justice, but also about improving and strengthening the quality of higher education, therefore quality assurance must take account of the social dimension of higher education in making certain that institutions would operate with the goal of fostering equality within the academic world and ultimately in society. Quality Assurance should strengthen its role in regularly monitor and foster the access, succession and completion rates of underrepresented groups in higher education (ESU 2011).

The characteristics described in the previous pages can provide a valuable set of recommendations into the construction of a system oriented towards adult education, continuously developed with the contribution of internal quality assurance structures, mechanisms and instruments. It is important to underline, however, that the initiative has to come from an intrinsic motivation of the higher education institution itself towards constructing an operating internal quality assurance system on one hand and towards a preoccupation for adult education provisions on the other hand.

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Validating competences of teachers and students involved in quality assurance - a step forward to quality culture

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Abstract

The article presents the perspective of validating competences acquired by teachers and students involved in quality assurance processes developed in a higher education institution. Being part of teams that are responsible of quality assurance processes at different levels – departments, faculty and institution – participants are exposed at informal and non-formal learning context and all the competences are not validated and recognize. Universities are facing now lack of motivation from bout group teachers and students, to be involved or develop new quality processes.

Key words: quality assurance, quality culture, competences

Introduction

In order to be able to present a definition for Quality Assurance it is considered necessary to give a definition for quality. According to Joseph M. Juran, a very well-known character in the field of quality management, "quality means those features of products which meet customer needs and thereby provide customer satisfaction." For Crosby quality means "conformity with requirements" and within the ISO 9000:2006 standard quality is defined as "the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements". The scientific literature presents many definitions for this concept and there isn't any definition that covers all the aspects involved, but even so, in a very broad way, it can be said that quality represents those characteristics of a product or service that meet the customer's requirements.

For any organization, in order to achieve, maintain and improve its quality processes it is needed to have a quality management system, which is defined by the ISO 9000:2006 standard as "a set of co-ordinated activities to direct

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and control an organization in order to continually improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its performance". These activities that are part of the quality management system are materialized in 3 main categories:

- Quality assurance – represents a set of activities of a company, through which it assures the achievement of its planned objectives and the fulfillment of the requirements (both internal and external)
- Quality control represents the total of activities that are undertaken in order to verify the results in comparison to requirements and to highlight the differences identified.
- Quality improvement it is a continuous quality improvement of products and/or services of an organization, both internal and external, in the purpose of increasing the rate of requirements fulfillment.

According to some authors there is another category that appears before quality assurance and it is called quality planning and it involves the planning of the quality system (Rose, 2005).

For an untrained eye it might seem that there is no difference between quality control and quality assurance and in fact, there is little difference as both are intended to assure the quality of a product or service. The main difference it comes from their purpose, as for the quality control the main purpose is to serve those who are directly responsible for conducting operations – to help them regulate current operations. For quality assurance, the main purpose is to serve those who are not directly responsible for conducting operations but who have a need to know.(Juran)

Quality assurance is similar to insurance as they both involve spending a small sum of money in order to avoid a bigger loss (Juran, 1998).

In the higher education context, quality assurance has been defined by many authors in many manners, similar to the general quality assurance concept. One of the most comprehensive definition it was given in 1994 at the Hong Kong Baptist University (cited by Andrea Wilger in 1997) and it presents quality assurance in higher education as "a collective process by which the University as an academic institution ensures that the quality of educational process is maintained to the standards it has set itself". "Through its quality assurance arrangements the University is able to satisfy itself, its students and interested external persona or bodies that:

- Its courses meet the appropriate academic and professional standards,
- The objectives of its courses are appropriate,
- The means chosen and the resources available for delivering those objectives are appropriate and adequate
- It is striving continually to improve the quality of its courses".

The definition makes a clear statement that quality is the responsibility of everyone in the organization. This is one of the main principles that is found in the majority of the quality management systems and philosophies defined in the

scientific literature. Basically, in order to achieve a high standard of quality it is needed for an organization to involve to the quality assurance processes all the stakeholders (for universities the main stakeholders are: teachers, administrative employees, students and researchers).

What means Quality Culture?

As one of the 3 main components of a quality management system is the continuous improvement of the system, it can be considered that the purpose of an organization that invests in quality management is to develop a quality culture.

The quality culture "is defined as the overall attitude of an institution, which focuses on the concept of quality and applies it to all aspects of its activities. That is to say, an institution as a whole has embraced quality in every element of functionality that enhances continuous improvement. It is a learning culture in which all members of an institution are involved in a self-critical assessment and improving culture in which all of the workforce of the institution is fully engaged in all activities carried out by the institution (Rose as cited in Muresan, 2008; Trewin, 2003).." (Rose as cited in Muresan, 2008; Trewin, 2003)).

Even if both the quality management system concept and models and the quality culture concept state the need to involve all stakeholders in the activities related to the quality management, the differences in cultural backgrounds around the world have made the universities to approach the matter of developing a quality cultures in different manners, mainly by excluding or minimizing the involvement of different stakeholders. Even if in Romania the law requires that students need to be actively involved in the quality assurance process, the percent of students that are actually involved is very low, mainly due to distrust in them and their capabilities for this jobs specifications.

The main issue that arises from this type of situation is the fact that the universities cannot develop a true quality culture and their institutions will suffer great losses in time compared to other organizations that understand what a quality culture means and needs and they undertake full responsibility. The loss is not the university's solely but it is also the society's loss as the students that graduate from a university generate added value in the society they live and work in.

Context

In higher education, quality assurance is one of the main topic all over the world. Universities have to find proper people to be involved in quality assurance processes. As we mentioned quality culture means also involvement of all stakeholders: students, teachers, administrative stuff and also external stakeholders.

Nowadays universities have one of the biggest cultural diversity because here we can find not only the image of the local context but also we are facing the educational migration that increase this diversity. In Europe Erasmus

program has been a great success, not only for students but also for teachers. We can find now a significant group of students with a different cultural background. Now, more than ever, global development, the pervasive influence of modern information and communication technologies facilitate a new intensity in the application of knowledge to economic and social world development (Nedelcu, Iucu 2012).

Teachers and students involved in quality assurance at all levels, should have also cultural competences. Specific to program evaluation, cultural competence refers to an awareness, understanding, and appreciation for cultural context when framing an evaluation, developing methodology, interacting with stakeholders, and interpreting results (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, cited in Development and Validation of the Cultural Competence of Program Evaluators (CCPE) Self-Report Scale). The most common paradigm of cultural competence consists of the three components of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills (Figure nr. 3)
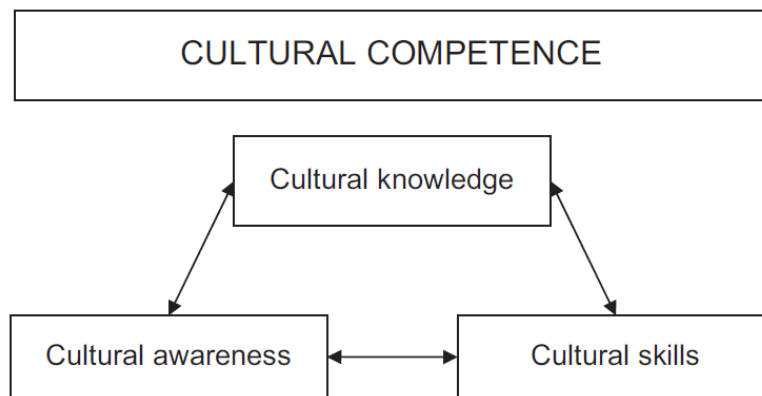

Figure 3 – Cultural Competence

According to Krystall, Jennifer and Bryan[60] cultural competence is important for three main reasons:

-   all members of society develop and form a sense of self and others in the context of culture. The presence of cultural competence alters potentially inappropriate culturally bound perceptions (e.g., racism, sexism)

[60] Development and Validation of the Cultural Competence of Program Evaluators (CCPE) Self-Report Scale Krystall E. Dunaway, Jennifer A. Morrow and Bryan E. Porter American Journal of Evaluation 2012 33: 496 originally published online 2 May 2012 - The online version of this article can be found at: http://aje.sagepub.com/content/33/4/496

and prevents evaluators from considering their beliefs, customs, and behaviors as unique benchmarks by which to evaluate others.

- the questions participants are willing to answer, those with whom they are willing to share their perceptions, and the extent to which they are willing to participate throughout an evaluation are profoundly influenced by their perceptions of the evaluator

- cultural competence is a necessary and important skill for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. In other words, cultural competence should not just be a concern for those in the majority group.

Opportunities

It is important to certify and formally get recognize competencies, knowledge and skills acquired on the job, in years of working with adults for educational purpose (Sava, Borca & Danciu, 2014), because working in quality assurance and quality culture means interaction with adults and is also a learning process curve with the main goal of improving educational activities and institutional management.

When we talking about validating the competencies of teachers and students involved in quality assurance processes we have some direct benefits that can be used by the universities to empower involvement like: motivation of participation, recognition of nonformal and informal learning, increase employability of students.

Until now a specific evaluation program to evaluate and validate competences acquired during quality assurance reviews and also during involvement in internal quality assurance processes is not developed although we have the context for that[61] (in Romania) and also the European Qualification Framework is an important instrument; the related national qualification frameworks are the guidelines for universities and other training providers to adapt their educational provision, for a better articulation with the labor market and with the formal frameworks of recognition (Sava, Borca, Danciu 2014) especially for students.

In general in a university is necessary to have responsible people at all levels: departments, faculty and also institutional level. When we speak about internal reviews we have different people involved, which increase the number.

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[61] In Romania, for instance, the development of around 300 occupational standards goes hand in hand with building a national system for validating non-formal and informal learning. A similar process can be observed in Estonia, where the development of professional standards has been linked to a method to attest an individual's professional qualifications (through either written / oral exams, test assignment, attestation on the basis of documents or a combination of these) – Maria Țoia, Validating the competences of migrant woman- The Forward approach

Conclusions

Development of education in universities is also going from quality assurance to quality culture. This means changing of organizational culture, a very long process which takes many resources. According to Marian D. Ilie organizational change in universities has two different source – internal (students, teachers, administrative staff) and external, (society – which now is very dynamic and also very demanding). Quality culture involves all stakeholders in all the processes developed in the higher universities. In a diverse society, leadership development is more important than in a homogeneous society, because leaders are required to submit in new values, to mediate conflicts and create coalitions to support reform (Bibu, Mos, 2012). The participation of teachers and students is not well developed, and because of that offering recognition and validation of competences acquired, should be a motivation to be involved.

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Portrait of Recognition and Validation of Prior Learning in Romania

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Abstract

The article presents the issue of recognition and validation of prior learning and experience in the Romanian Higher Education (HE) system and in Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, clarifies concepts, practices and regulations implemented in the two systems. While, the regulation for Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) does not apply in an explicit way to HE yet, there is a legal framework in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to professional competences. Although it has a fairly short history, validation of informal and non-formal learning is gaining momentum in Romania through an increase of certified validation centers and experts (CDEFOP, 2010). As a result of a study that I carried on in 2013, which aimed to estimate the impact of the validation process on the beneficiaries from their perception, the article includes conclusions and recommendation outlined with the purpose of optimizing the existent practices at the moment.

Key words: *recognition, validation, accreditation, prior learning*

Introduction

Nowadays the formal learning is not sufficient to facilitate and utilize the full human potential of any society. Recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) became an important instrument for comparing different forms of learning, in order to eliminate discrimination against those who acquired competences non-formally or informally (UNESCO-UIL, Singh, M., Duvekot, R., 2013, pp. 12). The importance of RVA comes also from the need to make visible, assessed and accredited the learning outcomes that young people and adults acquire in the course of their life. This need is created by a dynamic, fast changing world where individuals must acquire and adapt competences thorough all forms of learning in order to cope with various changes. However, qualification systems in many societies are still focused on formal learning in educational institutions (UNESCO-UIL, 2012).

In the last decades, policies and practices concerning the recognition of prior learning have been developed all around the world, and especially in Europe. Recognition of learning acquired throughout life has been known by

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different names in the different countries in which has been adopted, as a result of a different focuses, principles, or procedure it includes. Several examples are provided by France, where it is called VAE (*Validation de acquis de l`experience*) and VAP (*validation de acquis professionnel*), in England - *accreditation of prior learning*, in Sweden *recognition of prior learning,* in Portugal *recognition, validation and certification of competences* and in Romania is *assessment and certification of professional competences obtained in non-formal and informal contexts* (OECD, Werquin, P., 2010).

Validation of competences was introduced into the discourse and public policies in Sweden in 1996 and since then competence took on a new meaning, stressing its usefulness (Lima, L.C., Guimaraes, P., 2011, pp. 62-63). The European Commission's White Paper Teaching and Learning (1995), was the first step regarding this new educational opportunity, when proposed a common European approach to the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Since then, validation of non-formal and informal learning has been identified as a European priority on many occasions (European Commission, DG EAK, 2009). Validation of non-formal and informal learning became part of European policy agenda starting with 2001 when the Commission defined lifelong learning as all learning activity undertaken through life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective (European Commission, 2012). Coming closer to the present, the demand for recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of all forms of learning outcomes was expressed through the Belem Framework for Action, adopted by 144 Delegations of UNESCO Member States at the Six International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA VI) in Brazil, in December 2009 (UNESCO-UIL, 2012).

Being considered a priority after the Belém Framework for Action, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) took the initiative to develop the *UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning*. This document propose principles and mechanisms that can assist Member States in developing or improving structures and procedures to recognise all forms of learning, particularly the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (UNESCO - UIL, 2012).

The Council Recommendation on The Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (EU Council, 2012) recommends to the Member States to improve their validation practice, no later than in 2018, on aspects like: to make the link between the validation arrangements and the national qualifications frameworks; to offer accessible information and appropriate guidance, and counselling; to give special attention to disadvantaged groups and individuals who are unemployed or at risk of employment; to develop quality assurance measures that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools; to develop professional competences of staff involved in the validation process; to assure the synergy between validation arrangements and credit system applicable in the formal education (ECTS/ECVET); to use Union transparency tools, such as the Europass framework

and Youthpass. All in all, national arrangements should apply the above principles with the main aim of creating opportunities for individuals to validate their knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning to be created and opportunities to obtain a qualification on the basis of validated learning outcomes.

Main concepts

While there is a growing evidence that individuals can acquire their skills, knowledge and competences outside the formal education and training system, there is little consensus about the definitions of the terms (Singh, M., Duvekot, R., 2013, pp.15).

- *Validation* is a process of confirmation by an authorized body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. It consists of four distinct phases: 1. Identification through dialog of particular experiences of an individual, 2. Documentation – to make visible the individual`s experiences, 3. A formal assessment of these experiences and 4. Recognition leading to a certification for example a partial or full qualification. On short *Validation* it makes learning's outcome not only visible but also official (European Commission, 2012, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER IMPACT ASSESSMENT, pp.3). Validation process assumes a set of Common European principles (European Commission, 2004), which are necessary to encourage and guide the development of high-quality, trustworthy approaches and systems for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. They are necessary to ensure the comparability of non-formal and informal learning's outcome against some certain standards and wide acceptance of different approaches and systems in the Member States. They also enable the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. Key terms related with validation concept, but which have different meanings are: *recognition* and *accreditation.*
- *Recognition* is a process of granting official status to learning outcomes and/or competences, which can lead to the acknowledgement of their value in society (UNESCO-UIL, 2012).
- *Accreditation* – is a process by which an officially approved body, on the basis of assessment of learning outcomes and/or competences according to different purposes and methods, awards qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) or grants equivalences, credit units or exemptions, or issues documents such as portfolios of competences. In some cases, the terms accreditation applies to the evaluation of the quality of an institution or a program as a whole (UNESCO-UIL, 2012).
- Prior learning is defined as the knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired through previously unrecognized training or experience (AEHESIS, 2006).

Further in this article, the validation concept is understood as: 'The confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard'(CEDEFOP, 2009). It is a process that consists of four steps and has the power of making the prior learning not only visible, but also official.

Validation practice of non formal and informal learning in Romania - a holistic approach

The recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning in higher education is commonly associated with two main purposes: to gain access to a higher education program or to get exemption from certain higher education requirements by demonstrating that you already possess the knowledge and skills related to certain parts of study (European Commission, 2013). The same Eurydice study states that in Romania the implementation of recognition of prior learning is in a pilot phase at some higher education institutions, while an alternative route to access higher education does not exist.

The European agenda on "the Social Dimension of Education and Training" states that recognizing prior learning and providing individualized support enhances participation of underrepresented groups and non-traditional learners in higher education (HE). HE institutions are steel considering how to support the LLL (Lifelong Learning) perspectives and making use of the added value methods for Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). Some universities develop VPL – practices as an answer to economic and labor market needs; others use VPL as a way to widen access and participation of target groups which are obstructed in getting access in HE. Reality therefore calls for action on making HE more accessible for underrepresented groups and non-traditional learners by focusing on flexible lifelong learning strategies, opened up by tailor-made VPL-approaches (Duvekot, R., Halb, B., Aagaard, K., Gabršček, S., Murray, J., 2014, pp.3). The article "Integrated solutions for adult learning professionals to access master levels" published in the VPL Biennale volume entitled "The Power of VPL", highlights the idea that in Romania there is a great need for a more flexible and more open HE system, adapted to non-traditional older students, with a wide experience and a great need for getting it recognized. Alternative solutions must be identified by the universities in order to cope with issues like: the decreasing number of students and public funds, and also the students` interest in looking for more flexible and quick solutions which support them to struggle with their time, money and other constrains (Sava, S., Borca, C., Danciu, E, 2014, pp.79). In Romania, the regulation for validation of non-formal and informal learning does not apply to Higher education yet. The legislation does not explicitly mention recognition and validation of prior learning (VPL) for universities, but neither forbids it. It is up to the universities and coordinators of

programs, to teacher themselves, based on their autonomy, to use partly such possibility, mostly for the students with practical experiences (Sava, S., Borca C., Danciu, E, pp.86-87).

While, in Romania, the regulation for VPL does not apply to Higher education yet, there is a legal framework in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to professional competences. However, validation has so far mostly been confined to non-academic sectors (CDEFOP, 2010).

The validation process of professional competences acquired in non-formal or informal learning contexts is regulated by low and the main responsible body for this process is the National Qualifications Authority (NQA). NQA was established in June 2011 as a reorganization of two main institutions: The National Council for Adult Training in charge of CVET qualifications and the national Authority for Qualifications in Higher Education, responsible for higher education qualifications. This was an important step in order to cope with one of the main challenges in the recent years: to link two development process, structures and stakeholders from VET, higher education and labor market, in a more comprehensive framework. Starting with 2013, Romania has a comprehensive NQF linked to the EQF, developed by the NQA. The NQF *establishes eight levels of competences that can be acquired through the formal education and training in Romania and through the recognition of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal or informal learning contexts during life* (HG 918/2013).

Recognition and validation of vocational competencies acquired in non-formal and informal contexts are performed by the assessment centers authorized by the NQA in accordance with the *Procedure of the assessment and certification of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts (Procedure)*, approved through the Joint Order no. 4543/468/2004 of the Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sport and of the Minister of Labor, Social Solidarity and Family, with subsequent modifications and completions (3329/81/2005) (Order No.4543/468 from 23 august 2004).

The individuals who would like to be assessed in the view of recognizing of vocational competencies acquired through non-formal and informal ways should address to an assessment centre authorized for such occupation/qualification. The NQA has the responsibility of the authorization of the assessment centers. Authorization is considered for occupations/qualifications included in the Romanian Classification of Occupations/List of Qualifications (ORDER *N0.* 1832*/*856 *from 6* July 2011). In Romania, the advisory and validation services are not interconnected; there is no link between these two categories of services. Unfortunately, validation is an early-stage process and is quite difficult for the following reasons: it is a service that involves paying fees; lack of popularity and knowledge of these types of facilities among people; lack of confidence in this type of services (Crasovan, M., Siliman, A., Samoila, R., 2011).

The assessment and certification procedures for non-formal and informal learning in Romania are elaborated in line with the standard ISO/IEC 17024:2012 *General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons* which contains the principles and the requirements for a body certifying persons against specific requirements, and includes the development and maintenance of a certification scheme for persons (ISO/IEC 17024:2012). The individual assessor must be authorized by NQA in conformity with the *Occupational Standard of Evaluator of professional competences*. There are clear standards set for the individual assessors: he must be able to plan, organized and carry out an assessment of professional competences as well as make decisions and report on the assessment. The assessor can also show competence in the elaboration of assessment tools, but this is not a mandatory requirement. The performance of individual assessors is evaluated and monitored by internal observers also certified by NQA. The legislation sets out clear competence requirements for the internal observers. The actual of assessment procedure is followed by a process of internal verification, and an opportunity for the applicant to appeal against the decision (CEDEFOP, 2010).

In the last years, there has been an increase of certified validation centers and experts, refinement of assessment methods and the legal and practical procedures have become clearer in the VET system, which means that the number of validation process also increased.

According to the National Report on Flexi-Path (*Flexi-Path: Flexible professionalisation pathways for adult educator between the 6th and 7th level of EQF, 2008-2010*), on 15th March 2006 there were registered in the National Register of Competences Assessment and Certification Centres 28 authorized centres, for 20 qualifications and 40 occupations in the fields such as: social assistance, agriculture, education and vocational training, culture, constructions, administration and public services, informational technology and communications, tourism, hotels and restaurants, retail trade, food industry, forestry and wood processing, welding. The number of the certified assessors of vocational competencies was 182. On 19th of March 2009, there were registered in the National Register of Competences Assessment and Certification Centres 11 authorized assessment centres for trainer/ trainer of trainers' occupation, while in the curent National Register of Evaluation and Certification Centers of professional competences authorized by the NQA/ 31.03.2014 (http://www.anc.edu.ro/uploads/images/RNCECCP_31_03_2014.pdf) are registered 12 authorized assessment centres for trainer/ trainer of trainers'. The article *Credibility of trainer's competences assessment signed* by Raluca Lupou, Prof. Phd Simona Sava and Prof. Phd. Ekkehard Nuissl concludes that *the training path to certification is considered by the experienced trainer much more credible on the labor market than the validation. In spite of having the same national recognition by law, the graduating certificate and the professional competence certificate are differently valued on the labor market* (R.Lupou, S. Sava, E. Nuissl, 2010). Having in mind this increase in number of the validation centers and the conclusion above, I find it quite necessary to clarify this situation also from the beneficiary's point of view. The survey I carried on in 2013, for my

Master`s thesis, aimed to estimate the impact of validation on the beneficiaries from their perception, with the purpose of optimizing the existent practices at the moment.

Methodology

The survey carried on in the spring of 2013, had the following specific objectives: to identify the motivational factors that determines the target group's participation in the evaluation process; to emphasis the beneficiaries' perception regarding their experience in competence validation; to identify the factors that hinder the participation in the validation process of such interested adults; to identify the further benefits of this process in the respondents perception; to identify the factors that cause difficulties for the respondents in using the certificate obtained through validation. More than 30 people that have passed through the validation process in different fields, in validation centers from different regions of the country were questioned about their experience regarding the validation process and the further benefits that came after it.

Managers from seven validation centers from all over the country were contacted in order to facilitate the contact with the respondents. The data were collected via structured interviews which were applied either by sending it to the respondents via e-mail, either by asking them in a face to face meeting, either on the telephone. The sample was represented by 37 adults who went through a validation procedure in order to obtain a professional certificate for different professions, without considering their age, gender, level of education, or region in which they live.

Findings

The benefits mentioned by the respondents were: 'getting employed` for the profession for which they have been qualified through validation, `professional development` and `personal benefits` like: increasing self-esteem and confidence in their strength. The main benefits were in concordance with the level of the studies of the respondents. The lack of validation possibility was an impediment in getting employed for the people with low level of education (13, 3%) and qualification needs, while for the respondents with a high school level (30%) and higher education (53,3 %), the promotion at the work place and professional development were the main benefits they expressed. It can be observed a connection between the educational level and the benefits subsequent the validation process.

Level of education	FURTHER BENEFITS					TOTAL
	Promotion at the work place	Mobility in the workforce	Professional conversion	Entering the labor market, employment	Professional development	

Secondary school	0 %	0 %	**50 %**	**50 %**	0 %	100 %
Vocational school	100 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	100 %
High school	33,3 %	11,1 %	11,1 %	11,1 %	33,3 %	100 %
Higher education	**25 %**	0 %	12,5 %	6,3 %	**56,3 %**	100 %

Table 6: Correlation between the benefits and the level of education of respondents

Another issue that respondents highlighted is the need of improving awareness and information procedures to potential interested adults. The majority of 43, 33% respondents were informed of the existence of the validation procedure by their friends; only for 30 % respondents the work place and the internet represented a source of information. The responses of the respondents enhanced the need of improving awareness and information procedures to potential interested adults. It can be concluded based on these findings that if the awareness and recruitments procedures would be improved, the number of adults interested in having recognized and validated their professional competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts, could be higher.

Regarding the possibility of using the certificates of competences obtained through a validation procedure, on the labor market, the respondents did not confirm any difficulties in having the certificate recognized by the employers for purposes as: attend to professional development programs, get employed or be promoted.

Regarding the quality of the service the respondent's feed-back was a positive one. More than 80% of the beneficiaries stated that they have received support and guidance, the requirements were clear specified to them, and the assessment procedure was objective. A negative aspect that was mentioned by a part of the interviews respondents was the bureaucracy that this procedure imposes. It can be concluded that there are differences on the perception of the beneficiaries regarding their experience of the validation process. While the majority of respondents (80 %) concluded that the experience of validation was a pleasant experience, were they have founded quality services, guidance, seriousness and an objective evaluation, for several (more than 10 %) respondents this experience was stressful and implied to much bureaucracy.

Data confirm that the validation of professional competences in Romania have a major impact on the professional life of the beneficiaries and its necessity is assessed by them in terms of immediate benefits like promotion, employment, and so on.

Another conclusion is that `validation` in Romania is not yet a concept valued in the society to its full potential, being correlated in the practical life only with the official recognition of some professional competences through a certificate of competencies. But the reality is that validation of competences have much more to offer and can have benefits for different category of adults, either they are unemployed, or migrant, or disadvantaged people.

Conclusions and recommendations

Concluding, I would say that is room as well as necessity for further detailed research in the field of validation of competencies acquired in non-formal and in-formal learning. Is, for instance, the case of those who receive embedded training at the work place or are apprentices in a non-formal manner and, in spite of becoming highly competent workers in some professional fields, they have not a official recognition of those skills and knowledge. Due this fact, they often are in the situation of working outside of legal framework. So, more publicity, awareness and recruitment procedures are needed, especially among simple people, without higher studies. Validation of competences can be a solution for encouraging quitting work outside the legal provisions.

Spreading a number of the validation centers across the country, so they could be much more accessible to more categories of adults in different geographic regions could offer better chances to the people o get their acquired competencies validated and recognized. At the present, people have to travel from their local community in order to attend a validation procedure, which is sometimes too expensive for them in terms of time or many. Distance and cost of this service is a disincentive for many adults.

As an observation, in some cases, institutions that are authorized as centers of validation of professional competences provide also training services, but without working in a complementary way. The Sweden[62] model on validation of professional competences is a good example, and in this way the centers survival would be much easier: providing training services in order to fulfill the missing competences, is easier than to function only as a validation center or a training center.

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[62]CEDEFOP, 2010, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010,Country Report: Sweden*, edited by Ida Thomson, available at: http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77476.pdf.

As much as possible, the process of validation of competences should be more individualized, being part from a more complex counseling and guidance procedure, for different kind of beneficiaries: migrants, unemployed, youth, etc.

Developing counseling services for the people inside different stakeholders: NGOs, NAE (National Agency for Employment), and inside the Human Resources departments of the firms, HE institutions and so on, is an opportunity for a better utilization of human resources.

In the present, validation of competencies is starting to be more and more appreciated as an alternative route for obtaining a qualification. Though it has a bottom-up approach the practice of validation of competencies obtained through a different context of learning starts to be appreciated not only at the academically contexts, but also in the practical reality, by becoming a practice more and more required in the practitioners world. It is important to identify specific areas of competencies and to develop specific procedures of validation which are to be follow in the process in line with the standards set by the specialists in the certain professional fields. On the other hand, having in Europe an open labor market, the national standards and procedures have to be in line with European ones.

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1st Validation of Prior Learning Biennale

Maria Ţoia ⁑

The 1ˢᵗ VPL Biennale was held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, on April 9-11, 2014, and was hosted by INHolland University of Applied Sciences. More than 200 participants from European countries, the Republic of Korea and Canada attended the conference.

The central theme of the 1st VPL Biennale concentrated on '*The promise of VPL as the motor of social ánd economic change'*. Six topics were lunched for attending to this scientific event: *The power of VPL, The roadmap of VPL, Linkages of VPL, Personalization of learning, Quality-assurance, Open and flexible learning.*
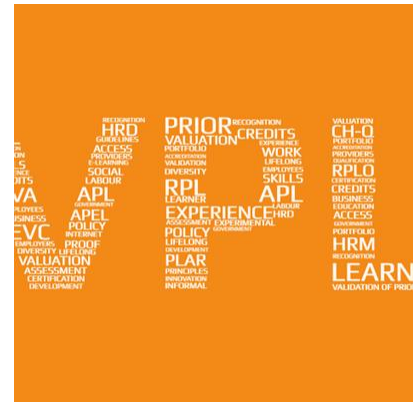
The VPL Biennale aim was to offer a meeting framework for experts, researchers, policy makers and people interested in VPL so current developments in **Validation of Prior Learning** to be discussed and research studied, policies, methods and practices to be presented. The goals of this event were:

- Knowledge exchange, sharing information, ideas and visions and about the creative process of learning from each other's successes, problems and solutions in 'the VPL-world'. This entailed a focus on the systematics of Validation of Prior Learning as the motor of more effective learning and working processes; all-inclusive for every citizen, regardless of status, gender, age, philosophy, special need, heritage or any other personal feature.
- Networking - creating a platform for policy makers, practitioners, users, researchers and all other stakeholders that are interested in further developing/implementing VPL in their practice.
- Challenge discussion on recent developments and the future and a market place for sharing knowledge and expertise.

All forms for knowledge and competence exchanged were facilitated through different workshops, discussions, poster-sessions, a marketplace, keynotes, active on-line publishing, etc.

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The keynotes and the parallel sessions pointed out that VPL already is active in all lifelong learning-perspectives (qualification-oriented, function-oriented and person-oriented), on the labour market and in education. This notion was highlighted in the concluding forum: *VPL needs to move from fragmentation to integration.* Another conclusion of the event was that in the coming years, VPL is explicitly going to be (further) embedded in the primary processes of learning (vocational, university) and working (HR systems, collective agreements, training funds). VPL will be – within these two main systems as well as between them – a matchmaker and 'guide' for sustainable personal development, shared ownership citizens-organisations of competency-based development and flexibility of the system.[63]

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[63] Duvekot, R., Joong, D., Murray, J., 2013, *Validation of Prior Learning as a multi-targeted approach for maximising learning opportunities for all. Linkages of VPL, Series* VPL Biennale nr. 2, published by Inholland University AS & European Centre for Valuation of Prior Learning, http://www.vplbiennale.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Linkages_of_VPL_2-Celeo.pdf

The fourth International Conference on Adult Education - Adult Education in Universities Local and Regional Perspectives

Prof. PhD. Simona Sava*

The 4th International Adult Education Conference gathered participants from different parts of Europe, from the United States, from Asia and from Australia, for a three-day scientific event organized in May in Iasi, Romania.

The event was hosted by the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, during 27th - 30th April 2014, and it represented a forum for exchanging information in the scientific, practical and legislative area, presenting the results of the research in the field of continuing and adult education on the following topics: Adult Education in Universities, Strategies and Programmes for Adult Education, Teacher professional training and development, and Technologies and Adult Education. The conference was organized by a consortium of universities: Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi - Lifelong Learning Institute, International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame Outreach University of Oklahoma, the University of Bucharest, the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the West University of Timisoara, and partners included ICAE, ASPBAE, EAEA, PASCAL, and CR&DALL. The conference arouse a great interest, at the event there were over 130 participants from US, Canada, Australia, UK, Germany, Hungary, Taiwan, Japan and Romania.

The announced key speakers were: Sturla Bjerkaker, The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning, NORWAY; PhD Prof. Chris Duke, Centre for European Studies, RMIT, AUSTRALIA; Per Paludan Hansen, EAEA President, Denmark; PhD Prof. John A. Henschke, Lindenwood University, USA; PhD Prof. Heribert Hinzen, Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association IIZ/DVV; PhD Prof. Vasile Isan, "Alexandru

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Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, RO; PhD Prof. Romita Iucu, University of Bucharest, RO; PhD Hideki Maruyama, National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER), Japonia; PhD Prof. Ekkehard Nuissl von Rein, Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung - German Institute for Adult Education; PhD Prof. Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow, SCOTIA, UK; PhD James P. Pappas, Executive Director, International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame; Acad. PhD Prof. Ioan Aurel Pop, Universitatea Babes-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, RO; PhD Prof. Fred M. Schied, Pennsylvania State University, USA; PhD Prof. Constantin Schifirnet, National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, RO; PhD André Schläfli, SVEB - Schweizerischer Verband für Weiterbildung, Zürich; PhD Prof. Laurentiu Soitu, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, RO.

Related with **The Fourth International Conference on Adult Education in Universities** — Local and Regional Perspectives took place on April 29, 2014, Iasi, the **International Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) Hall of Fame** where adult and continuing education leaders from around the world were inducted. International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame Symposium was created to honor leaders in the fields of continuing education and adults learning and to serve as a record and inspiration for the next generation of continuing education leaders.

A conference volume, indexed in Thomson Reuters Web of Science, will follow soon. More details via: http://iec.psih.uaic.ro/conferinta27042014/.

The Power of VPL

Validation of Prior Learning as a multi-targeted approach for access to learning opportunities for all

Denisa Mariana Lombrea[*]

The publication **The Power of VPL Validation of Prior Learning as a multi-targeted approach for access to learning opportunities for all** is a result of the research activity undertaken by a international partnereship involved in the ERASMUS-project 'Access to Lifelong Learing in Higher Education' (517978-LLP-1-2011-1-NL-ERASMUS-ESIN; ALLinHE) and olso this book accompanied the 1st VPL Biennale (April 9-11, 2014, Rotterdam) as the pre-Biennale book.

Edited by Ruud Duvekot, Bénédicte Halba, Kirsten Aagaard, Sergij Gabršček and Jane Murray and printed at the Inholland University AS & European Centre Valuation Prior Learning, April 2014, the book contains 14 articles, in which are presented evidence-based, case-studies and transnational studies and benchmarks for strengthening the application of validation of prior learning as part of lifelong learning strategies, for the benefit of all, in particular for those who are in danger of social exclusion.

All contributions present their own story, showing the diversity of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) and its contribution to implementing lifelong learning strategies in any given country and context. They either tell a more general story or a more specific one. The goal is to learn from this diversity.

In the 1st chapter, Ruud Duvekot presents a general framework for developing and implementing the systematics of Validation of Prior Learning in a given context. Nowadays, in the on-going transition to the learning society flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is required to keep the citizen viable on today's labour market. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors: individuals, trade unions, schools, universities, employers, legislative and regulatory bodies. Never before in history the individual - or the citizen - got the chance to gain so much control in steering one's career through learning as is the case in the learning society. It is the
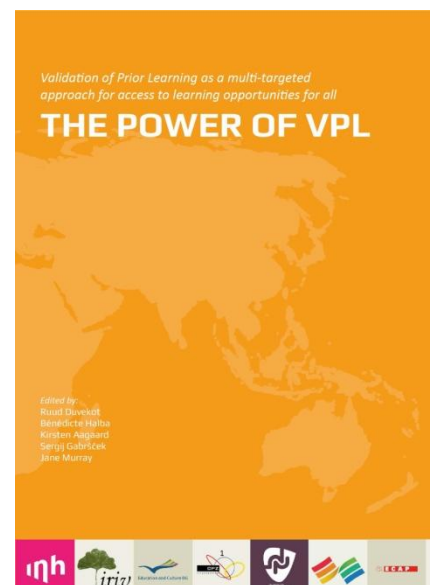
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systematic of VPL that offers this 'window of opportunities' with its focus on opening up learning opportunities on people's own demand. This contribution seeks to answer the crucial question how to activate VPL as an effective instrument for linking competences and credits in lifelong learning thatappeal to individual learners and the other stakeholders in learning and working contexts?

The chapter of Per Andersson discusses experiences as a basis for admission and particularly eligibility for higher education. The discussion is illustrated by examples from the case of Sweden, a country that has applied measures for widening access to higher 14 education since the 1970s. Particularly the focus is upon the 25:4 scheme, a measure that gave recognition to experience by granting basic eligibility mainly based on life and work experiences – 25 years of age and 4 years of work experiences were the main criteria for granting basic eligibility. The chapter also presents results from a survey among 25:4 applicants, a study which was focussing their experiences of application, admission, entering higher education, and drop-out or completion. The concepts of institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers towards participation are employed to discuss the results.

Hae Young Lee and Young Sang Ko provide insight in the learning culture of South Korea in which the further development of VPL could go well together with the present reforms in vocational (higher) qualifications systems. The gap in South Korea between the labour market and HE creates societal instability and unemployment and ironically, this enhances a skills mismatch that forces young people to seek more education and forces employers to invest more in job training for new recruits. Experts believe that the reform of vocational qualifications systems such as the National Competency Standards (NCS) and the National Qualification Framework might play a critical role in adopting VPL. However, with respect to this reform several issues require attention such as the modularisation of learning programmes/courses comparable to NCS, the development of learning outcomes-based curricula and assessment tools and the development of a transfer system amongst NCS-based academic programmes/courses and the Academic Credit Bank System.

Simona Sava, Claudia Borca & Elena Danciu state that the need for better access to higher education is widely argued in Europe. Different countries already introduced into their legislation the validation of prior learning outcomes (VPL) as a solution for widening access to different study programs, irrespective of their deliverance at bachelor, master or doctorate level. This contribution discusses how such options can be applied to adult learning professionals (ALPs), in order to provide better access to master levels in countries where such regulation does not yet exists. Different experiences and solutions developed in recent years in this respect are presented.

Antra Carlsen presents in chapter 5 the experience of the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) with networking in adult education as a means of addressing challenges in the Nordic region. The Nordic cooperation and the role of the Nordic Expert Network on Validation within this cooperation is described. This Expert Network is an excellent way of pooling of resources and producing added value to national development work. The Network has developed Nordic recommendations on VPL for decision makers, and has been working with the issues of quality-assurance and competence development in validation. The NVL sets an example for transnational cooperation and

development of 15 policies and instrumentation for lifelong learning ánd VPL that is beneficial to the participating countries. It also creates synergy with other countries through its affiliation with the European Union and other political entities.

Madhu Singh's contribution has two main purposes: to examine the progress made in member states in terms of the UNESCO Guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning (UIL, 2012) and to highlight some key recommendations for education systems, emerging from the country analysis. The title of her contribution links to the 'Faure Report' of 1972 that defined 'the learning society' as one in which learning is valued by all members of society, in which stakeholders invest in recognising and developing human learning potential and everyone regards people's non-formal and informal learning as a cornerstone of lifelong learning strategies. Faure argued that the educational system would need complete overhauling if the learning society was to be reached. It's in this context where Singh reflects on the development of VPL-systematics, or in UNESCO-terms 'the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning (RVA)'. She analyses the countries where mechanisms for RVA are a introduced as part of wider education reforms. These reforms typically seek to make education and training better reduce the education-job gap but also make lifelong learning a real possibility for individuals.

The article of Jane Murray focuses on a UK perspective regarding validated prior learning (VPL) as an instrument for access to Higher Education by two target groups identified as marginalised within European and UK discourses. The selected groups are people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and people aged 50-plus. Drawing on data compiled and analysed as part of the ALLinHE-project, the chapter opens with a consideration of the European and UK contexts in regard to VPL. Discussion then turns to characteristics of the two selected groups before moving to focus on VPL processes at macro-, meso- and micro-levels in the UK. The conclusion draws together the UK findings in regard to the two selected groups to posit that a varied picture of VPL supporting Access to HE in the UK exists, influenced by an asymmetric power relationship between HEIs and individual citizens, with HEIs the hegemonic partner.

Furio Bednarz and Giovanna Bednarz draw on the results of the piloting of the AllinHE Model in Switzerland. After the contextualization of VPL practices in Switzerland, the authors shortly present the methodology and the sources of the study, identifying a specific coherent target group (qualified immigrant women), in order to look for convergences and peculiarities of VPL according to 3 diverse modes: VPL as a means for making competences and learning visible, VPL as a means for achieving a qualification, at least a first step in career and lifelong learning pathways, VPL as an entry door to Higher Education. The article takes in account how expectations, goals, processes and outcomes differ from one case to another, putting always learners' narratives at the center, reading institutional impact, strengths and criticalities under this lens, in order to give some relevant inputs for the design of an integrated multidimensional and multi-target VPL- model

The contribution from Aino Lepänjuuri and Eila Burns describes an individual case story of a non-traditional mature (over 50 years) higher education (HE) student with a learning difficulty on his journey to have his skills and competencies recognised in Finnish HE. The process of validation of prior learning (VPL) in the Finnish HE context will be explained and some recommendations based on personal views will be suggested in order to ease and enhance life-long learning opportunities for all learners.

The article of Ellen Enggaard and Kirsten Aagaard is based on two case studies investigating the potential of VPL processes in a social inclusion perspective and of VPL as a means to empower the individual. In the Danish context the right to have prior learning assessed is embedded in the educational system. Therefore the educational institutions play an important role in VPL, not only in assessing prior learning but also in dealing with the entire process of validating prior learning.The first case study focuses on the individual's meeting with the educational system in his wish to gain formal acknowledgement of his prior learning. In the second case study they focus on the meeting between the individual, the work place and the educational institution. The case focuses on the potential and challenges of using VPL as a means in a strategic competence development project initiated by the work place. They discuss the problems and the conflicts of interest that might arise in such a project, where different stakeholders collaborate in a VPL process. The focus is on meeting points in VPL processes, concerning the mutual process in understanding each other and – more specifically - the mutual interests and perspectives of the VPL-candidates, the educational system, and the workplace

Bénédicte Halba argues that while Valuing Prior Learning (VPL) has become a major issue in Europe, in France the process of VPL already had and has a long history with the highlight of the 2002 Act dedicated to Social modernization. This act paved the way for assessing professional experiences understood on a broader sense than usual (paid, unpaid and voluntary activities). On the basis of three former projects implemented since 2003 (Vaeb, Va2el and Vab), she illustrates the progress in identifying, valuing and assessing different kinds of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. She emphasizesthe added value of the ALLinHE project, focused on people with special needs (50+, migrants and disabled people). In the last part of her article she explains the support to be provided to migrants and councilors to enhance the process of VPL, based on a French experience, in the framework of workshops offered at the Cité des Métiers in Paris (2012-2013).

Deirdre Goggin, Irene Sheridan and Tim Horgan report on an interesting case of VPL in industry focused programmes. They argue that as organisations focus on economic indicators and return on investment, their approaches to learning and development opportunities are transformed. In a challenging, competitive climate there is a need to ensure that the long and short term benefits are maximised. The authors describe the experiences and issues raised for Cork Institute of Technology, a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Ireland in implementing programmes developed in partnership with industry which are mutually beneficial and maintain academic standards. It also addresses the enablers, challenges and barriers in customised course development.

Camilla Alfsen describes in het article how Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, has developed guidelines for validation of prior learning towards exemptions in higher education in Norway. The guidelines were developed in 2013 in cooperation with representatives from the sector. Since 2001, adults in Norway without general admittance certification have a legal right to seek admission to University Colleges or Universities based on validation of prior learning. The law also states that students may seek exemption from parts of the study programme based on their prior learning. Validation of prior learning (VPL) for admittance to higher education is well established. Practice linked to validation towards exemptions in higher education is less well known however. Vox therefore conducted a national survey to find out how many institutions that use this kind of validation and how it is done.Based on this survey, Vox developed guidelines for validation towards exemptions. This article presents highlights from the survey and the development of the guidelines.

The final contribution in this book from Ruud Duvekot, describes and analyses the way in which VPL as a tool for and a vision on lifelong learning strategies is introduced the historical and cultural setting of the Netherlands. While describing the features of development and implementation of VPL in the Dutch setting, not only the necessity to contextualize VPL in order to make it an effective approach ánd tool in lifelong learning strategies becomes apparent but also the way of doing this in a national learning culture with its specific systems, institutes and the critical success factors that prevail in this culture.

With this book, the aim is to show that lifelong learning is possible in any context, country and culture, and that there are always shared elements that make it possible to make a manageable tool for lifelong learning out of the methodology of VPL. Why this is so relevant and of value to the citizens and their organizations across the globe is explained in the variety of approaches, practices and visions, presented in this book.

References for the development of the professionalization system for adult education practitioners

Adriana Osoian[*]

The publication ***References for the development of the Professionalization system for adult Education practitioners*** is a result of the research activity undertaken by a national partnership involved in the project ProAlps - National system for professionalization of adult educators: improvement, innovation, articulation (521448-LLP-1-2011-1-RO-KA1-KA1ECETA1), project run between 2011-2013, under the coordination of the Romanian Institute of Adult Education – IREA, from Timisoara.
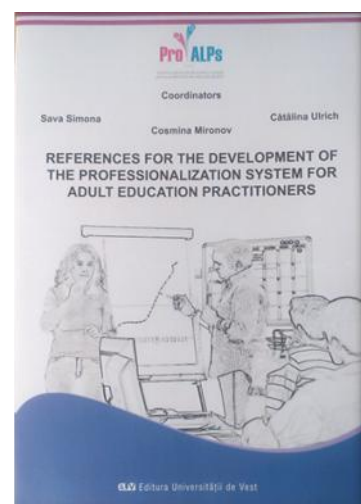
Edited and printed at the West University of Timișoara Press, both in English and in Romanian, the book is structured on five chapters writen under the coordination of Prof. PhD. Simona Sava[64], Prof. PhD Cătălina Ulrich[65] and Lect. PhD Cosmina Mironov[66]. The book shape the design of a national system for professionalizing the adult learning professionals. More specifically it develops a theoretical structure for a coherent and effective system which must be able to ensure an adequate framework for a career development path designed for the professionals in adult education area.`

The book is based on the findings presented in the *National research on adult education professionals,* coordinated by PhD Magdalena Balica[67], published in 2012, at the University of Bucharest Press. The survey study, based on the opinions of more than 460 practitioners in adult education, reunites the points of view of the beneficiaries of such a national system of professionalisation, their needs and expectations from such a system. In the same time, the study is a diagnosis of the state of art of the Romanian system of professionalisation of adult educators: functionality and its effectiveness, professional development opportunities available, how the system

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responds to the needs of beneficiaries vis-a-vis the various tasks and roles they perform and the diversity of areas in which they work.

The book presents in the first chapter several premises of the profesionalisation need in adult education; then, it explains the legitimacy and desirability of such a professionalization system for the AE practitioners. Chapter two presents the synthesis of the results of the national surveay mentioned above and the conclusions of the debate and discussion sessions realized in the frame of a national Workshop and a Final National Conference regarding the feasibility of the proposed concept of a posible professionalisation system and the manner of its implementation. In the same chapter issues like: present trends in the development of a professionalization system for the AE practitioners, possible funding sources, programs for initial and continuous training of trainers, strands on quality assurance and evaluation, are discussed and debated.

Chapter three presents and analyze three scenarios for the development of a system for professionalization of adult education practitioners: *Scenario A - heavily regulated system, Scenario B - flexible regulatory environment, Scenario C - self-regulated system.* Chapters four and five bring in disscussion specific elements that orient the construction and the implementation of such a system, reuniting them in a coherent concept of designing and setting up such a national system of professionalization of adult learning staff.

More concrete, chapter four highlits that the design of such a system must be draw upon the Romanian realities in the functioning of the adult education system and lifelong learning. In the attempt to capitalize the experience of the Romanian professionalisation process, in the book are specified projective elements that will support the development of the concept of a coherent and articulated national system adapted to the Romanian realities and to the needs of the adults that will benefit from it. Further, the development of such a system of professionalisation is justified and guided by strategic objectives and principles that are defined and described carefuly, along with the main elements that must be taken into account for developing such a system and a framework of a possible implementation strategy.

Chapter five describes the changes and the developments that need to be achived (institusions, involved professionals and beneficiaries, research subjects, regulation and educational policy measures, financing mechanisms, quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms) and also it adresses some specifications that regard staff qualifications and professional development (possible career evolution stages).

The book is in line with the specification of the European Agenda on Adult Learning, launched by the Council of Europe in 2011 (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011G1220(01)&from=EN), agenda in which there is specified that each

member state should set up by 2014 the national system of professionalization on adult learning professionals. The Romanian experience was considered a good practice example, a Peer Learning Activity being organized by the European Commission in April 2013 at Timisoara, on the topic of *professionalization of adult learning staff,* to discuss about the respective findings and design. The book is also apreciated by the practitioners European wide, the coordinators being invited to speak about it.

It also enjoyed the appreciation of the highest scientific forum from Romania, the Romanian Academy, and its main author, Prof. PhD Simoana Sava, was receiving the price for innovation in *Education IT Environment* in June 2014, with one of the main argument related to this publication.

Let`s hope that the book is a source of inspiration for other member states, but mainly that the Romanian governement will take the next step, the policy formulation and implementation of the adequate policy measures, once the evidence based policy making is ensured by the common work of university professors and researchers.

Recommendations for authors

The recommendations below are meant to clearify the expected quality of the journal and it's articles.

The authors can send the electronic version of articles at : resjournal@uvt.ro

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2. The words and quotes in foreign languages are written in Italics. The quotes in Romanian are writen normally. Every quote shall have a foot note
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4. Every text shall be preceded by an abstract and key-words (about 5 key-words). The abstract and the key-words section will be about of 800 characters;
5. The abstract and key-words shall be written both in Romanian (if possible) and English.
6. Each abbreviation shall be explained only at first use.

Technical criteria:

1. page - A4;
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11. ARTICLE: Author, (year), *Title*, in „Name of Journal", volume, number, date, page number, Publishing House, City (if available).
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The next number of the journal, 2/2014, will have a general theme.

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CRITERIA	1	2	3	0
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A.1. The importance and the actuality of the discussed topic, as well as the relevance of the discussed question				
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B. Potential contributions to developing scientific				
B.1 The research question is adequately answered, raising conclusions related to the theoretical basis presented in the article and the shared new ideas.				
B. 2 The type and the authenticity level is achieved by the				
B.3 The set of conclusions represents a synthesis built on a personal interpretation of the prior exposed results, with references to further developments on the discussed				
C. Argumentative procedure				
C.1. The research design is correct, the hypothesis are relevant, the methods and empirical investigation instruments are transparent and the interpretation of data is				
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D. Structure and presentation of the article				
D.1. A logic sequence/connection (the ideas are logically linked together, the transit from an idea to the other is easy to follow, the order in which the parts of the paper are				
D.2 The used language is coherent, grammatically correct, meeting the scientific standards of expression				
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ɴ Please provide explanations regarding the reasons for rejecting the article or list (on a separate sheet) with the concrete revision requirements