

## NON-FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA

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**Abstract.** *The article reviews the regulatory legal documents for non-formal adult education and lists the diversity of institutions providing non-formal adult education. Non-formal adult education forms a large part of a permanent education system and is an active factor in stimulating Lithuanian democracy growth; it empowers individuals and social groups to deal with social, economical and political problems by advanced critical thinking and assists adults in gaining diverse approaches to tolerance. A system of non-formal education consists of training institutions, voluntary organizations, culture and education institutions, commercial establishments and groups of mutual support. Media and modern information technologies play an important role in this system. Non-formal adult education through its complexities and structural diversity develops conceptual change and behavior of the individuals in the complicated and ever changing modern world.*

**Keywords:** *non-formal adult education, adults, educational institutions, lifelong learning.*

### Introduction

Global changes in the world (the new information, a variety of information and communication technologies) influence conditions of Lithuanian economy and move people's living demands to higher levels. This changing society has become known as information, knowledge and learning society. Society as a complex social system is in a permanent process of change, according to P. Jarvis (1996), and such change has become more the norm than the exception. Non-formal educational institutions are influenced by this change due to pressure from other public institutions, especially from institutions dealing with technology and economics, but also from other educational institutions. Individuals as well are instigated by these forces to try to find their place in the dynamic society. However, people are not passive social impact gainers; they themselves influence the world around them and become an active force, contributing to the changing process of the society.

Lithuania, as well as the whole world, is opening more and more to the understanding that non-formal adult education is one of the most important and necessary ways of helping a person to be conscious of his own performance. A person is both a participant in the development of his/her country and an observer of changes. Learning enables one to contribute to the sustainable change of

economic and social processes (Ziuzeviciute & Tereseviciene, 2008). Non-formal adult education in Lithuania has become one of the main tasks of the new educational reform. As it was noted in Lithuanian adult education concept (1992), non-formal adult education is a big part of the permanent education system, developing personal physical and spiritual strengths. Non-formal adult education system is characterized by the complexity and diversity of structure – it consists of educational institutions, voluntary organizations, educational and cultural institutions, commercial establishments and self-help groups. An important point in this system is given to media and modern information technologies. Moreover, non-formal adult education facilitates the growth of democracy, enables individuals and groups to develop critical thinking skills in solving social, economic and political problems, helping them to develop tolerance to different approaches. In addition, it provides the means to alter understanding and enables to operate in more and more challenging and rapidly changing world.

The paper seeks to review the growth of non-formal adult education in Lithuania and the challenges that different institutions meet in providing non-formal adult education.

### **Regulatory documents for non-formal adult education in Lithuania**

Legal basis for non-formal adult education in Lithuania is laid in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, state laws, Lithuania Government resolutions (by-laws), regulations and other legal documents of authorized institutions (i.e. ministries, etc.).

In 1998 a Law on Non-Formal Adult Education in Lithuania was passed. It was the first legal document to define non-formal adult education in the Baltics. The document stood no revisions until 2014, despite the fact that each year hundreds of thousands of adults participated in refresher courses, studied independently or sought newly required competences. The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Learning (2014) that came into force in 2014 focused on the implementation of the legal guarantees for the provision of the inherent right for every individual to develop one's personality lifelong, for developing the facilities for a person to acquire knowledge and skills; for reaching for new definitions of meaning of life, for strengthening along with professional skills the quality of leisure activities and for gaining active citizenship. The Law enforces adult education on the national and the municipal levels, creates new position of a coordinator of adult education in municipalities and establishes an adult pedagogue-andragogue professional status. The function of dissemination and consultancy for the broad population should undoubtedly result in a more active participation of both institutes and individuals in organization and delivering of non-formal adult education. Far

greater attention according to the Law will be given to the operation of the Third Age Universities; new models of financing adult education will be implemented.

In 2008 in response to the European Communication from the Commission Adult learning: It is never too late to learn a Lifelong Learning Strategy was approved, which echoed the strategic priorities of the Long-Term Development Strategy of the Lithuanian State 2020. In forming economic politics, the emphasis falls on the quality of employment and investment into the growth of human capital, the growth of physical, financial and social infrastructure, the development of science, technologies and innovation and macroeconomic stability of the country. Lifelong Learning Strategy (2008) presupposes that the growth of the competitive economy and knowledge society and the prevention of social exclusion not only form the need to acquire indispensable qualifications for the labor market needs, but also create the opportunities to improve skills, give training or retraining on demand. The quality of the personnel is becoming an increasingly important criterion for describing the labor supply. It should be noted that the Strategy for the first time highlighted other important adult education feature, non-formal non-vocational adult training, which is important not only for employment or the economic well-being purposes, but also for the reach of social cohesion, active citizenship, well-being of individuals.

Another important document in the development of non-formal adult education in Lithuania was Non-formal Adult Education Development in the period 2014-2016 Action Plan adopted in 2013; the aim of the document was to create a lifelong learning supply and demand system that would allow social and labor inclusion, active citizenship and personal development. The Action Plan (2013) enables adults to acquire core competencies and develop positive attitudes to lifelong learning; it extends formal and non-formal learning access; facilitates growth of lifelong learning conditions in vocational training schools and higher educational institutions, creates sustainable financial and legal incentive system that supports the participation of adults in lifelong learning activities. Though not all that has been planned was implemented to a full extent, to ensure continuity of the process Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Learning Development Program for the period 2016-2023 was passed in 2016, it gave the basis for establishing and developing non-formal adult education and continuing learning system in Lithuania, affordable and socially equal, matching the social needs of an individual successfully functioning in an open civil society, and the labor market.

It should be noted that Lithuanian strategic documents regulating the field of education continue to emphasize the need for developing lifelong learning systems, increasing the availability of adult learning opportunities and promoting lifelong learning diversity. In order to develop non-formal adult education services and to adapt them to the society and the labor market demands Ministry

of Education of the Republic of Lithuania in 2014 and in 2015 called non-formal adult education program funding competitions, with the dedicated priority areas of lifelong learning services in the regions, labor market general competences for adults, and non-formal adult education access points within formal adult education.

Lifelong learning remains one of the National Education Strategy 2013-2022 priorities. The Strategy states its goals: to make the community more productive, loyal, constantly learning, and to assist each person in opening to change, creativity and responsibility. It is necessary to enhance non-formal learning environment to expand the scope of non-formal education and its diversity, including cultural self-expression and creativity, and support for voluntary initiatives. To organize educational civic activities, personal self-help throughout the country, to develop various frameworks promoting lifelong learning quality of service, its variety and flexibility of non-formal adult education system availability.

Reviewed laws and resolutions reflect the advanced approach to provision of non-formal adult education in Lithuania, as an important segment of lifelong learning system within society; they open wider opportunities for its development.

### **Non-governmental organizations - active promoters of non-formal adult education**

In a society today there exists a firm assumption that the future of any country as well as success of democratic ideas depends on an individual, the individual's as an active citizen's involvement in public life and public affairs. Therefore, the democratic principle of life is frequently defined as a democratic participation, especially by the active participation in the function of NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

Non-governmental organizations are actively involved in Lithuanian public matters and through their connection with societal diversity support the creation of an open society and seek to achieve the following aims:

- to express the needs of citizens;
- to promote the diversity of opinions;
- to act as a policy shaping force;
- to signal about the increase of tensions in society;
- to act as a mediator between the people and the market along with the state (Juozaitis & Vilimienė, 2000).

Currently, Lithuania has more than 7,000 non-governmental non-profit organizations. The number of non-governmental organizations is increasing every year; unfortunately, many organizations cease to exist or transform into different

ones or become temporarily ineffective for one reason or another. However, an ever growing and diversified list of non-governmental organizations including a great number of clubs, associations, unions, foundations, centers and other organizations, point out a public democratization.

The NGO sector is characterized by constant quest for new possibilities, openness to new tasks, training, reflecting upon a new reality, learning to behave and adapt, willing and able to act creatively, make decisions quickly, be more flexible, happy to experiment, programs are adapted to individual needs of particular groups. Development of adult education has become an important and significant sign of social progress and in many countries it is one of the most important tiers of social growth. Jarvis (1997) points out that while learning is a private initiative, people have a need to learn, and as a consequence, the key feature of non-governmental organizations is empowerment through learning. Unlike state institutions, NGOs quickly adapt educational programs for the individual needs of the target groups and tend to maintain better usage of the funds. As a result, adult learners gain confidence and become a driving force in the society. About 60 percent of Lithuanian NGOs function are referred to educational activities of its members in the cultural, legal and economic education. Some, especially associations working in the field of education, pay particular attention to adult trainings (Zemaitaityte, 2007).

A definite leader among NGOs in non-formal adult education is the Lithuanian Association of Adult Education (LAAE) whose educational activities include not only individual members, but also organizations, and it is expanding its cooperation with other NGOs through various projects, providing support to NGO leaders, helping to consider important adult education issues of the century. In 2016, Lithuanian Adult Education Association had 113 individuals and 36 collective members. In Dienys' opinion (2002) - the Association has become one of the few non-governmental organizations whose activities have almost evenly covered whole Lithuania.

### **Non-formal adult education integration into labour market**

All countries worldwide, including Lithuania are experiencing rapid change. Knowledge and skills have become the real capital of the modern economy and competitiveness in a market is characterized by rapid economic and technological change. Knowledge and skills are assessed due to their capacity to stimulate development in a changing environment. Changes in the economy have diverged employment and qualification requirements. The quality of labour (especially education and qualifications) and its adequacy for current and future needs have become an especially important issue. Professional training and developing have become most important advantages in job retention and successful career. The

pace of change and progress leads to critical perception of a broader professional development. However, such changes do not create any confrontation among the state, employers (organizations) and individuals, it is clearly comprehended that the individual lacking relevant qualifications will not compete in the labour market. Hence, an employer without skilled workers will not be able to compete in the domestic market, and the state deficient in competitive companies will not be able to exist in the global market (Zemaitaitytė, 2010).

Non-formal adult education in professional qualification improvement training allows individuals to adapt to the constantly changing conditions of professional activity. As a consequence, it contributes to the conversion of the society itself. A change in society and the evolution of society leads to the change of each member of society and non-formal adult education is a tool for the implementation of this change. Lithuania's major training objectives are expressed in terms of individual education objectives, e.g.: the objective of the vocational training is a conscious, active, mature, constantly learning, responsible and an independent individual. This individual acts on the basis of the professional, cultural and human values to create personal, material and spiritual values, public welfare and to participate in the process of the formation of democratic society (Baltoji knyga, 1999).

According to the Lithuanian Department of Statistics (2013), in 2010-2011 school years there were 78 vocational schools and 10 labour market training centres, where there were around 30 thousand people in the field of non-formal adult education. Adult learning took place in the workplace which in accord to the needs of business was provided by employers. There were about 60 thousand businesses that were potential users or suppliers of educational services in Lithuania in 2010. As pointed out by Punzienė and Dienys (2003), employers' demand to develop learning has been recognized as an economical benefit.

The cooperation of employers and non-formal adult education becomes particularly prominent since human resource is an asset whose proper training, education, learning and the ability of continuous self-renewal contribute to the social and economic well-being of society and the country.

### **The role of leisure institutions of non-formal adult education**

An adult encouraged by the desire to acquire knowledge comes to adult education in order to develop the intellectual and creative strengths, to gain greater social acceptance, to communicate more or to reveal themselves. Such adults want to learn more guided self-help goals. Self-education seems to be the most individualized cognitive activity; it helps to develop a comprehensive, balanced personality with a foothold in society. Unfortunately, Lithuania has preserved the provision of an education that gives a formal qualification with such proof as a

certain certificate, while education based on the learner's personal initiative deals with cultural and personality development is often not assumed to be education. Teresevičienė (1999) stated it as follows, we tend to either underestimate or not include educational activities as well as keep no statistics on the education related to human personal development, which is based on the citizens' initiative, and clearly contributing to the development of lifelong learning scale. Cultural centres, museums, clubs, theatres are actively involved in non-formal adult education. According to Lithuanian Department of Statistics (2014) in Lithuania there were 632 cultural centres, 3,9 thousand adult art groups which involved about 60,000 people, 3862 libraries (including -2561 in educational institutions) in which the total number of readers exceeded 662 thousand.

In addition to these traditional educational institutions, for new or non-formal leisure educational institutions more and more important became such institutions as the University of the Third Age.

Interest in non-formal adult education, particularly of the elderly, resulted from the increasing number of older people in the world. At the end of 1970s the elderly problem was firstly mentioned, whereas in 1971 in Toulouse (France), the first University of the Third Age was established (*Le Universita 'della Terza Eta', University of the Third Age*) (Zemaitaityte, 2007). The name of the Third Age was derived from S. de Beauvoir book titled "The Third Age". This phrase replaced the words *the old /elderly* (with usually negative connotation), and gave a new meaning to this life period.

Jarvis (1996) argues that the Third Age University (TAU) is not an ordinary university (without the university area), it is rather increasing voluntary association that provides non-formal adult education for its members, as well as gives them the opportunity to associate through various interest groups and teach and learn from each other. The predominant principle is that anyone can teach and anyone can learn; classes are organized in some places and there are no certificates. M. Formosa (2012) notes that one of the most important functions of TAU is to create a society in which aging is viewed in a positive way where older people are not discriminated because of their age, and are valued for their expertise and willingness to improve.

In Lithuania University of the Third Age was established in 1995 in Vilnius. Its initiators and founders were the researchers of Experimental and Clinical Medicine in the Institute of Gerontology. In 2014 in the system [www.aikos.lt](http://www.aikos.lt) 70 schools of non-formal adult education were registered. In 2012 there functioned 24 TAU, and in spring of 2014 there functioned 40 Third Age Universities in different towns of Lithuania, which enrolled about 4,000 people. Participants of the Third Age University felt that it is the most democratic educational institution. Individual faculty listeners elect a Dean and combine training schedule. There is no entrance or final exams. Students receive a certificate of attendance of the

course. Often the participants attend some events with their families, and this is very important because it maintains generation communication. University of the Third Age in Lithuania belongs to the International Association of Universities of Third Age (Aiuta).

Learning in TAU is characterized by better social integration into society for elderly people, it promotes a productive and meaningful life maintaining their ability to work, physical activity, broadens their knowledge and culture. People can exchange experiences and maintain health. The University aims to help elderly people fulfill their potentially unfulfilled possibilities, to show that he or she is not excluded from the broader public circles, but on the contrary, that they are even more appreciated. Learning in TAU is based on human self-assessment, planning, reflection, reconstruction, and other methods determined by development of their competence, which takes place in any human activity and continues throughout life. Another objective of studies is to improve the rates of older people in the labour market. Training programs attempt to include as much as it is possible the application of modern information technology tools to listeners familiar with information technology capabilities. In this way, the Third Age University students acquire not only special competences in the curriculum subjects but also competences in the field of information technology. Third Age Universities enhance life quality for elder people in many ways, they raise social, cultural and physical comfort of their associates.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion it could be argued that non-formal adult education in Lithuania has expanded in coverage and diversity, it has received increasing attention in various political levels. The major functions of non-formal adult education are as follows: to provide knowledge and understanding necessary to adapt oneself to constant changes in the society, labour market, human life and assist adults in choosing education that best satisfies their needs and provides possibilities for choice. Lithuanian society based on continuous learning and knowledge has made the non-formal adult education a compulsory ingredient both in the society formation and in labour life. At the same time a process of constant change and lifelong learning contributes to the creation of modern permanently learning community. Non-governmental organizations exert a particular influence upon the development of non-formal adult education, as they are flexible, mobile and rapidly respond to the societal changes and have already become learning organizations in many cases.



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