

Demographics and Opportunity for Education of the Elderly: The Second Growth in the Third Age

Nataliya Chahrak

Precarpathian National Vasyl Stefanyk University,
Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine

The growing influence of demographic and social factors on people's lifestyle has caused the development of educational gerontology worldwide. The Longevity Revolution has changed the structure of life course and a new period emerged after a person's 50 – the Third Age – provides unexpected opportunities, challenges and perspectives for both individuals and communities. People are creatively redesigning their lives in the third age and moving in new direction with personal growth and renewal. In present days, the growing age group of elderly people needs to be ensured the adaptation to rapid economic and social change. For every country it is important to contribute to overcoming the problems of loneliness, "unnecessity", and social isolation of older adults. The author reports on significant findings from many prominent researchers that prove the importance of education in later life for successful adaptation of the elderly in society and their potential contribution to society. The author also analyses the demographics in Ukraine and describes the perspectives of education of the elderly. It is emphasized that lifelong learning programs can provide the opportunity for older people to become an integral part of human capital.

Key words: ageing, education of the elderly, people of the third age, University of the Third Age.

The ageing of the population worldwide can be considered as one of the heavy challenges for the 21st century – the era of old age. People are tending to live longer and more active lives than ever before, so elderly people should be brought into the active fraction of human capital. In such challenging situation the conception of lifelong education is becoming one of the most significant factors of the development of society.

The growing influence of demographic and social factors on the real picture of the world has led to the onrush of gerontological studies in education area. The Longevity Revolution has changed the structure of life course and a new period emerged after a person's 50 – the Third Age – provides unexpected opportunities, challenges and perspectives for both individuals and communities. People creatively redesigning their lives in the third age, making it a period of fulfillment: instead of following the decrement model of ageing their lives are moving in new direction with personal growth and renewal [13]. In this new stage people can realize their interests and hobbies; they can study and join programs for "third agers". Besides that, the growing age group of elderly people needs to be ensured the adaptation to rapid economic and social changes. For every country it is important to contribute to

overcoming the problems of loneliness, “unnecessity”, and social isolation of older adults. On the other hand, the society should help them to discover the potential for the second growth and provide a supportive community to facilitate human development and prospective contributions to society, state, and the future. Since education today is regarded to be a significant factor of the development of human potential and social progress, encouraging elderly people to learning activity should become one of the strategic directions of the state policy.

In case of Ukraine, the educational activity of the elderly is adopting rather slowly; modern legislative basis have not been worked out yet, and the opportunities of social partnership have not been used. In the situation of globalization and integration into the global economic, cultural, and educational space the outstanding achievements and experience of developed countries in the field of educational gerontology are of considerable interest among Ukrainian researchers and can be an important source of comprehensive understanding and creative use of their leading ideas.

The theoretical interpretation of the subject and sense of education for old age people has begun in the middle 70th of XX-th century. It was the first stage of educational gerontology which determined its main target: to instruct old age people how to help themselves during hard life periods, how to be an active member of community and still have a strong hold over their life (McClusky). Other interpretations of education of old/third age people emphasize on striving for independence: learning of the third agers is the process of self-development, self-realization and receiving some new experience (Groombridge); the activity that affords opportunity to control their own lives; the emancipation process, in some way, as old people will be able to cope with their problems themselves, shift for themselves, and to be inaccessible to another’s will (Phillipson) [1].

Recently, the craving for independence is supposed as a prevailing tendency in education of the third age people. On the one hand, this tendency arose on the bases of theoretical gerontology that declares individual’s activity; on the other hand, it was a result of social costs reduction in most countries. Independence under present-day conditions should be connected with an individual’s sustainable development.

Under present-day conditions the context for Lifelong Learning programs is changing, presenting us both opportunities and challenges that are new in human development. Reducing traditional age barriers and roles changes the view of maturity for systematic education.

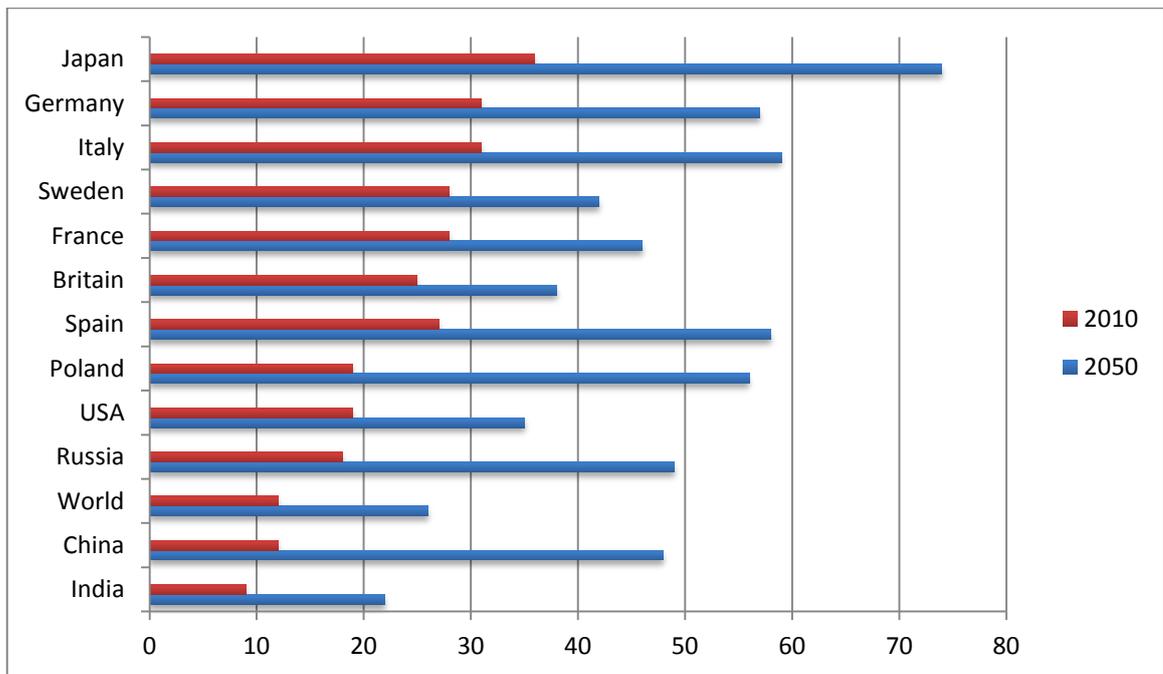
A change in the structure of life course has been emerging as a consequence of rising human life expectancy. And that rise is one of the most amazing facts in modern history (Sadler) [13].

According to UNO, the average life expectancy has increased about 30 years from 1950 and makes 68. People live the longest lives in Scandinavian countries and in Australia (over 80), West European countries, Japan, New Zealand, and Canada (over 78). In East European countries the average figure is 74, and in Ukraine – 69 [5].

Social, economic and cultural changes of the 20th century facilitated the rise of living standards, the improving of medical care that influenced upon significant increase of life expectancy. The increasing old-age population ratio occurs at the demographic level in many countries. The vital senility threshold (according to the demographers of UNO, it makes 7% of all 65-year old people and over, in comparison with the total population, or 12% of all 60-year old people and over, according to Polish demographer Rosset, 1959) was first overdrawn by France (1870), then Great Britain (1931), Germany (1937), the USA (1940), and Poland (1967) [17].

According to “The Economist”, continued increases in longevity will ensure that the old-age dependency ratio, which measures the number of elderly people as a share of those of working age, will rise sharply in most countries over the next 40 years, according to the European Commission. The chart below shows the biggest absolute increase will be in Japan, where the ratios of 35.1% in 2010, already the world’s highest, will more than double, to 73.8%, by 2050. At that point, the number of pensioners in China will be equivalent to 38.8% of its labour force, up from 11.6% in 2010. The European Union, which had 84.6m elderly people last year, will have 148.4m in 2050. And the ratio for the world as a whole will reach 25.4%, up from 11.7% in 2010 [12].

Chart 1. Old-age dependency ratios: number of people aged 65 and over as % of labor force aged 15-64), forecasts. (Source: Old-age dependency ratios // www.economist.com)



In case of Ukraine there are five factors regarded as those that have a significant influence upon the demographic situation in Ukraine: high rate of mortality; low birth rate; rapid ageing of the population; migration of youth; social policy decline [18].

There are sudden changes in reproductive potential. Some notable decline has occurred during the recent 10 years. By the year 2020 the old-age dependency ratio is expected to be 2:1. It is also prognosticated that the population size in Ukraine will be constantly decreasing. By 2050 it will have fallen to 34 857 000. At the same time the percentage of the people aged 65+ will have reached 25, 4%. Thus, the middle 21st century will prove to be a severe trial for the state in the provision of pension [18, p. 62].

In such crucial demographic trends in Ukraine the effective social policy should be proved and consistently embedded. Under the circumstances of ageing of the population the main purpose of national social policy consists in the combination of the demographic factors in conformity with the human capital. It seems that the political purposes should not be determined on the base of the quantitative parameters of population size; it is more rational to take into consideration the human resource to provide the best quality of life for all people. Under the circumstances of longevity revolution on the one hand, and ageing of the population on the other hand, education of the elderly is regarded as an integral component of this process.

The Longevity Revolution, which was experienced during the 20th century by most developed nations, has caused the change in the life course. According to W. Sadler, if we follow the usual decrement model of aging, the extra time could be spent experiencing decline, degeneration, disabilities, disease, and dependency that have defined usual aging up until now. People positively changing their lives after

fifty are pushing scientists to redefine the second half of life and aging [13]. In many researches on social gerontology a Four Age Framework is used to interpret the life course:

- The First Age – a time for growing up, Preparation.
- The Second Age – a time to establish ourselves, Achievement.
- The Third Age – a time to change course, Fulfillment.
- The Four Age – a time for integration, Completion [13].

Weiss and Bass (2002) suggest a working definition of the third age: “The life phase in which there is no longer employment and childraising to commandeer time, and before morbidity enters to limit activity and mortality brings everything to a close, has been called the third age. Those in this phase of life have passed through a first age of youth when they prepared for the activities of maturity, and a second age of maturity, when their lives were given over to those activities, and have reached a third age in which they can, within fairly wide limits, live their lives as they please, before being overtaken by a fourth age of decline” [16, p. 3].

Being a uniquely modern phenomenon the third age (from 50 to 75 years) is understood through the complex of interrelationships between the changing nature of social class, the lived experiences of the pre-baby boomer cohort of generation, and the changing nature of community and social relations (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005) [4]. The obvious problem with the term is that it relates to macro social conditions that affect different people in dramatically different ways (Hodkinson, Ford..., 2008) [7, p.169].

P. Laslett argued that the third age was not a time period but a type of quality of life [7, p.170]. People in their 50s are changing course to move towards new life peaks. This new trajectory in their life course is often called second growth, a process of renewal that transforms aging in the Third Age – a season in search of purpose, an era for extended self-realization (Freedman) [2]. A. Sadler has defined the second growth as a process of renewal that transforms ageing in the Third Age – an era of fulfillment. It begins as people start asking probing existential questions. He has also determined six principles of the second growth:

- reflection and risk taking;
- realistic optimism;
- building a positive Third Age Identity;
- redefining/balancing work and play;
- expanding freedom, deepening intimacy;
- enlarging your capacity to care [13].

These principles constitute a heuristically valuable strategy for enhancing personal skills in the creative process of second growth in a new Third Age.

The research on educational gerontology has revealed the strong links between an individual's well-being and learning activity during the third age, "... healthy active people who continue their intellectual interests as they grow older tend to maintain and even increase, various dimensions of cognitive functioning" [11, p. 115].

R. Swindell accepts this statement but argues that although a cause-effect relationship between intellectual challenge in later life and an individual's ability to continue to function effectively may remain difficult to establish, the empowering nature of education provides a convincing rationale for increasing the range of opportunities for older people [14, p. 430]. Thus, education is considered as a significant part of social adaptation of the elderly. A socially adopted person being on a pension is a socially active person who acts under his/her own steam, who leads his/her life, making full use of his/her personal and professional experience and intellectual potential.

Many prominent researches believe that how people age is determined not so much by their genes but by the way they live that includes an opportunity for second growth, and is closely associated with lifelong learning. The third age presents us with new possibilities in the life course which are of great importance to both individuals and society, stimulating the lifelong learning programs. According to D. Garvin, people, whose lives illustrate growth, have been committed learners. They have been learning more about themselves, about opportunities and challenges, exploring new areas, and gaining new skills [3]. Their learning has not been just mental stimulation with an accumulation of information. Strategic learning includes gathering information, interpreting it, and then applying learning to new behaviors – the way they work and live [13].

B. Groombridge states, that the importance of education in later life is recognized by both individuals and society through these major reasons:

- education can foster the self-reliance and independence of the elderly;
- education is a major factor in enabling older people to cope with practical and psychological problems in a complex, changing and fractured world;
- education for and by older people enhances their potential to contribute to society;
- education encourages the elderly to communicate their experiences to each other and to other generation, fostering balance, perspective and understanding which is valuable in a rapidly changing world of conflict;
- education is crucial for many older people's self-actualization and for lifelong learning [6].

Thus, the main role of education of elderly people is to delay or minimize dependence by the rapidly growing older population, on the public purse. The importance of lifelong learning is seen not only in acquiring further knowledge, but in communication, critical comparison, and personal experience. People who have an opportunity to learn in later life are more likely to be able to retain their independence than those whose options are limited.

Learning may be defined as “any more or less permanent change in behavior resulting from experience” (D. James). D. James distinguishes two main categories of learning process in later life:

- extension or exploratory learning through which individuals acquire new skills, develop new interests, increase understanding and broaden horizons;
- reinforcement or consolidatory learning through which individuals revisit and confirm experiences and ideas with which they feel comfortable, re-affirm their position in the world particularly after some major change or challenge in their lives [8].

Recent research has revealed that the most successful and effective educational program for older people is the University of the Third Age (UTA). It provides opportunities for the elderly to enjoy a wide range of activities associated with well-being in later life. On the other hand, UTA provides a host of examples of individuals who initially are looking for some mutually supportive group of like-minded people with whom to interact informally [8]. It may be defined that UTA is a growing phenomenon which reflects the demographic trend of more people living longer, healthier lives. Two distinctly approaches to UTA (specified by R. Swindell and J. Thompson) were successfully adopted by a number of countries: the French model, based on the first U3A funded by professor Pierre Vella in 1973 in Toulouse, they offer mostly formal courses; and the British model arising in Cambridge in 1981, emphasizes informal, autonomous self-help groups in which the instructors are usually third-agers themselves, not college professors [9].

In present days five types/models of UTAs (identified by J.-L. Levesque in 2005) are recognized worldwide.

1. *West European model, or “Vellas”*, which is closely linked to a host university; the U3As are affiliated with colleges and universities. The learning programs are realized by lectures or group-studies and are held by staff professors of the university, former professors or visiting professors who are experts in the field of knowledge. The third age students do not participate in curricula designing and choosing lecture subjects, they are just invited to attend classes organized by the institution.

2. *Anglo-Saxon model*, designed by P. Lasslett and E. Midwinter according to two main principles:
 - The principle of the third age: U3As are opened for all people in their post-professional and post-family period of life; the third age students are also expected to popularize the importance of lifelong education and positive aspects of learning in the third age.
 - The principle of learning self-organizing: the universities offer informal courses in self-help groups in which the instructors are usually third age students themselves, tutors and geragogs, without traditional distinctions between teachers and learners. Students are active participants of education process. The third-agers' wishes are the only criteria of what to learn and how to make progress [10].
3. *French-Language North American model* is linked to a university to a certain extent and it is a combination of two previous models. The lectures are held by staff professors of the university, former professors or visiting professors. The most popular forms of learning are practices, group discussions and debates, workshops, and excursions. Students participate in curricula designing, choosing lecturers and experts, and planning of their activities. The university management is realized by both the university administration and the students association.
4. *South American model* is very close to West European one but it is characterized by two features: the relation to a host university is required, and the concern for education of the third age people, including low-income groups, is a responsibility of all people who live in the country.
5. *Chinese model* offers various forms of education – from some basic instructions to a high-level professional training. The emphases are made upon the civic rights, cultural consolidation (knowledge, traditional arts, philosophy), and healthy life-style [14, p. 429].

In recent years the differences between the university-led academic model and the independent self-help model are no longer as distinct as they once were. Over the years, the European UTAs have developed inter-generational membership, a wider range of activities, and members themselves have more opportunities to plan and manage their activities at UTAs.

The opportunities for gaining extra competence by people of the third age and developing their motivation for learning activity can be guaranteed by both civic society institutions and private educational sector. Both international knowledge and special features of national gerontological education should be taken into

consideration to create the right educational conceptions and models of learning in retirement.

The development of UTAs in Ukraine has just started. It would be a good idea to extend their activity in every region of the country. We interviewed 350 people of the third age in Ivano-Frankivsk region, Ukraine, for the purpose of finding out the approach and content of education in retirement. 56% of the interviewees are people with higher education, 38% have vocational education, and 6% - people with general secondary education. According to the interview, 54% of old age people feel themselves as socially isolated; the opportunity for education is accepted by 72% of older people. The areas of science they are most interested in were specified as: medicine basis and healthy life-style (32%); information technology (18%); law basis and social legislative (17%); psychology (12%); foreign languages (9%); gardening (7%); history, art, and religion (3%); other (4%).

Among old-agers' motivations to learn the following were mentioned: raising their social activity (42%); communication (37%); broadening of their outlook (16%); continuing their labor activity (5%).

As it is seen from the results, most of the people of the old age consider education as an opportunity for growth and adaptation in society, communication and social activity. Since older people adaptation is realized harder under present-day conditions of social-economic and technical development, we can consider education as a successful adopting and developing mechanism, which is mutually advantageous and helpful for both the individuals and the society. It helps the old age generation of people to save themselves from social isolation and turn themselves for socially active and creative members of society.

In conclusion, we can state that active longevity of old age people is stimulated by many factors. The individual growth as a sociable, active and creative personality can be considered as the essential pre-condition for the life quality of elderly people. And education is of a primary importance in this process because it can enable the conscious self-regulation of the lifestyle and life activity of old age people.

In both developed and developing countries elderly people are not of great value in the modern society. In other words, people of the old age are suffering from depreciation and isolation. This fact reflects some negative stereotypes of elderly people among the people of young generation. But for the last 15-20 years some significant changes have taken place in most developed countries, which have principally influenced the system of social welfare of old age people, state social policy, and changing of the deep-seated attitude to old-agers.

In order to develop the theoretical and practical experience of educational gerontology in Ukraine it is necessary to encourage the activity of Universities of the

Third Age, clubs for older people, institutions of guardianship, universities and colleges, scientific and social associations. The analysis and implementation of international theory and practice of international gerontological science can enable the adaptation and re-adaptation of old age people in Ukraine. These should be considered as an absolutely essential precondition for the sustainable development of democratic society.

References:

1. Azarina M. Universities of the Third Age in Russia and in Poland: commons and differences // *Rocznik Instytutu Polsko-Rosyjskiego*. – 2012. – Nr. 1 (2). – P.147-157.
2. Freedman M. *Prime Time*. – New York: Public Affairs/ Perseus, 1999.
3. Garvin D. *Learning in Action*. – Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000.
4. Gilleard C., Higgs P. *Context of ageing: Class, cohort and community*. – Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005.
5. Global Sherpa: Internationalisation, Global Development and World Rankings from a Positive, Comparative Perspective, <http://globalsherpa.org/global-development-and-world-rankings/>
6. Groombridge B. Learning, education and later life // *Adult Education*. – 1982. – No. 54. P. 314-325.
7. Hodkinson P., Ford G., Hodkinson H., Hawthorn R. Retirement as a learning process // *Educational Gerontology*. – 2008. – No. 34. – P. 167-184.
8. James D. *Living and Learning. Exploring our Biological Roots: Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture 2008* – AEA and David James, <http://www.aea.org>
9. Kerka S. *Universities of the Third Age: Learning in Retirement* // *Trends and Issues Alert*. – 1999. – No. 2.
10. Lasslett P. *Das Dritte Alter. Historische Soziologie des Alterns*. – Weinheim, 1995.
11. MacNeil R., Teague M. *Ageing and leisure: Vitality in later life*. – New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1987.
12. Old-age dependency ratios, <http://www.economist.com>
13. Sadler W. *Changing life options: uncovering the reaches of the third age*, <http://thirdagecenter.com/Changinglifeoptions.pdf>.
14. Swindell R. An International Prospective on the Third Age / R. Swindell, J. Thompson // *Educational Gerontology*. – 1995. – No.21 (5). P. 429-447.
15. Treas J. *Older Americans in the 1990s and beyond* // *Population Bulletin*. – Washington, D.C., 1995. – No. 2.
16. Weiss R., Bass S. *Challenges of the third age: Meaning and purpose in later life*. – Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002.
17. Зых А. (Zych A.). Непрерывное образование в контексте геронтологической теории. Развитие и главные идеи педагогики старения и старости, <http://lifelongeducation.ru/index.php/ru/literatura>
18. Пирожков С. (Pirozhkov S.). Демографічний розвиток України: сучасне та майбутнє // *Вісн. НАН України*. – 2006. – № 1. – С. 59-64.