

In recent decades pressure on development of *Lifelong Learning* is growing. Among others, importance of adult education is raising, especially in case of high-skilled employees in economy based on knowledge.

The necessity of continuous improvement of competence is the aftermath of unprecedented pace of information "aging" and also changes taking place in the labor market. The dominance of the linear career model is gradually weakening in favour of horizontal model and the need for a new type of worker, "the worker of knowledge" who sees the need for continuous improvement and flexibly, responds to the need for retraining that occurs in the course of his/her career.

Lifelong education, also due to the observed demographic processes, has grown into one of the strategic challenges in the field of European education and was entered in the account of priorities for the European Higher Education Area. The fact that the idea of lifelong learning permanently occupied an important place in the development strategy of the EHEA, as a consequence also means its implementation at the level of the policies of individual countries. The postulate on the implementation of systemic support for the idea of lifelong learning will be found, among others, in ministerial Development Programme for Higher Education up to the year 2030. It indicates clearly the need to adapt the education system to widening the circle of potential recipients - people of different ages, with different motivations and needs - by extending and diversifying the educational offer and the development of appropriate organizational structures aimed at implementing various forms of adult education.

Unfortunately, it is still one of the areas in which Poland is left behind in comparison to the most developed countries in the world. In terms of the percentage of adults participating in various forms of education, our country ranks at the end of Europe - is twice lower than the European average. Studies also show that the participation in these forms of education is characterized by high selectivity, among others, because of their age.

Society and the economy of knowledge undoubtedly need "new" higher education, in which an important place will be occupied by an area of lifelong education. Are higher education institutions in Poland ready for it, to respond to this challenge? The project will attempt to answer this question based on: a) the recognition that a place in the strategies of Polish university education is lifelong and b) verify the implementation of these strategies pursued by universities educational practice on the example of post-graduate studies. The key for choosing this form of education is the fact that the market for post-graduate studies in Poland was growing very rapidly. Only in the last 10 years the number of graduates of this type of studies has exceeded 1.5 million, which represents nearly 10% of the professionally active Poles.

The question posed is the question about the maturity of higher education institutions in order to develop in that field, in widely understood area of quality of education, and finally - the question of the role that different types of universities want (and using available and already used tools are able) to play in this area. A qualitative study of the comparative character covers twelve institutions representing key segments of higher education. Their strategies will be the subject of research. It can be expected that the analysis carried out will answer the question as to which of separate categories of institutions are prone to the annexation of adult education market (and due to what factors).

It is impossible to consider this issue without taking into account the huge changes (both quantitative and qualitative), which have taken place in the last twenty-five years in the area of higher education in Poland. In the context of the research, differences in institutions within the higher education system will be especially important, which is the aftermath of the Higher Education Act introduced in 1990.