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Participation in society is needed to both individuals and society. Isolated and excluded people do not fulfil their basic human needs and opportunities. Without the participation of individuals, meaningful common goals in society cannot be designed and realized, and it becomes impossible to balance the interests and define basic common values. A society in which some social groups are excluded lacks its constituent parts.

The areas often overlap: social engagement, social connectedness, social capital, social support, social network, social integration, and community involvement have sometimes been used interchangeably with social participation (Levasseur, M., Richard, L., Gauvin, L., & Raymond, É., 2010). Also, social participation can be understood in the narrow and broad sense. In the narrow sense, social participation is just one of the participations in addition to the political, cultural, labour participation. In a broader sense, it is a term that encompasses all of these forms of participation in political life, in cultural activities and in paid and unpaid work. The intertwining and interdependence of participation in various activities as well as the basic characteristics of these activities suggest that it is preferable to use a broader definition.

Participation has two basic assumptions: social interaction and the presence of others. These dimensions are especially interesting to those professionals who deal with marginalized or disadvantaged social groups. This applies to people with disabilities, the poor, the long-term unemployed, and the like. There is a special interest in participation of older persons in society. The concept of active aging assumes that older persons are active, and activity involves participation in various social activities.

Agenda for active ageing in the European Union is set by the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012 (EY2012). The EY2012 aimed at raising awareness of population ageing and positive solutions to address the challenges it brings, including the participation of older persons. It is a process of mainstreaming of active ageing policy.

At the global level, key changes were determined by United Nation's Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA 2002). They were implemented by European commission and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) through the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) in Europe. The Vienna Ministerial Declaration in September 2012 outlines four priority goals for the UNECE countries to be reached by the end of the third cycle (2017) of MIPAA/RIS implementation. As key activities, the Declaration states promoting, encouraging and enhancing longer working lives; participation, non-discrimination and social inclusion of older persons; dignity, health and

independence in older age, and intergenerational solidarity. According to EC and UNECE, active ageing "... as a policy discourse, based on making use of the potential of older people, goes hand in hand with a social investment approach. Social investment is centred on the idea that activating social policies can yield high economic and social return."(2013).

One of the ways of active ageing monitoring is Active Ageing Index (AAI), which was launched at the end of EY2012. „The Active Ageing Index is a new analytical tool that aims to help policy makers in developing policies for active and healthy ageing. Its aim is to point to the untapped potential of older people for more active participation in employment, in social life and for independent living“(UNECE 2013). To reflect the multidimensional concept of ageing, the AAI is constructed from four different domains. Each domain presents a different aspect of active and healthy ageing. The first domain is employment (employment rate from 55-74). The second domain includes voluntary activities, care to children and grandchildren, care to older adults, political participation. Older citizens can share with younger generation their political experience about different types of political participation, about their socio-economic experience and social engagement as well (Goerres, Achim (2009). Third is independent, secure, and healthy living. It is very important that this index includes capacities for actively age (use of ICT, educational activities, social connectedness).

These documents and new policy discourse show that active ageing, as an important part of Europe's strategy, cannot be understood without the participation of the elderly in society. In these documents the normative concept of active ageing is clearly visible: what should be done to activate the elderly people in society? This participation has many dimensions in real life. The first one relates to the participants of participation: who participates and who is cooperating in the process. Although this is a group of elderly people, participation is always an individual process of each person with his/her motives, abilities and interests. In a similar way, participation can also be analysed as inclusion and activity of groups or collaboration with other individuals. Such participation may have a formal or informal character.

<The areas in which participation occurs are very diverse. They can include information about the activities of others. The presence of others does not necessarily mean a total social interaction, as Bob Dylan uttered with the words "Standing next to me in this lonely crowd / Is a man who swears he's not to blame"(I Shall be Released). Simple contacts with neighbours are more significant form of participation, especially in district contacts. Small talks (e.g. when walking the dog) are important for strengthening mutual trust and

cohesion of the neighbourhood. A higher level of participation is participation in joint informal activities in which there is a common goal. A step further is when it involves the organized participation and formal membership. That could be different forms of participation in helping other people, religious organizations, political organizations, and the like.

There are different areas where such activities are possible: paid or unpaid work, voluntary activities, community activities, leisure activities, cultural and sport activities, daily activities and social roles (e.g. in family life). These activities can be carried out at different levels in the family, neighbourhood, local community, on a national, regional, European or global level. Mobility is often an obstacle to the participation of older persons in society, but the new transport possibilities and the development of ICT tools does not retain participation solely on the immediate social environment, and spatial distance is no longer an obstacle as in previous periods.

What are the benefits of these activities for the individual, and what are the benefits to society? Participation preserves and develops the capabilities of the individual (Sen, 2001). It encourages the ability to transform resources into valuable activities, giving them rise to happiness. These capabilities are important for the society because they involve concern for the distribution of opportunities within society. According to Martha Nussbaum it is a form of the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, or to participate in political activities. Affiliation is one of the central capabilities. „Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. Having the social basis of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species.“ (Nussbaum, 2011: 34).

A number of studies have shown that participation is important for the self-esteem of the individual, his mental and physical health, meaningful life, wellbeing and happiness. On the other hand, without the participation of individuals it is not possible to develop civil and political life. Excluded, isolated and passive citizens cannot be European citizens that will create sustainable development at local, national, regional or European level. Capabilities must be continuously developed and strengthened, and knowledge and experience of older people are very useful in this process of learning. They can acquire new knowledge, but they can also use their knowledge and experience to help other community members.

## Literature:

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