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EDUCATING SENIORS, CONDITIONS FOR SENIOR EDUCATION IN POLAND¹

Learning in old age – from education practice to the interest in the phenomenon

The groundbreaking moment when a change occurred in the perception of seniors as potential participants of educational processes was probably the establishment of the first university of the third age. This symbolic event in 1973 not only initiated a serious educational movement which led to the greater involvement of the most emancipated seniors in academic education, but also provoked a reflection on the place of seniors in lifelong learning. Since 1975, after the first university of the third age of H. Szwarc, new facilities were founded in order to reflect the biggest growth dynamics within the first ten years of the twenty-first century; these facilities numbered 400 units. Along with practice, Polish scientists were developing scientific awareness concerning the senior learning process, institutions that support such activity, the role of the teacher in shaping seniors, and other conditions relating to the educational activity of seniors. The greatest interest in gerontology in scientific activity by Polish seniors may be observed only in this century and this involvement has been growing constantly.

In 1974, the Polish Gerontology Association was founded – the first association that unites specialists in the matters of sociology, demography, psychology, medicine, and economics. Up until now, the main branches of interest for members of the association have been: medicine, economy, and demography. The association of larger social and humanistic provenance is the Social Gerontology Association, founded in 2011. The SGS's main area of interest is the learning processes of seniors, care for seniors, and their support. Both associations included in their statutory goals the extension of knowledge

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about ageing and old age, finding – through research – the specifics of how old people function in family conditions, and also the application of new solutions to support old people. Another significant function is also gerontology environment integration.

Both educational practice with seniors, and the data from research on senior learning indicate that “seniors learn differently from young people and learning in the senior age is not so much possible as necessary in order to keep mental fitness until the late age. Thus, the problem of senior education in the perspective of change should be considered, and not the limitation or withdrawal from education. It is worth underlining that educational activities dedicated to seniors may be employed more effectively if the seniors are prepared for old age during the course of their education. This means that they will be characterized by an open approach towards educational activities, will be aware of the level of lifelong learning, and every educational undertaking will be another in a sequence, never the last initiative. They will be methodologically prepared for self-education and self-nurturing. Thus, preparation for the active attitude of seniors towards education will depend not only on the reality in which they remain but also on the past – on their own educational biography” (Fabiś 2005, pp. 153–154). Learning during old age means being inspired by one’s surroundings, being with other people and by one’s self, and learning during everyday situations through participation in various events, both those created and those already extant. Learning during old age will mainly take a non-formal character; nevertheless, the large involvement of seniors in institutional education highlights the important role of non-formal education. According to O. Czerniawska: “The educational aspects of the quality of life are based on the acceptance of the re-interpretation of one’s own experiences and past, searching for forgotten and underappreciated values and re-living them for self-development, for a better life in the present, for the acceptance of changes to one’s own persona through maturation up until today, tomorrow, through the constant projecting of one’s own life, perceiving perspectives in the future, even if the perspective concerns tomorrow, a week from now, a month” (2000, p. 178).

It is widely known that the education of seniors not only alleviates the decrease in cognitive abilities and mental condition that would otherwise be experienced, but also contributes to human development in many areas. From the perspective of personal development, learning becomes a key developmental tool, and helps to improve the quality of life. According to Czerniawska: “Learning does not mean only participation in organized forms of education but it also means becoming aware of educational situations in life and through life, it means opening to one’s self, to others, and to the world. Learning becomes a way of life, a style. This style is the art of expressing thoughts and one’s self” (1997, p.17). From the perspective of social development, learning during old age provides a person with certain competences for taking action in family, social, medical, political, and local areas, and makes it possible to understand others, to communicate with others, to work together, and to support.

Educational activity is crucial in order to “once again determine (or maintain) one’s own social identity” (Wawrzyniak 2009, p. 260).

Polish educational policy concerning older people

The Polish Ministry of National Education and Sport does not reach seniors; even the broadly understood senior education is of only a little interest for this institution. The priority task is currently to apply reforms in primary, lower secondary, and secondary education. The subject of these changes and discussions are: lowering the school age, the reading canon, the forms and content of tests, the parameterization of schools, and professional promotion for teachers. Systemic solutions are currently being awaited by the education profession. It could also be said that modern Polish education policy is not a steady concept, is not created through the setting of long-term goals, results have to be visible in the near future and are superficial and are more of a political and propaganda character than actual content. This explains the short-term but spectacular system changes that in a slight way increase the quality of teaching or reinforce the educational role of school, which would be much more expected.

In the world of economics, roughly 10% of adults are still in some form of education; however, there is no accurate data source on the forms of post-school activity for other adults and for seniors. In Poland, research connected with the education of adults, organized by the Central Office of Statistics, are based on the population between 25 and 64 years of age. Therefore, it is unusual to encounter representative data that characterizes the learning process of seniors in Poland. Non-formal education is in crisis, and this is connected with the limited sources for the maintenance or development of educational-cultural institutions, and potential adult education managers, including older people. Many facilities were shut down in the last few years. Some of the remaining facilities effectively gain funds by using subventions from the state and union. Formal education areas are represented by very few schools for adults. Non-formal education (and some of more formal character) is covered mainly by schools, vocational training institutions, and non-public schools, coaching companies, continuing education centers, foundations, associations, and religious communities. Continuing education centers and practical education centers function very successfully by managing schools for adults at every level, with training, professional, and qualification courses, overall professional lectures aimed at gaining certain competences. At the same time, these institutions extend one’s sphere of knowledge and culture through publishing offers, the organization of conferences, exhibitions, and conducting open lectures. Non-public managers for the education of adults operate in the commercial market, acquire union, national, and self-government funds, and also gain funds directly from their clients. This allows them to constantly extend their educational offers and adjust them to the needs or priorities of their clients. In the last few years, the priority group of education receivers, organized

with union or self-government funds, are people on the edge of old age and in the so-called third age.

In Poland, problems associated with ageing and old age are handled by The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. It assigns non-governmental institutions for direct activity for the benefit of seniors. The most recent initiative was *The Government Program for Senior Citizens Social Activity for the years 2012–2013*. According to the Ministry website, the program assumed the disposition of 60 billion PLN for activities supporting the activation of seniors, mainly through education, although the goal was described as “the improvement in the quality of life of seniors with dignified ageing through social activity”. However, the priority, which is the education of seniors, becomes apparent in the first two detailed goals:

“Detailed goal no 1. Increase of variety and improvement in the quality of educational programs for older people:

- Creating programs that meet the problems of people who find themselves in unfavourable conditions;
- The promotion of new solutions to motivate seniors to learn in order to stay active, including seniors who find themselves in unfavourable conditions;
- Creating conditions for improving educational-cultural programs.

Detailed goal no. 2. Creating conditions for intra- and intergenerational integration of seniors with the use of existing social infrastructure, among others: extending knowledge on the biological, medical, and social changes that take place with age in order to prepare society for old age” (ibid, pp. 20–21).

A significant undertaking was the assignment on August 16, 2012 of the Senior Policy Department, which was responsible for “creating and developing ways to work for the benefit of seniors, the realization of tasks in the matter of active ageing and other forms of intra- and intergenerational co-operation with seniors, and monitoring the applied solutions. The department also co-operated with organizations and institutions which dedicate their actions to seniors, including international co-operation in the matter of active ageing” (Senior Policy Department MPiPS, 2014), organizing conferences, debates, and competitions connected with the educational activity of seniors.

Another organ assigned in the framework of Senior Social Activity in order to create senior policy was the Senior Policy Counsel. It united representatives of the Ministries, the central organs of public administration, representatives of territorial government units and the third sector, and is accompanied by invited experts. The head of the counsel is doctor Prof. B. Samoliński, PhD. Eng.

Currently in Poland, apart from those projects chosen for realization through competition and individually, there are also some system projects financed by the European Union. The addressees of some of these projects are people over 50 years of age. System projects are one of the formulas for the realization of the tasks included in the Human

Capital Operation Program (POKL). Unlike competition projects, system projects directly realize developmental tasks of the state or given region described in strategic documents, such as *National Development Strategy 2007–2015*, *Social Policy Strategy 2007–2013*, or *Education Development Strategy 2007–2013*. Among the projects directed at people over 50, special attention should be paid to the system projects by MPiPS (handled by the Human Resources Development Center) and the Polish Business Development Agency, including projects: Age as an advantage – training for businessmen; and Active Pensioner and equal chance in the labor market 50+. They supplement the national *Solidarity of Generations* program, which assumes activities aimed at encouraging businessmen to hire people between 45 and 50 years of age and over, and improving the qualifications and work performance of those people (Lt. Cupruś 2012).

Among the results of the POKL program for people over 50 years of age, one can distinguish: “Most participants who are between 50 and 64 years of age gained supporting Priority VI *Labor market open for everyone* – 77 thousand unemployed people were trained, received professional advice, and received psychological-advisory support. Some costs of salaries were refunded by employers (via the so-called employment subsidy) and grants and loans were given for the establishment of business activity.

- 10.4 thousand people who belong to the 50+ group were granted donations for starting their own businesses, which is 8% of all subsidies (...).
- Every second person in the age range of 50–64, registered as unemployed or looking for work, found a job, and every fourth started a business within 6 months of their participation in the project.
- 2 years after their participation in the projects financed by POKL, 91% of people of this age who were working at the time of taking part in the project, still worked – 75% of whom work for the same employer.
- Nearly 50 thousand people in the age range of 55–64 who were at threat of social exclusion, used the social service which supports overcoming individual barriers in returning to the labor market, the service of educational, health and social character and support the mobility of seniors in the labor market, offered in Priority VII *Social Integration Promotion*. 68.3 thousand working adults of age 50 and over took part in training sessions to improve their skills and knowledge, as well as to help them to keep their job in those cases where their job had been at risk through corporate restructuring or bankruptcy (Priority VII *Regional economy staff*). Support of a similar character is also given for Priority II *Development of human resources and adaptation potential of enterprise and health improvement of workers*, where 38.5 thousand working people in the age range of 50–64 used the help available’ (Job for people over 50 by courtesy of European Funds, 2012 pp. 1–2).

Other programs in terms of non-formal education in the Polish education market that are dedicated to seniors were founded *as the initiative of non-government institu-*

tions, which acquire independent funds for activity, either living off member fees or were of a fully-commercial character. An enormous role in local environments is taken by libraries, cultural centers, universities and schools, churches, associations and funds, and local authority units. These institutions, apart from their key tasks, are also dedicated to educating seniors. They establish universities of the third age and senior clubs, although less formalized facilities are also found, such as discussion clubs, and short-term initiatives, which are a result of acquiring financial resources or the completion of a particular goal. One worth mentioning is Słupsk Academy, which since 2012/3012, has organized full, three year first degree studies in the area of regional history, directed at people over 50 years of age. It is an innovative idea, whose results will be observed only after the undertaking has ended. However, there are many undertakings in the education market that support senior education.

Adult education institutions

Among the institutions which are most devoted to adult education, the universities of the third age are dominant. Their number is constantly growing and currently they number almost 400. They help to meet the educational and social needs of the most mobile and independent Polish senior citizens. However, other institutions should be mentioned whose programs reach people in their place of abode, supporting senior development at the limits of educational activity through care and animation-therapeutic activity. These are senior clubs – which are often founded as an initiative of the people concerned as successful educational facilities and also sections in cultural centers, country wives associations, libraries, bands near churches, day care houses, clubs, and many more.

Universities of the Third Age

Non-formal education includes many forms of education, training, and general and professional improvement, realized by various associations: institutions, organizations, and public and natural bodies. UTWs, as institutions devoted to education, do not work in line with the character of continuous education facilities. This is connected with the need to follow the principles laid out by the Ministry of Education which states that the education manager should provide: a curriculum, didactic staff with the professional qualifications necessary for the proper realization of the educational process, a facility provided with the proper equipment and didactic help to support correct learning, internal supervision in order to improve the quality of education, and the organizational and technical conditions for the full participation of disabled people in education (cf. Suchy 2010, pp. 15–16). UTWs fulfill some of the requirements; however, the points referring to didactic qualifications are especially important, since some people who decide to work with seniors do not have qualifications relevant to adult education. Moreover, lectures conducted at UTW are not subject to any control, so it is difficult to objectively evaluate their quality.

According to a *Zoom on UTW* report, the university of the third age is the most common institution that educates older people. Most facilities were founded in the new millennium and their number has been growing constantly. In 2012 it was estimated that there were 372 facilities in Poland (*Zoom on UTW*, 2012); however, determining the exact number is not possible due to the various initiatives to establish new universities and the lack of formal frameworks for this type of institution. Thus, many undertakings may be considered universities of the third age, although the educational activity itself does not have to be formally set and has very little in common with the traditional understanding of a UTW. Unlike other system solutions, e.g. that in the Czech Republic, no staff minimum is required: they do not have to be connected with the university and they do not have to fulfill any other demands in order to declare the educational undertaking of a university of the third age. Thus, UTWs are found in common rooms, parishes or senior clubs without having fulfilled any formal demands.

Universities for seniors are mainly found in cities; only every tenth facility is located in the country. More than half of UTWs are independent associations or foundations or operate within this form. Every fifth university for seniors operates under the auspices of a higher school, most often non-public. The remainder operate under self-government institutions or in another organizational form.

Their main goal is to support the development of seniors through attending to their intellectual and physical ability: learning, developing interests and skills, and participation in cultural and recreational events. UTWs are also places to spend free time. According to the principles of the first French UTW, Polish universities also direct their activity to gerontology prevention, the promotion of a healthy life style, sports and tourism, and to creating possibilities for establishing and maintaining social relationships.

In 2011/2012, 90 thousand students attended Polish UTWs. According to research conducted in Silesia, among the 65+ age group, 4% used the offer of UTW (*Seniors in Silesia*, p. 103). However, people in their post-productive age (up till now: men 65+, women 60+, currently the same retirement age – 67) are not the only members of UTW communities. When analyzing the evolution of universities for seniors in Poland, G. Orzechowska (2008, pp. 137–144) indicates a few crucial directions of change. First and foremost, the characteristics of senior education have changed. Apart from the noticeable increase in their number, the age structure has also changed. More young people attend (less than 60 years of age): those who retired early or are partially professionally active. This varied age structure is sometimes the cause of problems in the university community, connected with the preparation of the way of working, development of the concept, and the creation of new solutions. The average number of university students is 230; however, every tenth UTW prepares programs for 500 participants and these are most often universities near academic schools, which have their divisions in other cities. One example is the University Of the Third Age in Katowice under the auspices of the Silesian Universities with departments in Sosnowiec and Jastrzębie-Zdrój. Changes have

also occurred in the matter of the educational level of UTW students. Although most often universities for seniors have no criteria connected with the educational level of the candidates, this type of institution particularly attracts better educated people. Currently the percentage of people with higher education is growing and they outnumber those with only a secondary education. In the example of the facility in Lublin, Orzechowska highlights the growth of students with higher education from 26.3% in 1985/1986 to 54.8% in the academic year 2004/2005 (2013, p. 141).

Most UTWs have more than one source of financing. But three quarters of facilities collect fees, of which two thirds are supported by regular fees from students (Zoom on UTW, p. 34). New facilities, before looking for financial support from outside sources, most often rely on the goodwill of their lecturers, who do not receive compensation. This is the case with the Upper-Silesian Higher Pedagogy School of Myslowice and the Senior Academy under the auspices of the Higher Administration School of Bielsko-Biała.

The content of the lectures varies greatly. The typical lectures are most often a set of presentations and only some UTWs plan their lectures according to cycles. However, lectures which meet the interest of seniors – namely medicine, history, tourism, geography, and those that meet their spiritual needs – literature, culture and religion, are all dominant.

Table 1. Thematic range of lectures carried in the academic year 2011–2012 in Polish UTWs

Medicine/Health	88%
History	70%
Tourism/geography	69%
Literature	67%
Culture/Religion	66%
Psychology/psychoeducation	63%
Local tradition (including local history and culture)	59%
Economy	52%
History of Art	50%
Law	48%
Natural sciences (astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics)	47%
Philosophy	40%
Sociology/Society	40%
Music	39%

Computer/Information	36%
Politology/Politics	34%
Theater	29%
Film	23%
Fashion and beauty	23%
Sport	19%
Preparing for retirement/late old age	17%
Engineering	7%
Other	15%

Source: Zoom na UTW, 2012.

When analyzing the lectures topics over the years, one can observe that there has been a decrease in interest in medicine and religion and an increasing interest in geography, tourism and foreign cultures (Orzechowska 2008). The data shown in Table 16 seems to confirm the growth of interest noted by Orzechowska; however, the decrease of interest in medicine is doubtful – the data do not confirm this. Additional lectures most often chosen by UTW are usually connected with three areas: computers, language courses, and sports activities. Lectures connected with art (painting, dancing) and hand-crafts are also popular. Furthermore, seniors enjoy tourism and recreation.

Table 2. Lectures offered to UTW students in the academic year 2011/2012

Computer classes	88%
Language courses/lectures	87%
Sports activities	85%
Art classes (e.g. drawing, painting)	65%
Tourism lectures and sections	63%
Dancing courses/classes	56%
Handicrafts (e.g. embroidery, pottery, decoupage)	52%
Music lessons and bands (e.g. choirs, folk band, instrument classes)	44%
Literature classes (including reading clubs)	36%
Photography classes	35%
Theater/cabaret classes and groups	33%
Social games clubs (e.g. bridge, chess)	31%

Psychological-therapeutic classes/psychoeducation/personal development	29%
Lessons concerning memory training	25%
History/Local history	22%
Literature/journalism/creative writing	18%
Voluntary classes	17%
History of Art	15%
Cooking classes	14%
Film lessons and discussion groups	13%
Cultural/religion studies	9%
Intergenerational clubs	8%
Lessons preparing for retirement or late old age	5%

Source: Zoom na UTW, 2012.

When analyzing the currently developing educational space of the existing facilities, Orzechowska notes new trends connected with the individual needs and interests of seniors. For instance, UTW in Olsztyn lists the following solutions:

- “new, very often unique lectures: Esperanto, Italian and Spanish,
- New plastic art techniques: e.g. pergamano, whose leader has received an international certificate.
- Modeling: fashion shows that require physical movement, visage, personal exhibitions etc.
- Education for voluntary work: not just amateur work but the professional preparation of candidates for voluntary work in Wojewódzkie Centrum Wolontariatu (District Voluntary Centers).
- Learning about the needs of the environment: organizing collections for the poor and those in other dire straits (for two years UTW have funded meals for 10 students at the periphery school with children who require special care),
- More and more presentations of students’ own achievements in the closest and further environments: exhibitions and presentations in cultural centers, participation in Days of Olsztyn, Senior Day, in the international exhibitions of non-professional artists in the country and abroad,
- Gathering funds for educational activity in regional competitions and union projects etc.” (Orzechowska 2013, pp. 131–132).

W. Wnuk (2012) observes that UTW has become more than just a place of education in the traditional understanding. Crucial functions of this institution are care, sup-

port, and help. The care service, which is widely known, is described by Wrocław UTW through the following tasks:

- “proposing education covering physical and intellectual development;
- Supporting development in every possible dimension (still triggering potential developmental);
- Minimizing physical and mental stress;
- Providing emotional support for difficult moments (e.g. for widows, those who receive bad medical diagnoses);
- Prolonging the time of actual activity in order to maintain an independent life without the need for institutionalization (no more long queues at DPS);
- Exchanging information and coordinating events between social branch partners and other possible subjects that function in the web of social support;
- Minimizing the threat which can lead to disability and discomfort deriving from unfavorable bio-psycho-social conditions;
- Organizing common events for the good of people;
- Applying sections and support groups (that solve their own and other problems with the use of mutual help)” (Wnuk 2012, pp. 65–66).

As it seems, the idea of the UTW in Poland has found a wide application. The development of the UTW is not only about quantity but also about quality. Apart from traditional universities for seniors, there are new and changing traditions that meet the actual needs of older people.

Senior clubs

Apart from UTW, there are also senior clubs – community institutions which support and activate seniors –in the area of education. Their number is not sufficient compared to what is needed, but the tendency in this matter is growing. Originally, after the Second World War, their existence was connected with the adjustment of seniors to new circumstances in life. Later, their activity was focused around care so as to finally transform into animated institutions, which create the conditions to undertake various activities, mainly cultural, educational, social, and recreational. Zofia Szarota describes senior clubs as, “facilities of social normalization through preventing solitude, social isolation and uselessness and also through supporting the intellectual and creative abilities of older people” (2010, p. 153). The aim of these clubs is the organization of free time for seniors through various activities. Facilities of this type fulfill crucial functions and support the social and intellectual development of older people. A. Chabior distinguishes the following functions:

- “Integration function, which through club activities allows active people to adjust better to group work, establishes new, valuable interpersonal relationships both on an intra- and intergenerational level.

- Educational function [...] Currently, due to the very well-developed lectures of an educational character [...] their function is also connected with senior clubs, which from typical recreational and free time facilities very often turn into educational facilities.
- Compensatory and adaptive function, where the first is based on smoothing out deficiencies (real or supposed) in other areas of social life. The latter is based on the better adjustment of seniors to life in a new social and family situation.
- Recreational-entertainment function – which helps to eliminate stress, reviving the will to live, to motivate and inspire for further activity” (Chabior 2011, pp. 103–104).

Chabior (2011, pp. 104–107), who collected data from members of such facilities in Kielce, briefly characterizes members of senior clubs. According to the analysis, the majority is women, and their biggest group is between 55 and 60 years of age; the older the women, the smaller their representation among members of senior clubs. However, the majority of men are in their seventies. Nearly half of all the members have secondary and primary education. Most often, seniors get to know about senior clubs from friends, but press and advertisements are also a good source of information. Those members asked for their reasons behind joining the club indicated the desire to do something connected with their interests. Almost every fifth member treats club membership as an escape from loneliness with the simultaneous motivation to make new friends. Another important factor is the motivation for continuous development.

The programs offered by senior clubs are directed at all older people. Among the forms of activity, sport activities are the most preferred by members of clubs in Kielce as indicated by two thirds of respondents, events (one third of the surveyed) and artistic lectures.

The example of a senior club in Piła is presented below.

Table 3. Senior Club program in Piła – July 2014

Date	Time	Title
Tuesday 01/07/14	3 pm	“Card paper chase” 1000 competition part 1
Wednesday 02/07/14	4 pm	“Brainbox” – general knowledge competition
Thursday 03/07/14	9 am	“from the two-wheeled perspective” – trip of the “silver spoke” group
	4 pm	Meeting with zoo psychologist. Human-animal relations
Friday 04/07/14	3 pm	Scrabble, part 1
Saturday 05/07/14	4 pm	“Summer karaoke” – everyone can sing
Monday 07/07/14	2 pm	July bridge games. Competition
Tuesday 08/07/14	3 pm	Draughts madness. Part 1 – competition for volunteers

Date	Time	Title
Wednesday 09/07/14	3 pm	Black ball – women’s billiard competition, part 1
Thursday 10/07/14	9 am	When you ride a bicycle over a hill, listen to the sounds of nature. Bicycle trip with “silver spoke” group
	3 pm	Bridge for volunteers
Friday 11/07/14	3 pm	I water my flowers. Holiday gardening
Saturday 12/07/14	4 pm	“Charades summer”
Monday 14/07/14	2 pm	Bridge competition
Tuesday 15/07/14	3 pm	1000 competition part 3
Wednesday 16/07/14	3 pm	Scrabble part 3
Thursday 17/07/14	4 pm	Janek Kos club garden shooting competition
Friday 18/07/14	3 pm	Black ball /men competition/
Saturday 19/07/14	10 am	Picnic for seniors at “TARCZA”
Monday 21/07/14	2 pm	Monday bridge competition
Tuesday 22/07/14	3 pm	Checkers for guys and gals
Wednesday 23/07/14	3 pm	Artistic Recycling “The second youth of everyday objects”, part 2
Thursday 24/07/14	12 am	July program meeting
Friday 25/07/14	3 pm	Dart course
Saturday 26/07/14	4 pm	“Garden show” /picnic in the club garden/
Monday 28/07/14	2 pm	“Summer bidding” bridge competition
Tuesday 29/07/14	3 pm	Bridge, part 2
Wednesday 30/07/14	3 pm	Women black ball – competition, part 2
Thursday 31/07/14	9 am	“Silver spoke” group trip
	4 pm	Pneumatic weapon shooting. Janek Kos competition.

Source: Senior club in Piła 2014.

Free time organization in senior clubs is, unlike UTW, less formalized, freer, closer to non-formal education, learning, and discovering. The club gives the participants a lot of freedom and autonomy. The choice of activities is not long-term, the program for the various activities is rather short-term, and most often focused on recreation, games, playing, moving, physiotherapy, manual improvement, cultural development, and also

learning via courses, discovering the world in a pleasant way (journeys, discussions), meetings with interesting people, and being with other people.

Other institutions

In some cities there are Senior Activity Centers (CAS) which are organized e.g. by local authorities, cultural centers, or NGOs. Lectures in CAS are of a similar character to UTW meetings; however, the second type of organization is of a more academic character. Other locations include daytime social care centers, which are institutions focused on the realization of social policy dedicated to free time management for seniors who are not fully independent. In many cities of Western Europe, solutions such as daytime care centers for seniors are standard: they offer care for older people and organize activities for when the rest of the family have work commitments. In Poland, daytime care centers are institutions which are slowly becoming popular solutions.

Senior learning profile through the example of UTW students

In Polish institutions of an educational character, one mainly finds the youngest seniors – and the better educated. Among these, there are people who live mainly in cities, mostly women – they are in a better situation and are a more emancipated group within this population in Poland.

Based on the example of students from UTW in Oświęcim, an attempt could be made to create a profile of a senior learner of the University of the Third Age (Fabiś, Łacina-Łanowski 2013).

Seniors who take part in UTW lectures also like to read. Almost half of them read one or two books per month, the rest read less. In most cases, seniors read biographies; almost half enjoy the *belle lettres*. Almost every fourth senior reads poetry, romance, and science-fiction literature.

The most common activity for seniors is spending time in front of the TV. 38% of those surveyed watch TV for about 2–4 hours per day, one third – for 3–4 hours per day. Most often, they watch information programs, soap operas, and serials. Every third person looks for entertainment when watching TV, and every tenth is interested in programs about religions.

Only some UTW students declare a total lack of interest in music. Half turn on music during selected activities, and 38% declare that they have music turned on all the time. Three in ten turn on music in order to listen to it or to aid contemplation. The term that seniors use to define their music preferences is “music from my youth”: this answer was marked by two thirds of the respondents. More than half declare that they listen to classical music. When it comes to determining favorite songs, most often they are by Polish artists from both modern entertainment and classical music.

The Polish senior is often characterized by a rich religious life. Although religion is a very important matter for 40% of UTW students, it is surprising that two in ten students claim that religion is of little or no meaning in their lives. The remainder evaluates the importance of religious activity as average.

When analyzing the declarations of seniors concerning their political preferences, most of them – nearly half – declare their support for the ruling center party (Citizen Platform). One third is not interested in politics, and the rest divide their votes among right and left-wing parties.

The self-image of UTW students (Hasińska and others, 2012) is based on a few basic activities, which characterize Lower-Silesian students, such as: intellectual activity, the will to learn, curiosity about the world and its people, and a readiness to organize their own life and physical activity. Other phrases that describe UTW students are: interest in culture and art, independence of thinking and opinion, self-confidence, a wide range of interests, the ability to handle difficult and new situations, and satisfaction with life. Such opinions were expressed by 83–89% of those surveyed. Among the characteristic features which students describe when they talk about themselves, the dominant are: honest, independent, curious, solid, and hard-working. These items were indicated by 65–87% of the respondents. Others, expressed by more than half of the surveyed, include: organized, sensitive, optimistic, helpful, realistic, sociable, sane, and intelligent.

However, among the declared values, 90% are: honesty, health, material safety, friendship, honesty, wisdom, and knowledge. More than 85% also mentioned family, honor, and faithfulness – and love as a value was declared by nearly 80% of respondents.

Specifics of learning in old age – senior perspective

The education of seniors is characterized by an extended freedom of choice as far as educational content is concerned. The freedom to learn has allowed seniors to gain knowledge, shape skills, and gain new competences which are derived from their interests and are determined by intrinsic motivation. An analysis of the research on two of the most popular courses for seniors makes it possible to present the didactic process from their perspective.

Information education

An analysis of the research on the motivation, expectations, and needs of UTW students connected with learning about new media (Jurczyk-Romanowska 2012, Tomczyk 2012) allows one to distinguish a few areas that are especially important from the perspective of the didactic process. The basic factor which encourages the decision to learn how to operate a computer and/or to use the Internet is mainly the sense of digital exclusion, which in turn influences the quality of one's participation in social and family life.

Seniors noticed that activities which demand the use of new media are more expansively entering every-day life, and they, as the digitally ignorant, have to withdraw from a wide range of activities and contact with others since they cannot handle new media. Seniors also indicate the need to gain and extend information technology competences because of the job they do – this concerns people who are still professionally active. Very often, the motivation to gain computer skills comes from an attempt to become independent and to have a more intensive existence in many areas of life. Others indicate their curiosity, the desire to test themselves, and to learn something new. E. Jurczyk-Romanowska underlines that, in their opinions, seniors express some kind of sense of pressure concerning computers and internet usage. The modern media are omnipresent, crucial for work but also in the family and in terms of contact with the younger generation. Day to day life creates opportunities to use such skills, and seniors recognize these and undertake the proper educational actions in order to fulfill themselves in this area. One interesting form of extrinsic motivation is also the need to study after the prior purchase of computer equipment. The possession of such a device obliges its use and, as a result, the need to educate oneself in that area.

The expectations and needs of seniors concerning their participation in computer courses focus around a few issues. Obviously, seniors expect a different approach, a different learning methodology, which would be specific for their age. They underline the expectations of the teacher, the right book, the learning tempo to be adjusted to their capabilities, and emphasis placed on repetition and revision of the course material. The source of their expectations are mainly earlier didactic failures during other courses or in relation with family members who played the role of teacher. In computer education, seniors indicate one more important factor that is an obstacle in gaining new competences – the English language. Descriptions, commands, messages in English, and even their Polish-translated equivalents, complicate the didactic process for seniors. The Participation of peers lends a sense of peace and confidence. A hermetically-sealed group guarantees a similar level of advancement and similar chances for results, without the necessity to adjust to younger people. Seniors expect that the course will allow them to rid themselves of their fear of using such devices. After gaining basic computer skills, many expect the continuation of courses at a higher level.

Language learning

Among the most commonly offered courses for seniors, right behind information courses, the dominant form are foreign language courses. Mainly, this is English language learning. However, in Silesia, in the Opolskie district or the districts which are near the German border, the German language is also popular. The motivation to start this kind of education focusses on the very utilitarian need to communicate during foreign journeys or to understand basic phrases and words when working with a computer. Learning a foreign language is also a form of training which activates mental ability, and

is a way to spend free time. At the same time, the research (Jurczyk-Romanowska 2012) shows that seniors are aware of the difficulties in foreign language learning; they express a range of doubts and expectations connected with the language learning process. They expect content which will interest them, but first and foremost, their main goal is communication, without unnecessary grammar or vocabulary. Seniors express the belief that the atmosphere, interesting people, and an approach specific to seniors as learners, provide the proper conditions to foreign language learning. The adjustment of the tempo of learning to this homogenous group, the right book, and a curriculum unique to their age group, will provide an effective atmosphere for senior education. Anna Jaroszevska, who has conducted research on the expectations and needs of Polish seniors who have started learning a foreign language on foreign courses (2013, pp.137–140), confirms the above-indicated mechanisms and adds the need for independent activity by seniors, the expectation of participation in the planning and organization of didactic events, and an individual approach to each and every student, with full consideration of individual psychophysical abilities. The skills gained must be useful in life situations. Also, the strong need to learn about culture of the chosen language may be indicated. The willingness of seniors to correct their mistakes is especially interesting, and comes thanks to the right reaction of the teacher. They express a willingness to participate in the evaluation of lectures in order to track progress. They also highlight the importance of atmosphere during the lessons.

Senior Education Specialist

On July 1st 2010, a regulation was put forward by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy according to which, due to the initiative of the Academic Andragogy Association, andragogy was added to the list of professions and specialties. This initiative was an answer to the need for adult education specialists, whose task will be the widely-understood support for adult human development with the use of mainly educational methods. According to the shortened description of the profession: “Andragogy describes, examines, organizes, realizes, coordinates, and inspires the educational activity of an adult person, which is undertaken in the statutory education system – general and professional education: formal, non-formal in various environments (local communities, work environment, non-formal groups); realized goals of state education policy in the matter of human and social capital” (Andragog, 2010, electronic doc.).

The places of work of the andragog are adult education facilities, schools, training companies, continuous and practical education centers, and also those institutions in which the andragog fulfills the role of education actions coordinator – offices, work places, career bureaus, cultural centers and public order and social support institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The term andragog refers to the person dedicated to educating adults, observing the phenomena connected with the adult human, forming

theories as well as being an educator, a person who works for the benefit of adults. The requirement is graduation from I or II level andragogy specialty.

Nevertheless, the specialty of adult people educator cannot be found on the ministerial list of professions and specialties. A few Polish universities offer pedagogy specialties in the area of adult education, but these are not very popular. It may seem that especially the second degree geragogy studies would have a chance to be a success, since during their education, students are more aware of the necessity of educational work with adults, including seniors by verifying their perception of pedagogy as a discipline dedicated to the education of children and youth. In practice, these specialties, regardless of level, are seldom chosen and sometimes closed, since the number of students is insufficient.

When analyzing the educational offer in the matter of geragogy – as most schools defines adult education, in higher education a synthesis and generalization may be made which depicts the didactic process and professional future.

Geragogy (gerontopedagogy, social gerontology) most often occurs in connection with specialties: social pedagogy, care pedagogy, adult education, or as an independent specialty. Education may take place at I and II degree studies or faculty in a stationary or non-stationary way at a few public and non-public schools in Poland.

Absolvents are specialists with interdisciplinary knowledge, skills and competences, with a stress on a chosen area of interest – depending on the policy of the organizers who manage the studies. Professional preparation is focused mainly on: social care, gerontological care, ageing psychology, medicine studies, and educating seniors. Special competences refer mainly to: diagnosis, prevention, treatment, activation, support, advice, and therapy for seniors.

The place of work of geragogs are educational-cultural and care facilities, social help centers, health care facilities, hospices, senior clubs, sanatoriums, and daycare centers.

Conclusion

An ageing society is one of the most important challenges which are currently faced by European countries. This problem is also becoming an issue for Poland. It is crucial to take action in the social, economic, and political spheres, to alleviate the negative consequences of this process, to support preparations for old age, and to help to improve satisfaction with life in the last developmental stage. The activity of Polish seniors is outside the range of interests of Polish educational policy. A much greater level of interest in the problems connected with societal ageing is expressed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. The next funding allocation for the improvement of senior life based on the ASOS program in 2014–2020 will be funded by 280 million dollars, which means 40 million a year (about 10 million euro). The money will be mainly spent to achieve the

following goals, among which the first refers to teaching seniors, although to a certain extent, each of the goals refers to educational activity:

- “Improvement in the variety and improvement to the educational offer for older people (...).
- Creating the conditions for inter- and intragenerational integration of seniors with the use of the existing social infrastructure (...).
- The development of various forms of social activity, including the promotion of voluntary work, the participation in decisions, social life, including the participation of older people in shaping public policy.
- Increasing accessibility, improvement to social service and support for activities for the benefit of self-help and self-organization.” (M.P., 2013, sec. 53, p. 11).

Without doubt, there is a need in Poland to create the conditions for the development of older people in many areas. Although education at UTW and in senior clubs has been developing well, the possibilities within education are still limited for less emancipated seniors. There are elderly people, living in small towns or in the countryside, poorly-educated, disabled and chronically sick. It seems that the education policy should support non-formal education and create the conditions for non-formal learning, promote reading, and cultural and recreational undertakings, and promote knowledge which is the access to learn by action.

There is also a need to educate specialists in the matter of senior education, although, judging by the low interest in geragogy studies, the desire to study in that area is low. Also, the job market does not yet offer many places of occupation and in the current classification of professions and specialties, geragog, geronto-pedagogue and gerontologist are not currently found. This profession may make a big difference in the near future, when the need to support the growing population of seniors will become far more noticeable.

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