



THEATRE, MYTH AND ELDERLY IN EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

WROCLAW 2015

THEATRE, MYTH AND ELDERLY IN EDUCATION EXPERIENCE | Edited by: Ilona Zakowicz

Z recenzji: Adnan Tufekčić, PhD

„The manuscript represents a significant contribution in the area of educational sciences, particularly in the area of gerontology and andragogy in general, but in its certain disciplines as well, such as: andragogical didactics, andragogy of work, andragogy of free time, social andragogy and andragogy of media. Also, the manuscript is a significant contribution to conceptualizing and structuring the educational system for adults and its integration in the overall educational system in contemporary society”.

Recommendation

„for publishing “Theatre, myth and elderly in education experience” edited by Ilona Zakowicz, and I recommend it to experts in various fields of study (andragogy, pedagogy, sociology, psychology, social work), whose area of work is aimed at education in adult and older age, to students whose interests are aimed at the field of andragogical work, as well as to all other interested readers who will undoubtedly find it very useful”.

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Ilona Zakowicz



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

According to Jacques Delors “the idea of education as a lifelong process seems to be the key to the gates of the XXI century” (Delors, 1998, p. 17). It is hard to disagree with this statement, especially in the context of contemporary changes resulting in ageing of society. A rising percentage of the elderly in the whole population causes increase in the amount of products and services – including education – directed at this group. Attempts at “outreaching” to the elderly, who for many years have been an “invisible” even marginalised group, appear to be a priority goal. It is inconceivable to ignore the presence of the “grey-haired generation” and trivialise the needs and expectations of the group, which contains a significant portion of the population.

The priority task concerning the elderly should include, among others, educational activities. This activity is the result of opportunities provided by the idea of education as a lifelong process. Designing, executing and propagating innovative and effective forms of education of the elderly seems to be the answer to the challenges caused by the rapid changes in economy, society, culture and demographics. All of these changes have a significant impact on the quality of life of the elderly. Education, in the views of the authors of this paper, may be the solution for issues like perceived maladaptation, marginalisation and alienation of the elderly from modern society. Educational activities varied in both form and content so that they are innovative and flexible and may meet the needs and expectations of this social group along with instilling the need for self-development, propagating the attitude of an open mind to new knowledge and experiences and creating an environment for broadly understood self improvement are the key factors to consider in order to enhance the situation of the elderly.

In the publication *Theatre, myth and elderly in education experience*, which is a collection of reflections and studies on the activities undertaken during the “Tell Me a Story project” (Project title: “TELL ME a STORY” / Programme: Lifelong Learning Programme / Sub-programme: Grundtvig Action type: Partnership 2012), the authors presented various views on education with the issues concerning the education of the elderly being the main theme. The topics discussed in the publication contain items like: theatre education, intergenerational learning, new technologies in the education of the elderly, study on the perception of the elderly, free time activity of the elderly and many others.

In the first chapter of this work: *The specificity of adult education* – Beata Działa focuses on the specifics of the late adulthood education, the possibilities and limitations which determine the form of the late adulthood education. The other topic analysed in this chapter is the free time and activity of the seniors. It is discussed by Katarzyna Biel-Ziółek in: *Activity and dignified living conditions chance for older people in the serene autumn of life* and **Agnieszka Kaczor** in: *Free time activities as a means of preventing the effects of old age*. The second chapter: *Theatrical activities in the education of seniors*, Aleksandra Marcinkiewicz and Małgorzata Kozłowska approach the topic of theatre and drama as an instrument in the education of the elderly. In the articles: *The education of older people- drama as a form of non-formal education* and *The inter-generational theater group from the perspective of seniors and students* the authors present the potential of theatre activities and its possible applications in the adult education. In the third chapter: *Myths, legends, fables and metaphor in educational context*, Seweryn Leszczyński and Joanna Kołat in the article *Myth and legend – comparison trial of definitions* attempt to define the myths and legends which were a significant aspect of the “Tell Me a Story project”. Ewa Jurczyk-Romanowska and Ilona Zakowicz in the work: *Between analogy and metaphor – on visual techniques in computer skills training for seniors* discuss the potential of metaphor and analogy in elderly education with special focus on their application in computer classes. This article serves as a link between chapters three and four – focusing on the new technologies and image. In the fourth chapter: *Computer and images in the education of seniors*, Ewa Jurczyk-Romanowska in the article: *An abstraction, the outer space, a fairytale, a web, or an entanglement of cables? – the cyberspace in the conception of seniors participating in information technology education* presents the ways in which the elderly perceive the virtual space. Also Ilona Zakowicz in: *Multimedia computer classes – reflections of the studies* describes the computer literacy-multimedia classes of University of the Third Age, a part of Wrocław University and presents the innovations in elderly education concerning the new technologies. Justyna Sochacka in: *The impact of new technologies on the creation of the image of the elderly* writes about the creation of the image of the elderly on the internet. This theme is continued by Ilona Zakowicz in her work *The image of old age – the opinion of seniors from U3A of University of Wrocław*, where she reflects on the ways of creating the image of the elderly in media with special attention to the views of the seniors of UTA of University of Wrocław.

I sincerely hope that this work will be an inspiring source of knowledge for all who concern themselves with the education of the elderly and provide an interesting new perspective on the theme of the old age.

Ilona Zakowicz

Educational aspects in old age

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THE SPECIFICITY OF ADULT EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The paper concerns the specific character of adult education. The analysis undertaken by the author begins by describing the context in which grown-up people operate – a factor that considerably influences the way that adult education is generally perceived. What makes this type of learning fundamentally different from childhood education, is the fact that the crucial potential of a grown-up student lies in life experience – and this is something that should be made use of in the education process. This aspect of learning has been exposed in certain andragogical theories, i.e. transformative learning (Jack Mezirow), experiential learning (David. A. Kolb) and biographical learning (Pierre Dominice).

Keywords: education, lifelong learning, adult people.

CONTEXT

An important factor that one should take into account while examining adult education is the changes that occur in different stages of human life. According to Jerzy Halicki, an individual in their late adulthood tends to loosen the ties with the external reality, while focusing on contemplating their internal world. For that reason, this period is especially important for the development of a person's self consciousness, i.e. the knowledge acquired via introspection, reflection and intuition. Thus, late adulthood is generally recognised as the phase in which wisdom emerges: an individual rediscovers meaning through deeper and more exact understanding of events or phenomena, as well as by comprehending the deeper sense of generally acknowledged facts. It is going beyond one's subjective view and projections that constitutes the foundation for this wisdom. Egocentrism and egoism give place to altruism. Finally, there also appears a sense of "wholeness" (Halicki, 2007, p. 161) that merges one's individuality with society. The reduction of a person's egocentrism is likely to make them accept limits,

contradictions, the negative aspects of human life, and to understand that nothing is permanent. This awareness is especially important for the elderly, since in the late phase of life the negative aspects of one's existence in both the social and the psychophysical sphere grow more numerous (Halicki, 2007, p. 162). One's memory deteriorates, the level of fluid intelligence decreases and the personality changes. Also, a need to adapt to old age in the social sense arises (Straš-Romanowska, 2012, pp. 326-350). All of these factors inspire an individual to search for meaning and for the purpose of life. In regard to a person's development, the most important kind of competence that emerges in this phase of life is gerotranscendence – a specific kind of wisdom that is characterised by:

- less concentration on one's self and the self redefinition;
- highly selective approach to social activities;
- a growing need for spiritual values (Halicki, 2007, p. 164).

Since in this phase practically every aspect of a person's life undergoes some changes, the specific features and needs of adult individuals should be paid attention to in the education process.

LEARNING

The process of learning is not the same for adults as for children. The crucial difference between the two is that grown-up people are able to independently choose information that they acquire. According to Knud Illeris, being an adult means being capable of taking responsibility for one's own life, as well as willing to make it an active one. These characteristics are commonly attributed to individuals that are over eighteen years old, but, in reality, this is a slow and gradually advancing process. Grown-up students are expected to feel responsible for their own education and to select the information that they either want or do not want to learn. K. Illeris notices that in the present, post-modern world, the amount of available knowledge is beyond the capabilities of a single human mind – thus, the overall situation becomes quite complex. As he states, currently adults only learn the things that they want to learn; they acquire the knowledge that they consider meaningful. They only take as much responsibility for their education as they want to. Finally, they are not very eager to acquire the information that they are either not interested in, or simply consider meaningless (Illeris, 2009, pp. 86-88).

According to Malcolm Knowles, there are four main features that make andragogy different from pedagogy. Firstly, in adult education, the student is perceived as a self-conducted and self-reliant subject; it is he or she who

should create the learning process, while the teacher's role is only to provide them support. Secondly, experience is emphasised as a key feature of this type of education – it should, therefore, be activated and made use of in the learning process. Thirdly, grown-ups are most eager to learn the information that they consider useful and necessary to deal with everyday problems. Because of that, the process should be adjusted to their individual needs. Finally – they need certain competences that can be used both for self-development and for meeting the requirements of today's world. Thus, it is important for them to be conscious of how the skills and knowledge that they acquire could be used in practice. It should also be noted that adult students are driven by internal motivation; therefore, they should be made realise the benefits that they can achieve by participating in the education process (Mikołajczyk, 2011).

At the moment, the basic knowledge about adult education relies on the following claims:

1. Adult people learn through situations, not objects. Curriculums should be created basing on students' individual needs and interests.
2. The most important value in adult education is experience – including all that is related to everyday life.
3. Adults feel a strong need to self-construct.
4. As people grow older, the individual differences between them become greater (Solarczyk-Szwec, 2010, p. 35).

EXPERIENCE, REFLECTION, CRISIS

As Hanna Solarczyk-Szwec states, experience, reflection and crisis are three useful notions in the analysis of adult education processes. There is always a strong link between learning and individual biography. This fact is especially crucial when relating to a grown-up person; their life experience is the essence of the education process. The development of an adult person is not conditioned by the genetic code and upbringing as much as it is by the practice of life and its challenges. Thus, an important role is played by reflection, understood as the ability to draw conclusions from the practice of life, as well as the increased consciousness of one's own thoughts, feelings and impressions (Solarczyk-Szwec, 2010, p. 40).

In relation to the last of the terms mentioned – the crisis – it should be emphasised that the way grown-up people learn is through the events that happen to them. It is, therefore, important to understand the nature of these occurrences, as well as the transitional phases in life, to be able to creatively use them during education (Solarczyk-Szwec, 2010, p. 41).

There are a few andragogical theories that can be referred to in relation to these claims. As for experience, there is a noteworthy concept of experiential learning, created by David A. Kolb. According to this educational theorist, learning is the process of human development that takes place when the subject is facing a task or a problem to solve (Bron, 2006, pp. 13-14). Kolb's theory is based on a dialectic model of learning, which is represented as a four-stage cycle. The stages, following one after another, are: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation. Each of these phases can serve as a starting point for the whole process, but it is most purposeful to begin with the first mentioned. Perceiving and reflection need to be supported by a specific experience. A grown up person gathers information in a conscious and reflective manner, pondering over the way they act and why. This leads them to evaluating specific experiences and trying to comprehend them. They subsequently translate their thoughts into abstract, verifiable notions and sets of ideas. In order to explain specific events, there emerge certain rules that can be later tested in practice. Kolb calls this process Active Experimentation. It leads to a new experience, thus beginning another cycle. For experiential learning to be optimal and successful in making the student able to solve a specific task, four kinds of abilities are required: of concretely experiencing humans and objects in the surrounding reality, of reflective thinking, of abstract thinking and, finally, of verifying various hypotheses (which is performed by action, experimentation and examination of the way that the hypotheses function). All of these lead to new experiences (Bron, 2006, pp. 13-14).

The theory for which the most important notion is reflection is Jack Mezirow's transformative learning. J. Mezirow assumes that the goal of education is to serve a liberating function, resulting in a humanistic type of development. Because of the reality that people live in and the social roles that they perform, there evolve certain cognitive structures and semantic patterns in their minds. According to the theory's creator, these models can be constrictive to a grown-up person's development. Firstly, the acquisition of knowledge is limited either to absorbing the information that matches the cognitive patterns or to reinterpreting these structures so that they remain compatible. That is why an adult student will tend to learn in a conservative manner, only reinforcing current knowledge and beliefs through extending their range and placing them in new contexts. Another argument for this type of learning is related to how dysfunctional the mentioned semantic patterns are – or, more precisely, how problematic they can make it for a person to operate in a modern, pluralistic society. The world is undergoing constant change, posing, from an individual's perspective, numerous difficult choices. To enclose oneself in the fixed boundaries of semantic pat-

terns can lead to a personal failure. J. Mezirow claims that it is the transformative learning that can contribute to changes in this field. He singles out three types of learning: instrumental, communicative and emancipator. In instrumental learning, knowledge is descriptive and related to the technical arrangement within society. In this case, the problems that arise are solved by the hypothetico-deductive thinking. Communicative learning is linked to the realm of everyday life; rooted in social norms, it relates to communication and the ties between human beings. Within the scope of this learning type, challenges can be overcome by employing metaphors. The prospect of further development lies in opening oneself to other people, thus giving a new meaning to past experiences (Malewski, 1998, pp. 106-110).

The goal of emancipatory learning is to liberate a person from the hitherto prevailing patterns with the help of critical self-reflection. They are required to adapt the point of view of other people participating in the educational discourse. This makes it possible for an individual to see through his or her semantic perspective. Such learning does not occur in isolation – it accompanies the instrumental and communicative type. It is only distinguished by the mentioned critical-self-reflection – a process that can lead to changes in one's thinking perspectives (Malewski, 1998, p. 112).

In J. Mezirow's theory, education is viewed as an integral part of life. It is not limited to specific behaviour, since, as it is assumed, one can learn something in every sphere of their existence. It is due to their interactions with the world and other human beings that knowledge emerges. The transformative learning theory can prove especially useful in the situations in which an individual's life needs reorganisation and when new goals and priorities have to be set. It leads to changing the pattern according to which reality is perceived (Malewski, 1998, pp. 113-114). This concept corresponds to the idea of informal, lifelong learning. According to Józef Kargul, the development of individual experiences-based reflectivity can be far more efficient when it comes to enhancing a person's competence. Relation to everyday situations makes it possible to direct the education process towards the real problems that an individual faces. The analysis of everyday experiences often convinces a person to undertake lifelong education. As ordinary problems become the content of the learning process, they turn into a helpful tool to cope with future difficult situations. What is more, compared to school education, spontaneous and informal acquisition of knowledge expresses a far swifter reaction to various challenges, problems and crises (Kargul, 2005, p. 41).

All of the claims regarding learning from experience are contained in the theory of biographical learning. The educational biography is a method used in adult learning that is focused on subjectivity and an individual's developmental process. Telling stories from one's life can lead to reflection upon the

learning-related experiences. The aim is to deepen the student's understanding of their own learning processes, as well as the knowledge that they possess (Dominice, 2006, p. 11). To put the method into effect, a person has to describe their educational biography in a form that is either written or oral, and, subsequently, to analyse and interpret it (Dominice, 2006, p. 20). According to Anna Bron: "Uczenie się biograficzne zawiera doświadczenia, wiedzę, refleksję i samorefleksję oraz – najogólniej mówiąc wszystkie lekcje wynikające z doświadczeń, które zawarte są w naszych życiowych historiach. Wykorzystując samoświadomość, uczymy się z naszych biografii przez podsumowywanie, refleksję, samorefleksję, opowiadanie historii innym i sobie samym. To właśnie sama narracja – opowiadana historia – jest najważniejszym instrumentem (czy narzędziem) uczenia się biograficznego." [„Biographical learning contains experiences, knowledge, reflection, self-reflection – generally speaking, all of the lessons resulting from our lives' stories. Employing our self-consciousness, we learn from our biographies by summing up, reflection, self-reflection and by telling our stories to other people, as well as ourselves. So, it is the narration – the story told – that is the most important instrument used for biographical learning”] (Bron, 2006, p. 19).

CONCLUSION

The andragogical theories that are focused on the idea of lifelong learning and utilising the life experiences of grown-up people, encourage pedagogues to turn their attention to both the individual differences between students and the potential that lies in the practice of life. Attention should also be paid to all the practical aspects of creating the education process. Due to deterioration of an older student's health and the physiological indicators (reduction of lungs' capacity and muscle mass; the degradation of eyesight, hearing, and touch sensitivity; slower reaction to various stimuli and the weakening of mechanical memory) one should adjust their pace of speaking, the length of the presentation, the font size, etc., to the recipients' capabilities. It should also be remembered that the participants of the education process possess different skills, abilities, interests, experiences, goals and possibilities of acquiring information. Each student utilises individual learning strategies, acquires new information at different speed and has a different level of self-consciousness (Matlakiewicz & Solarczyk-Szwec, 2009, p. 40). For the education process to be effective, it is crucial to take all these factors into account.

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ACTIVITY AND DIGNIFIED LIVING CONDITIONS – A CHANCE FOR THE ELDERLY TO ENJOY A SERENE AUTUMN OF THEIR LIFE

ABSTRACT

The autumn years of people who have reached retirement age can be cheerful or sad, depending on the individual's state of health, lifestyle, environment friendliness, social activity and interests. An interesting way of developing active interests are the Universities of the Third Age for the elderly, created on more than 400 campuses in Poland.

Activities at universities, depending on their nature, include lectures in widely differing fields of knowledge, such as: medicine, psychology, sociology, art, history and even physics, chemistry, biology, news in technology, biotechnology, cosmology, etc. Additionally, various types of workshops are conducted, attractive guided tours organized, and even physical exercise, in the gym and swimming pool. Alternative activities are conducted by the Department of Culture. An example of such an organization is the Kraków Nowa Huta Cultural Centre, in which the Creative Seniors Academy also offers wide inter-disciplinary activities, such as various courses, workshops, meetings and joint artistic activities. Interesting activities are also organized in environmental Senior Clubs. These include meetings, poetry readings, concerts, art, dance and sightseeing tours. The Department of Social Welfare has created a number of care facilities, such as day centers, where participants can attend for a few hours a day or longer. People in the terminal stages of disease may benefit from hospice care, conducted either in the hospice itself or in the patient's own home. The biggest problem is that the number of such centers and hospices is insufficient, causing the huge number of people – especially during sickness and suffering – to be lonely and deprived of decent living conditions.

Keywords: old people, elderly, seniors, retired people, care facility, therapy, activity, Universities of the Third Age, teaching, loneliness, sickness, disability.

„Old people are carriers of timeless universal values which cannot be lost in the mad rush to modernity (...) Respect for the old man is a self-respect, then respect for the society of which he is a citizen, the depth of humanity“
(Trafialek, 2006, p. 15).

The Autumn of life is not an easy challenge for all older people. Society is becoming increasingly older and seniors issues concern an increasing number of people. In order to draw attention to the problems of older people, in 2012 the European Union launched the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

The purpose of this initiative was to:

- support the development of better job opportunities and working conditions for the growing number of older people in Europe,
- to promote their active participation in society,
- encouraging older people to maintain a healthy and independent life.

Seniors, women over 60 and men over 65, are people who have retired after completing their working life. They are then confronted with new problems and challenges posed by the prospect of old age or illness. Older people undoubtedly possess a wealth of knowledge and skills, stemming from their life experience. Because of their age, these people have wisdom, and young people can gain a lot of valuable information from them about life. Very often, older people take care of their grandchildren, surrounding them with love and care. They dedicate their time and give their heart, which is not always duly appreciated. Seniors are usually calm people, patient, humble and balanced. They have time, which they are willing to share with others, trying to help them make something easier, or sharing their experiences with younger people. The most important problems of older people include loneliness, sickness, disability, living in poverty and a sense of uselessness. All of these problems, and the lack of solutions, indicate the existing marginalization of older people collectively.

An example of this marginalization can be a gradual exclusion of the elderly from active professional and social life from the moment they pass retirement age. Older people are afraid not only of disease and resulting disability, but also loneliness and intolerance from the prevailing „cult of beauty and youth“. They fear a misunderstanding of their problems by young people and dependence on others. Elderly people are often lonely and abandoned. Frequently, this problem affects people whose children are abroad or working a long distance from them. For such people, every good word, smile or affectionate gesture is a ray of kindness, without which it is difficult for anybody to live.

The increasing disability with age and lack of full independence creates new challenges and limitations for the elderly. Increasing helplessness in the face of decreasing self-reliance, fills them with fear and concern about their fate. The need for care and assistance at some point becomes a condition of their continued existence. With age, older people tend to reflect on the future, particularly about the near future and the inevitable end of their own lives, reflections which are often accompanied by fear and anxiety. Older people often have serious financial problems, due to their very low pensions, which cannot satisfy even their most basic needs. They frequently try to hide it, especially single people living alone in poverty. The World Health Organization warns that difficulties in daily life and the isolation of the elderly may lead to their exclusion from society. The younger generation should not forget about the needs of the elderly and should to help them. They should prevent loneliness and helplessness of the elderly, and surround them with care and support.

Unfortunately, many young people see senior citizens as unproductive, useless, boring and not very active. Seniors also frequently become the objects of fraud and violence, which seems an exceptionally cruel phenomenon, and which should be prevented in every possible way. The prevention of loneliness and the possibility of spending time in such a way that they have an opportunity of pursuing their interests and passions is very important in the lives of older people. Helena Radlińska has already indicated two different sources of personality development of an adult – his / her own creativity and participation in cultural and social life. The process of education consists of the participation of a person in the world of science and art, social life, social service, in the world of ideals, moral values and aesthetics (Radlińska, 1947, p. 101). She postulated the philosophy of social activity and the philosophy of optimism in life (Radlińska, 1947, p. 103). However, Jan Amos Komeński's ideal was of an active person, conscious of their personality development, shaping a sense of empowerment and striving to satisfy their desires, which is the way to self-fulfillment and satisfaction of his life (Turos, 1999, p. 69). It is worth noting that satisfaction in leisure time has a strong influence on a person's optimism level in his life, resistance to stress, and ability to adapt to changing social, economic and technological civilization and cultural backgrounds (Turos, 1999, p. 357).

Excellent stimuli for elderly people are Universities of the Third Age, which are aimed at further education and the development of various interests. The first University of the Third Age in Poland was established in 1975 in Warsaw. The purpose of the University of the Third Age is the inclusion of older people in lifelong learning, intellectual stimulation, mental and physical, as well as developing better methods for the implementation of edu-

cation and initiation of gerontologic prevention. The University of the Third Age provides various forms of activity:

1. Teaching activities – including lectures in such study fields as history, sociology, philosophy, medicine, architecture, chemistry, physics, innovation in technology, biotechnology, cosmology, geography, art.
2. Classes related to culture and leisure – visits to museums and exhibitions, meetings with interesting people (writers, painters, sculptors, ethnographers, archaeologists), sightseeing, walking tours, bus tours.
3. Workshops and interest sections – arts and crafts workshops, painting workshops, rehabilitation, physical exercises such as gymnastics and a swimming

In addition to the Universities of the Third Age there are a number of clubs, associations and non-governmental organizations, which provide various interesting activities for the elderly. By participating in such activities, these associations seek to encourage seniors to cross various borders, not only those relating to travel, but also the limits of their abilities, by breaking down internal barriers and constraints. The Krakow Academy of Creative Seniors in Nowa Huta is an example of such an organization. Classes were held within the framework of educational and cultural projects, co-financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, under the government program for the social activity of older people in the years 2012-2013, which was organized within the framework of the Nowohucka Senior Academy. For example, participants in the project were taken on a virtual tour of the wonderful places on Earth: „The various colours of Africa and the Orient, the wonders of South America, hot Australia and Alaska – not always covered with ice”. Participants could also take part in workshops, during which they could learn the basics of Japanese calligraphy, ancient hieroglyphic alphabet and also learn basic phrases in Arabic. They created jewelry using motifs characteristic of various African tribes and ancient cultures and civilizations, such as the Incas, Aztecs and Mayans. They could learn basic Nubian dance steps and Latino salsa. Those with an artistic leaning could attend courses of crafts and drawing.

A number of interesting activities for the elderly are provided by Cultural Centres and Senior teams. One of them is the Cultural Centre Krakow – Nowa Huta which is a municipal cultural institution. It operates in the dissemination of culture at its headquarters and in 11 environmental clubs, in most of which are senior clubs. These clubs operate artistic groups and organize various meetings, the purpose of which is to counteract of the isolation of the elderly. The subjects of these meetings include: poetry readings, demonstrations of different companies, tea-parties, group outings to the theatre or cinema, and sightseeing tours. These meetings also provide partici-

pants with an opportunity of presenting their own literary, musical, artistic abilities and skills. Occasional social gatherings are also organized.

CARE FACILITIES

There is no doubt that the proper environment for the sick and elderly should be the family home. However, there are some situations in which the family is not able to provide appropriate care for a sick elderly person. In these cases there are public or private care facilities, providing care and support. Such establishments include, among others, the Department of Social Welfare, day centers and hospices. The Department of Social Welfare is a facility providing life services, care, support and education for people who need full time care because of age, illness or disability. Facilities are divided into centers for:

- elderly people with chronic somatic diseases,
- chronically mentally ill,
- adults with intellectual disabilities,
- children and young people with intellectual disabilities,
- people with chronic somatic diseases and physically disabled,
- elderly and physically disabled.

DAY CENTERS

The purpose of these centers is to provide a caring environment and emotional support during the day. The resort provides meals for older people, care services – rehabilitation, grooming, health and cultural recreation (dance parties, art performances, tours), and assistance in dealing with their daily affairs, accounting for a particular difficulty. Thus, the centre relieves the family of round the clock care for the elderly. Such centers mobilize elderly people and support them through the problems of satisfying their needs. Thanks to community support, many elderly people can avoid staying in a Nursing Home, which is often seen as a necessary evil (Support Centers).

HOSPICES

Hospices play an extremely important role. Their activity is generally based on the work of volunteers and the voluntary donations of people of good will. The concept of a hospice is first and foremost as an institution dedicated to the care of patients in the terminal stages of disease. There are

two basic types of hospice operation. The first is care in the patient's home. The hospice team, working with the family, offers care for the patient in their home. Hospices are also involved in the rental of specialized equipment, and the training of the family in the care and management of patients. The second model provides care in the hospital where the patient resides, or in a hospice. Permanent hospices are intended primarily for patients who, because of severe illness, require a permanent specialist medical care. This type of care can also be applied to seriously ill single people without families (Hospice).

Currently there are more and more different types of organizations dealing with the problems of the elderly, but still their number is not sufficient. It is worth noting that the nation which does not respect their seniors, is a nation without a future. Therefore, by declaring 1999 the Year of the Senior, the United Nations wanted to pay special attention to the situation of seniors in the late twentieth century. Thanks to such actions, which highlight the problems and needs of seniors, they can learn more about the possibility of self-realization and address their needs. We should have respect, understanding and care for the elderly. The task of the young generation is to create the appropriate conditions for life, providing care and dignified comfort, especially in moments of despair, suffering and bereavement. We should educate children and young people from an early age in the needs of the elderly, the lonely, and the suffering, and make them aware of the need and duty to help such people. Teaching young people to help others – to show empathy and sensitivity to their needs – is fundamental to them developing as dignified and humane adults. The quality of life of the elderly depends on the active scheduling of their free time, a sense of being loved and needed by their immediate family, and an awareness that they have someone to count on. Some older people, those left by themselves and alone, see no reason or purpose in struggling to survive. They become increasingly weaker, and slowly drop out of life, which they perceive as only suffering and affliction. We should therefore ensure that seniors are provided with the best possible conditions to ensure that the autumn of their life is serene and full of interest, and that at the end of their life they are surrounded by family love. Just as the duty of parents is to surround their children with love and care, so the duty of children is love and responsible care for the elderly and sick parents.

There is nothing more precious in a human being than love and sensitivity to the needs of others. We should all, therefore, cultivate it in ourselves and act responsibly in accordance with our conscience, and not depending on the circumstances. In order to improve the quality of life of the elderly, it is undoubtedly necessary to attempt to increase the number and type of

centers, with various initiatives offering a range of different activities which will help them to spend time in an interesting, active and creative way. It is also important to create new centers which could provide welfare assistance, care and support to the elderly, lonely and terminally ill. The number of existing institutions of this type, in no way meets the real needs of society, and as the number of seniors in Poland is increasing, the demand for this type of facility is also constantly increasing. The younger generation should feel it their duty to provide dignified living conditions for the elderly.

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FREE TIME ACTIVITIES AS A MEANS OF PREVENTING THE EFFECTS OF OLD AGE

ABSTRACT

Retirement results in increasing the amount of free time, and filling it is very often a challenge for older people. Activities that older people take up in their leisure periods are important for their health and well-being.

Keywords: free time, older people.

In order to reflect on the free time of the elderly it is important to take a closer look at the definition of free time itself. The term free time has been coined and gained popularity after its recognition by the UNESCO International Conference in 1957. At first it was replaced with either "holiday" or "recreation" (Pilch, 2003).

In this way free time was described by Czesław Maziarz. He believes that "cultural holiday", work day rest or Sunday rest, holidays and summer vacation to be the equivalent of the free time. Cultural holidays consist of actions which are undertaken for pleasure or self development of an individual. As its base the term takes not merely the way of spending time but rather its social-pedagogical function. Cz. Maziarz describes three functions of the aforementioned holiday:

1. rest: passive (when one desires silence, solitude, escape from commotion of earlier activities); active (when one wishes for risk, competition, adventure, pleasure, thrill).
2. Entertainment,
3. self development (Maziarz, 1966).

On the other hand Wincenty Okoń believes the free time to be the time left after one finishes all of his/her obligatory activities such as: job, school and chores. Free time is then reasonably spent in resting - regeneration of both

the body and the mind, pleasure, voluntary and selfless social work, development of skills and talents through learning and amateur musical, artistic, scientific, technical and sport activities (Okoń, 2003).

Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński discerns three types of free time:

1. short – occurring during workdays;
2. medium – the weekends;
3. long – vacation (Wnuk-Lipiński, 1975).

Bogusława Jodłowska divided free time into two separate elements – the positive and negative. In its positive aspect, free time is an opportunity to discover its riches, to use as one wishes, without any obligations and the manner of its spending depends solely on one's character qualities. In the negative sense it is time remaining after work, time liberated from obligatory activities (Jodłowska, 2002).

From a sociological point of view it is possible to distinguish two definitions of free time. The first takes into consideration activities which are, in a given society, outside the realm of obligations. Therefore leisure activities are countable and defined in every society. This definition of free time allows us to perceive it in terms of cultural-social institution. The second way of defining the free time takes into account the psychological perspective. It is a sphere of activity ruled by one's urges. Therefore free time may mean different things for each person (Kwaśniewicz, 1998).

In English literature free time is described using the following terms: "spare time", "rest", "play", "entertainment", "recreation", "avocation", "hobbies" and "it yourself" (to do what one wills) (Grad & Kaczmarek, 1999) the English term *leisure*, interpreted by Moris Kaplan as the time when one has the greatest opportunity to be oneself, and Polish term free time are counterparts of Greek "skhole" (peace, inactivity, respite, relief, study, entertainment, discussion, meeting; to perform an action in a slow, leisurely manner) (Kaplan, 1960).

Joffre Dumazedier defines *loisir* as "an activity one may perform voluntarily, that is outside the realm of work, familial and social obligations, to rest, entertain and develop oneself" (Kłoskowska, 2011, p.163).

E. Wnuk-Lipiński discerns four possible arrangements for spending free time:

1. Arrangement I – home;
2. Arrangement II – local institutions and out of home interactions;
3. Arrangement III – mass media;
4. Arrangement IV – travel, tourism (Jung, 1989).

Aleksander Kamiński sees free time as free from work, additional gainful occupations, commuting, fulfilling the basic bodily needs, chores and family obligations. A. Kamiński also presents three pairs of themes for spending free time:

1. centered on home and out of home;
2. solitary and non-solitary;
3. passive and active.

They are dependent on the individual's psycho-physical qualities, social role, social models and norms (Pilch, 2003).

C. Gordon, C. M. Gaitz i J. Scott mention a tendency to pursue physical pleasure which always occupies a significant amount of ordinary people's free time. The American authors mean by that all the activities leading to pleasing experiences, happiness and emotional experiences. According to them free time contains the following categories:

1. varied types of pleasure;
2. creative activities – artistic, musical, writing also educational and all activities leading to benefit of others;
3. self-development – physical exercises, sport, personal research including reading and participating in cultural events, societies, travel;
4. entertainment – television, radio, hobbies, conversation (Gordon, Gaitz & Scott, 1976).

Therefore free time activities are not limited to hedonism and are subject to social norms.

Tadeusz Wujek points the following functions of free time:

1. rest and relaxation – recreative function. It is concerned with compensating for lost physical and mental stamina due to exhaustion. It includes active rest – demanding different activities than those responsible for exhaustion and passive rest – idleness, comfortable sitting, laying.
2. Personality improvement – developmental function. It is focused on following creative urges, topics of interest and self-improvement (Pilch, 2003).

The classification of T. Wujek does not include activities such as eating or sleeping because he shares the view of free time with R.C. White who believes it to be "all the time during which one does not eat, sleep or work" (Worach-Kardas, 1983, p. 114)

Stanisław Czajka considers the effect of free time on an individual with productive and health issues in mind. In his view the proper arrangement of free time has the following benefits:

1. improving one's health;
2. prolonging life;
3. increasing one's adaptative capabilities;
4. increase work efficiency;
5. improved interpersonal relations (Czajka, 1974).

Cz. Maziarz believes that the manner of spending the free time has a significant impact on both physical and mental development of an individual.

Still, the rational arranging of the free time is a skill that needs to be learned. It is without a doubt that improper examples of rest and entertainment created by the traditions of given group (social or professional) are an obstacle. "Including a generous amount of chores, family obligations and additional schooling through various courses and external studies in the free time does not promote systematic realisation of the cultural holiday of ordinary day, especially in their active form" (Maziarz, 1966, pp. 61-62).

In addition, considering the views of Lech Witkowski who believes that "free time is the time unfulfilled with roles and in extreme cases – empty", it is important to note the development of new cultural competence and new educational strategy outside of professional roles and instilling behaviour possessing subjective worth and meaning, because when there is no guard – outside coordinator, a moment for "killing time" becomes apparent (Siekma-Tylikowska, Kwiatkowska & Kwiatkowski, 1998, p. 59).

FREE TIME OF THE ELDERLY

Considering the opinion of J. Dumazedier, who wrote that: "participation of the elderly in various active recreational acts is probably the most important element of the development of rest in our age, while the experiences of an individual correlated to free time – which is dominant in the third age – allow the researchers to deepen their understanding of meaning and attractiveness of voluntary activities for personality development" (Dumazedier 1988, p. 152), it seems important to direct attention to the ways in which the elderly spend their free time.

The optimal solution for the elderly would be filling the third stage of their lives with comprehensive activities including but not limited to: physical, rest and relaxation, social, cultural, self-help and political activities. It is so due to the concurrent ageing and development of adaptive habits by active individuals which allow them to maintain excellent productivity even at a very advanced age (i.e. memory issues may be compensated with the habit of making notes whenever anything of importance occurs). The trigger for the development of compensative mechanisms is the attitude of an elderly individual to confront their disorders (Suchobskaja & Bozko, 1999).

Therefore the complex social policy for the elderly should, according to Elżbieta Trafiałek, focus on the following tasks:

1. "organising and funding aid institutions;
2. activating and promoting self-help activities;
3. equalizing the sanitary and material deficiencies;
4. researching demands" (Trafiałek, 2003, p. 20).

In 2002 (2-5 X to be exact) The XXI AIUTA congress took place, its theme being "Age and experience in service to the future" (Czerniawska, 2003, p. 15). Luise Bourgenois, the AIUTA commissioner, stated that in an ever changing society culture takes new forms. In order to understand and participate in it one must constantly reflect upon the world (Czerniawska, 2003). Culture also creates new opportunities for the elderly related to the new roles like voluntary work, sharing memories, experiences and intergenerational, intercultural and interpersonal communication (Czerniawska, 2003).

FORMS OF FREE TIME OFFERED TO THE ELDERLY.

Retirement is a shock for a person raised with the ideals of work ethics, yet with time a change has occurred regarding the accepted ideals and free time has assumed the position of prominence. For those who were dissatisfied with their careers, retirement can become an expected and desirable period. Ganhild Hagestad calls the elderly the satisfied "leisure class", due to their inclination towards adoption of new lifestyles and broad shift of ideals in whole society – the work ethics being replaced with free time ethics (Worach-Kardas, 1983).

The current challenge for the elderly is to find the answer to the question: how to protect their value as a members of society by free time activities which are by definition useless for society. Michael Young and Peter Willmott commenced a research in which they asked responders to divide their daily activities into two categories: work and free time. The results have shown that there is a spectrum of activities between those polar opposites. It contained the following: eating, sleeping, commuting, looking after children and social activity (Worach-Kardas, 1983).

The manner of spending free time by the elderly in Poland depends, according to Anna Zawadzka, on several factors:

1. Education

High school and university education is rare among the senior citizens. This fact has a significant impact on the individual's connection with culture due to insufficient education being a hindrance when one tries to understand social, cultural and political realities and in consequence narrows the spectrum of interests and impairs the ability to choose free time activities.

2. Gender

Woman entering the third age in Poland can often be described as tired. The reason for this state is the amount of obligations from the very young age, also the amount of rest time and manners of its spending are decreased.

3. Exhaustion

This is caused by several issues: occupation by the Nazis and Soviet Union; detestable material conditions in the aftermath of the second world war; complicated economical and political situation; the decay of patriotic-christian-solidarity ethics; the shift from “nationalising the society to socialising the nation”.

This state of the affairs resulted in social uncertainty, lack of optimism and hope for a better tomorrow. The elderly resign from engaging in civic life and culture. This “instilled helplessness” forces them to assume passive attitude and solidifies the belief that a single man does not matter at all in the greater scheme of things. They expect the government to organise rest instead of providing the environment for an individual to fulfill his needs on his own.

4. Criticism of free time

The dominant perspective on free time during the communist regime of the Polish People’s Republic was negative, this view was further reinforced by utilitarian doctrine and is still present in the minds of older Poles. In consequence retirement degrades the individual in both his/her own opinion and that of others. His/her self-esteem and sense of identity are also disturbed. The free time activities performed by the elderly are perceived as useless since in Polish society free time is still not considered to have a value of its own.

5. Conformism and falling into a routine (Zawadzka, 1997, pp. 180-181).

Maria Grzelak states that increased lifespan of an individual is a colossal achievement of modern civilization, yet the quality of the elongated period of old age is an important issue (Grzelak, 2003). Retirement does not have to equal inactivity. It is wrong to perceive the elderly with only the diminishing physical and mental capabilities in mind. They should be recognized as potential and active participants of social, political and economical processes.

Astrid Tokaj mentions the following types of activity performed by the elderly in their free time:

1. Most popular are the passive ways of spending the free time: watching television, listening to radio, reading newspapers and magazines;
2. popular forms of spending the free time are hobbies. Needlework, tinkering, solving crosswords, fishing, collecting fungi and also tourism, cycling and swimming are popular.
3. Looking after grandchildren. According to the free time theory of A. Kamiński this should be considered as semi-rest. It is without a doubt an activity in which the dividing line between obligation and voluntariness is blurred (Tokaj, 2000).

Senior citizens in Poland, according to the *Social development report – Poland 1999. To dignified and active old age*, prefer to spend their free time on: watching television, listening to the radio, walks, small scale farming and cycling. They also enjoy gardening, reading and meeting with friends. 70,1% of seniors engage in short term travel, usually visiting relatives and friends, 21,6% travel for pleasure while 4,2% have a religious reason for travelling. 37% of the elderly do not travel at all due to financial reasons and 35% – declining health (2001).

The results of a study by E. Trafiałek in 1994 on a representative group of people aged 60 and over show that the amount of free time at their disposal is significantly greater than in other age groups. The free time of the people who have been relieved of their career obligations is limited by their family obligations and necessary chores. The time requirements for those activities vary by location (rural, city), the limits being 2 – 10 hours a day (Trafiałek, 1999).

The research allowed the author to distinguish five forms of activity characteristic of the elderly:

1. Passive reception of culture (watching television – 71,5%, listening to the radio – 11,7%, reading – 6,8%);
2. physical activity: 3,8%;
3. participation in religious cults: 3,1%;
4. social activity: 2,3%;
5. passive rest, sleep: 1,5% (Trafiałek, 1999).

The factor inhibiting the active spending of time by the elderly is, apart from the habits carried over from the period of socialism, the closure of many senior's clubs, reading clubs, amateur artistic institutions, which used to have a broad and free of charge offer for the elderly. Quite often financial barriers prohibit the elderly from participation in theatre plays, classical music concerts, art exhibitions or international tourism (Trafiałek, 1999).

In the opinion of E. Trafiałek the most beneficial form of organising free time for the organism is a mixture of alternating physical and mental activities. This allows one to regularly relieve different parts of the brain. An inseparable element of proper activity shifting is the varied environment, therefore remaining in one's house or room constantly does not benefit such a lifestyle (Trafiałek, 1999).

Zofia Szarota i Anna Panek performed a study on a group of 191 inhabitants of seventeen nursing homes in Cracow. The data was gathered using the following research techniques: observation, narrative interview, and dialogue. The most popular free time activities in the study group were:

1. Listening to the radio – mainly *Radio Maryja* [*Radio Mary*] or current news;

2. watching television – *Wiadomości* (News), *Teleexpress*, *Panorama* – which are all news broadcasts were watched the most, closely followed by the series, cartoons and childrens shows;
3. participation in special events – such as: Grandmother’s Day, Grandfather’s Day, celebrations of religious festivals (75%). Participation in celebrations of St. Andrew’s Day, balls and dance nights was confirmed by 64% of the study group. Therefore the elders perceived the ludic-social activities as positive and desirable elements of day to day life;
4. reading (magazines) – 68%, religious press was the most popular (*Gość niedzielny* – Sunday Guest) and also the magazines targeted at women (*Przyjaciółka* – A Friend; *Kobieta I Życie* – A women and life) were often chosen;
5. reading (books) – 64% – history and religion are themes of the most popular books;
6. lectures and arranged visits of interesting people – 44,5% – the elderly have an interest in current events and they express the wish to understand the reality around them;
7. everyday physical exercises – 58%;
8. hobbies – 39% – i.e. gardening, needlework, arranging flowers, writing diaries and poetry, tinkering, repairing old clocks, chess and card games, fishing, collecting fungi, travelling;
9. creative work – 38% – embroidery, tailoring, writing for example articles for *Głos Seniora* (Voice of the Senior) and *Zielnik* (Herbarium), painting, sculpting, model making;
10. participation in occupational therapy – 38% – art, music, dance therapy;
11. mental exercises – 27% – solving crosswords, playing chess and cards;
12. membership in amateur artistic groups – 27%; examples: Gypsy Band, “Helclusie”, “Łanowiaczy”, “Bando-Bando”, “Zielniczanie”, cabaret group “Laseczka”;
13. visiting cinemas, theaters and other cultural institutions – 25% – in addition – the responders prefer the calm offer of higher rather than mass culture;
14. sports – 14% – mostly physical medicine and rehabilitation, dance therapy and training for spartakiads;
15. participation in contests, festivals and spartakiads – 13%;
16. the hobby of collecting – 9% – pictures, embroidery patterns, advice, family heirlooms, postage stamps, poetry, dried flowers, obsolete currency, photographs, clocks, crosswords, video cassettes;
17. walks and excursions;

18. self-education – as single person, a lady, who develops her skill in english language (Szarota & Panek, 2000).

The sphere of dreams of the elders contains such free time activities as: using the knitting machine, working as an accountant, animal care, farming, basketweaving (Szarota & Panek, 2000).

Bogusław Borys observes that the free time of the elderly is often an empty time, and the time which is devoid of any activity may be tiresome (Borys, 1996). The elderly often focus on daily chores and household maintenance. In this situation the dominant forms of activity for women are chores while men are occupied mostly with gardening and tinkering (Piotrowska, 2002). Senior citizens of Poland definitely prefer the domesticated lifestyle and their mobility is limited.

There are also several more factors hindering the ability to spend free time according to one's wishes such as: health issues, bad financial situation and lack of interests (Tokaj, 2000).

Those issues cause the elderly to spend their free time in a passive manner, mostly at home or to pursue affordable forms of recreation.

"With the advancement of the ageing process the elderly withdraw from the world, they cease to pursue entertainment and attractive, satisfying activities, recreation and relaxation" (Woźniak, 1997, p. 137). Therefore, in the opinion of Kinga Wiśniewska-Roszkowska, it is important to teach the elderly how they can still be useful to the family, local community and society. This requires instilling and solidifying interests, physical, mental and artistic activity and also cooperation and helpfulness (Zawadzka, 1997).

INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS IN SERVICE OF THE ELDERLY

An effective way to contend with the stereotype feelings of defeat correlated to being an elderly person is to partake in offers prepared by the organisations and institutions concerned with the free time activity in the third age. Institutions supporting and assisting the older generation distance themselves from the simplified view of the elderly. Through their activity they try to instill a change in the way society perceives the elderly. They do not concur with the statement that the only thing seniors need to live and have a good mood is providing for their basic needs i.e. sleep, nourishment and security.

Maria Grzelak tries to create a map of activity of the elderly and a list of institutions popularizing active spending of free time among them. M. Grzelak lists the following institutions : day care centres, senior's clubs (They

counteract isolation and loneliness among the elderly through organisation of dance nights, choirs, discussions, philately club meetings and providing access to gym and embroidery classes), culture centres, Universities of the Third Age and several organisations, societies and unions such as: Union of Ex-Political Prisoners of Hitler's Prisons and Concentration Camps, The Siberian's Union, "Katyn Family" Society, Catholic Intelligence Club, Polish Retirees and Pensioners Union, Association of the Living Rosary, Association of Radio Mary's Family (Grzelak, 2003).

The study of M. Fałkowska on the usage of institutionalised entertainment by the elderly provides interesting results. In the 50-59 age group 9% visited circus alone or with another adult and only 5% with children. 2% of the same group visited funfair alone or with another adult while 11% - accompanied by children. Only 4% of said age group were spectators at stage performances. This situation is significantly more dire in the 60 or older age group. Only 3% of seniors visited a circus with an adult and 4% with children. As the study shows the elderly only visited the funfair with children (6%) and attended stage performances more often with another adult (3%) than with children (1%) (Falkowska, 1992).

To summarize the provided data, free time is a significant factor in the individual's self development. In this period of time affirmation of one's increasing individualism occurs. Therefore it is a disturbing fact that senior citizens in Poland are not always capable of spending their free time in a beneficial manner. E. Trafiałek notes that the daily activity of the elderly is usually centered around family matters (Trafiałek, 2003, pp. 22-23) which certainly provides them many happy moments but considering their development in a broad sense, it should not occupy most of their free time.

Until the elderly in Poland achieve the same level of self-organisation as their counterparts in the other European countries, they will expect help in arranging their daily lives which in turn creates the opportunity for volunteer work, self-help and varied activities deepening their passions and interests.

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Theatrical activities in the education of seniors

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THE EDUCATION OF OLDER PEOPLE – DRAMA AS A FORM OF NON FORMAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This article deals with basic issues concerning adult education. It presents the three forms of education as defined by Philip Hall Coombs, and compares the andragogical model of learning with the pedagogical model. It indicates the specific educational needs of adult (older) learners and presents a model for learning in old age. Drama is presented as a form of non-formal education, and the possibilities of using theatre form in the education of elderly is discussed.

Keywords: adult education, learning of old people, non-formal education, drama, theatre form.

Education is an important part of human life. Nowadays, when everything is changing at a fast pace, learning is a way of enabling us to keep up with these changes, and so we are in a way forced into constant learning. Moreover, educational activity is seen as an expression of self-development and social status, so learning has become fashionable, because it is a symbol of success. The idea of Lifelong Learning is therefore very popular.

According to this concept, education includes all human life and every aspect of learning. Although education begins in childhood and continues until death, it is often equated with adult education. This is due to the fact that its source is in permanent education assigned to adults who are professionally active.

Lifelong Learning is a concept implemented by the European Union. Its goal is economic development of Europeans through education and knowledge. However, according to this concept the main focus is the comprehensive development of man. According to this concept, education is the union of the three forms of learning distinguished by P. H. Coombs (Marcinkiewicz, 2011, pp. 8-9; Jarvis, 2004, pp. 40-41):

- Formal education means a hierarchical system of educational institutions (from primary school to higher education), which through certificates

and diplomas, selects students for different social roles and puts them on different levels of the social structure. This kind of education is similar to initial education.

- Non-formal education involves educational activities, which lie outside the formal education system, which include courses, seminars, lectures, training, postgraduate studies, etc. A person who has taken part in this form of education improves his/her skills and knowledge, but he/she has not obtained a certificate or diploma, which entitles him to enter the higher level of education.
- Informal education refers to processes in which a person acquires knowledge, values, skills, abilities, from universal experience.

Based on this division, Mieczysław Malewski has created models of education activities with adults: technological, humanistic and critical. The technological model of educational work with adults was allocated to formal education. In this model the teacher is the centre of the education process. The teacher decides how and what to teach students. He/ she equips learners with an objective view of the world and models for effective action. This model of education tailors learning to social needs. The teacher is responsible for the effects of education, whereas the student is a passive recipient of the learning content. Malewski assigns the humanistic to non-formal education. The humanistic model assumes a partnership relationship between teacher and student – therefore, it is a cooperation between student and teacher, because the student is placed at the centre of the learning process. The result of this relationship is that teaching content is related to the learner's needs. In this model the goal of education is a comprehensive development of the student. The critical model assumes the total independence of the student, which causes a blurring of official programs and educational content. The aim of education activity is the development of abilities and interests in order to obtain a broader perspective. Therefore, reflexivity and criticality of thinking are important in this model. In the critical model, the teacher does not exist in the traditional sense – the media and internet can play the role of teacher, with the student learning from everyday life, experiences, TV programs and books (Malewski, 2000, pp. 47-63).

It should be noted that the differentiating factors of these models are responsible for the effects of education. Malcom S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III and Richard A. Swanson pointed out that at the beginning of adult education, the pedagogical model is in force, which is identical with technological model of P. H. Coombs. M. S. Knowles, E. F. Holton and A. Swanson have noted that „(...) in any group of adults there will be a wider range of individual differences than is the case with a group of youths. Any group of adults will be more heterogeneous in terms of background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals than is true of a group of youths. Hence, greater emphasis in adult educa-

tion is placed on individualization of teaching and learning strategies" (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, p. 66). Thus, the process of teaching adults cannot be the same as for children. Adults have different learning needs and aims, so their education should take this into account. M. S. Knowles E. F. Holton and A. Swanson, therefore, suggest the andragogical model, which is based on assumptions that are different from those of the pedagogical model. The andragogical model draws attention to aspects such as: awareness of the aims of education, responsibility for the process of education and its results, experiences of adult students and motivation to learning. The andragogical model is based on following assumptions (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, pp. 64-68):

- *The need to know* – adult students should know why they need learn something before undertaking to learn it. When adults undertake to learn something, they will be more involved in the learning process and they will feel responsible for the results of education.
- *The learners' self-concept* – adults have a need to be responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives – they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others as being capable of self-direction.
- *The role of the learners' experiences* – in contrast to children, adult students have their own experience of life, and their own system of values and beliefs. Moreover, as was noted earlier, in any group of adult learners each participant has different kinds of experiences – in these terms it is not a homogeneous group. Thus, diversity in quantity and quality of experiences has consequences for adult learning. The learning content should refer to the experiences of students, because it ensures that they learn faster. However, their experiences can sometimes be a barrier to the absorption of new content.
- *Readiness to learn* – adult learners should be ready to learn those things they need to know. Moreover, they must be able to do so in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations. Readiness to learn "is the developmental tasks associated with moving from one developmental stage to the next. The critical implication of this assumption is the importance of timing learning experiences to coincide with those developmental tasks" (p. 67).
- *Orientation to learning* – Adult learners are motivated to learn because they believe that education will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations. Adults acquire new knowledge, skills, values, and understanding most effectively when they realise that these can be useful in a real situation.
- *Motivation* – this is the factor which makes the student want to undertake education. Adults react to various external motivators (better job, salary, promotions) but the most potent motivators are internal pressures (self-esteem, quality of life, self-development etc.).

Referring to the above content, each educational process of adults should include the assumptions presented earlier.

The authors compared two models (pedagogical and andragogical) and emphasized that the pedagogical model is an ideological model which excludes andragogical assumptions. However, "the andragogical model is a system of assumptions that includes pedagogical assumptions. The andragogical model is not an ideology; it is a system of alternative sets of assumptions, a transactional model that speaks to those characteristics of the learning situation" (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, p. 72).

As pointed out earlier, very important in adult education are factors such as: responsibility for learning effects, experiences, self-concept, motivation and goals of education. These elements are also important in informal and non-formal education. Furthermore, a change from formal education to non-formal and informal can nowadays be observed in adult education, as well as the growing importance of the andragogical model.

It should be noted that seniors are a special group of adult students. Aspects such as experience, motivation and self-concept are also important in education of older people. All the same, due to the nature of old age they have specific needs. Planning educational processes for seniors should take into account potential problems with vision and hearing. Moreover, because of the transition to retirement, seniors have different motivations, self-concepts and readiness for education. Therefore, it is worth mentioning the learning models presented by Małgorzata Malec, who defines three models: learning by old age, learning to old age and learning in old age.

The learning to old age model should be implemented at earlier stages of life, prior to old age. The important issue in this model is the introduction of gerontological prevention in daily life. Another essential aspect is biographical learning. This kind of learning shapes perspectives and capabilities and in this way it is transformative. The theory of biographical learning allows analyses of one's own experiences at different stages of life. It should be noted that biographical learning can be used in various ways. During intergenerational meetings, young people learn by listening to the experiences, successes and failures of older people. Biographical learning is important in all three models (Malec, 2011, pp. 13-16).

The learning by old age model is based on showing and promoting different images of the elderly in the public space and popular culture. Popular culture is a part of everyday life, and it contains elements of *tacit knowledge*. People are generally unaware that they learn from everyday experiences. Content concerning the elderly is transmitted by culture. Learning in this model is an analysis of stereotypes of the elderly in culture and the public space, aimed at combatting those stereotypes (Malec, 2011, pp. 17-19). In turn, the learning in old age model is the most important in the context of my discussion. This model stresses that

the diagnosis of education potential and the capabilities of the elderly are fundamental, and that the aim is to find the best form of educational activity. The model shows that various experiences can be useful in learning new content by using an existing *meaning scheme*¹. On the other hand, the same *meaning scheme* can be a barrier to learning new content which is inconsistent with them. It should be pointed out that older people do not always learn new things – during the educational process they generally reinforce the beliefs and attitudes which they already possess. In a mobile, dynamic and pluralistic society, the rigid meaning scheme can be dysfunctional. The aim is to assist older people in transforming their subjective view of the world, therefore, older people will learn new things which are useful to them in their social life (Malec, 2011, pp.19-22).

It should be noted that experiences are fundamental elements of both the andragogical model and the model of learning in old age. Parts of the andragogical model should be used in the education of older people, but they must be adapted to needs of older students. As mentioned previously, non-formal education occupies an important place in adult education. This form of education is based on a partnership relationship and student responsibility for learning. In the context of the learning in old age model, it is worth mentioning a non-formal form of education, which can be helpful in transforming the learning of seniors and their self-development. An example can be drama (theatre form). Theatre form should be understood as “(...) basic elements of theatre that a playwright employs and a director builds upon: focus, tension, constraint, ritual, contrast and symbolization” (Bolton, 1993, p. 42).

Drama has a lot of educational potential. The richness of “drama lies in its potential to achieve change of understanding (a pedagogic objective) along with improvement in drama skills and knowledge of theatre” (Bolton, 1993, p. 39). It should be pointed out that drama is based on a partnership relationship between teacher and participators. These elements point to the use of drama in adult / elderly education.

Moreover, the developmental function and aspect of theatre form should be stressed. It is distinguished by two functions: the development of self-awareness and the development of social consciousness. Participation in drama can be a way to discover and express ideas by means of body and voice. Furthermore, drama facilitates the development of self-confidence and self-esteem. Theatre form also develops sensitivity and imagination. Moreover, this method of education allows us to study the social environment and understand it. Participants of drama develop communication skills, problem-solving and empathy (Witer-ska, 2011, p. 76).

1 Author of the model learning in old age had based on theory of transformative learning by Jack Mezirow (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Company).

Drama should, however, be adapted to specific stages of human development. The potential for realising the educational goal is dependent on the age of the students, and refers to such aspects as: action vs. analysis action; concrete vs. abstract and me vs. others. Drama is used differently in adult education than in the education of children. Late adulthood signifies a stable ego, which permits empathy, therefore adult participants in drama are interested in understanding the behaviour and motives of others. Moreover, the transformation of morality determines the level of analysis of problems in drama. In the case of children and young people, drama is used only to discuss reality and change understanding (Witerska, 2011, pp. 77-81).

Drama can be used successfully in teaching seniors because it includes many aspects important for adult education. First of all, the participants' own experiences can be a topic for drama, with the potential of using educational biography. Furthermore, participating in theatre form is an opportunity to combat stereotypes of the elderly and to promote their positive image. Drama is based on a partnership relationship, which is also important in adult education. Moreover, theatre form enables a person's development, both in an individual and a social aspect. It should be noted that drama is a good way of seeing another point of view, and of changing perspectives, which is very important in the learning in old age model.

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THE TRANSGENERATIONAL THEATRICAL GROUP AS SEEN BY SENIORS AND STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

The main aim of the article is to describe the transgenerational relationship between seniors and students who were involved in the theatrical group. The analysed research material consists of 9 interviews with seniors and 5 interviews with students. Areas explored were such as: the image of seniors seen by students and the image of students seen by seniors, mutual exchange of experience, difficulties and conflicts, benefits derived from transgenerational cooperation and the general atmosphere and hints for people starting the cooperation between generations.

Keywords: transgenerational cooperation, theatrical group, generations, seniors, students.

INTRODUCTION

According to a well-known anthropologist Margaret Mead, there are three forms of mutual learning: the education of the younger generation by older ones, peers' education from each other and handing down knowledge to the older generations by younger participants of the same culture. In different situations there might appear other configurations of this intergenerational transmission. However, in today's world a bigger and bigger part is played by the transfer of knowledge coming from the grass roots level, which means the situation when younger generations contribute to educating the older ones (Niezabitowski, 2010, pp. 37-38). The tendency is especially seen in the technological field, yet there exist other branches that require the knowledge of younger people. The older humans may feel excluded or even less important.

Despite the increasing phenomenon of ageing societies (Wójcik, Brzezińska, Sienkiewicz-Wilowska, 2012, p. 56). and different programs within both national and transnational reach aimed at improving the image of the group

of elderly people, among the younger ones there still exists a myth of the old age connected with gradual withdrawal from life.

“Physical symptoms of growing old make old age become associated with infirmity, scruffiness, body decay, fluidality, disease, death or a lack of control over one’s own organism. On account of their physical features, elderly people are often regarded as decrepit, asexual, disabled or even incapable of independent existence” (Dziuban, 2010, p. 142).

The results of research carried out on 573 persons aged 10 to 23 indicates that the young perceive the old age mostly as a negative and sad stage of a human life. Among all the terms connected with the old age about half of the respondents indicate poor health conditions both physical and mental, one fifth of those questioned associate old age with passing time, loneliness and alienation, about 16% of the respondents see medicines and dependency as a sign of the old age, whereas the 11% perceive this life stage mainly as bitterness, grouching and unwillingness to live (Zawada, 2012, pp. 24-25).

Such a picture of the elderly people does not contribute to building positive relationships, which corresponds to increasing negative attitudes towards them. 52, 19% of the respondents treat the elderly reluctantly claiming that the relationships with them are difficult because of their harshness, persistence, dissatisfaction with everything, inquisitiveness, excessive religiousness, physical exhaustion as well as scruffiness (Zawada, 2012, p. 25).

Furthermore, as revealed (demonstrated) by CBOS research from 2009 conducted on a group of 1022 adults, “younger generations were responsible for the vast majority of negative approaches towards older people (30%)” (CBOS, 2013, p. 8).

Patience, understanding, ability to solve dilemmas, cheerfulness were among positive features mentioned by younger people (Zawada, 2012, p. 25). What is more, the great majority of the CBOS respondents (87%) think that elderly people are absolutely necessary in society, and only 9% are of the opinion that they constitute a burden. As many as 97% of those questioned claim to appreciate the role of grandparents in a family, and 95% of them think that it is worth taking advantage of the elderly people’s knowledge and experience (CBOS, 2013, p. 2). The others appreciate the engagement of seniors in social work (CBOS, 2013, p. 3).

Based on the presented research, it can be seen that in the image of the elderly people functioning in the postmodern society, there are many ambiguities, unfortunately a negative approach to the elderly prevails. To improve the image, it is really essential to involve the seniors in activities beyond work within their peer group. It is important to arrange the situations in which postfigurative transmission would be balanced by gaining knowledge from the old by the young. The example of such situations can

be the seniors' participation in different artistic enterprises based on cooperation with younger generation.

A cultural and educational activity, as Agata Chabior maintains, among others plays an integrative part. It consists of enhancing the degree of identifying of specific people with given social backgrounds. It is personified mostly through tightening bonds with the representatives of younger generations, which constitutes special prevention against social exclusion and loneliness and, what is more, it increases a feeling of belonging to society (Chabior, 2000, p. 71).

An active participation of the elderly in cultural life may be one of the ways towards a good old age. Irena Pufal-Struzik, in his research proves that "active and creative seniors want to be useful and necessary proving that they are not only capable of reflexive and long-time-perspective view on reality, but also rich in experience which they want to share with the young [...]" (Chabior, 2000, p. 77; za: Pufal-Struzik, 1996, p. 261). Undoubtedly, young people are really necessary for the old ones in direct contact, thanks to which they can feel heard, understood, appreciated and accepted. Also younger generations can gather from the seniors' experience, knowledge and life wisdom (Fabiś, 2005, p. 96). Such a mutual exchange pays off in the development of tolerance, friendliness and acceptance as well as a sense of belonging to a multigenerational community in the spirit of solidarity between generations.

One form of cultural activity is different kinds of theatrical groups. According to Aleksander Hertz "the social task of theatre consists of its socializing activities. What is even more important here is the fact of the a human group which challenges itself in the atmosphere of emotions provided by the stage. [...] The process of socializing through joint emotions, giving in to the same authorities or taking on the same moral and aesthetic patterns etc. is permanent" (Hertz, 1978, p. 35). The vast range of the influence of theatrical activities means that it moves many aspects of human personality and enables people to satisfy their needs, express their own "I", as well as their beliefs and expectations. The shared process of creating a piece of art is an excellent ground for understanding, tolerance and mutual learning. It seems that a transgenerational theatrical group is the situation in which both the young and the old have a lot to offer to each other.

The purpose of this article is to outline the vision of intergenerational cooperation as a part of a transgenerational theatrical group from the perspective of its participants: seniors and students. To realize this assignment, the technique of the free interview was used with the oriented list of issues. In nature the research was qualitative. The analysed research material consists of 9 interviews with seniors and 5 interviews with students. The research group included seniors from the University of the Third Age from the

University of Wrocław as well as students from the same university who took part in the classes of the transgenerational theatrical group. Original statements of respondents are marked in italics in the text, while the number of the interview is marked in brackets.

THE ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL RESEARCH

The reason for participation

When asked about the reason for their participation in the activities of the theatrical group, most frequently the older respondents mentioned unfulfilled childhood dreams or the continuation of previous artistic and social engagement. On the other hand, the younger were usually driven by curiosity or willingness to develop new skills. Most of the respondents knew about a transgenerational character of the group and had earlier experience of working with other generations and this is why, starting cooperation was not burdened with mutual prejudices or doubts, but rather characterized by open-mindedness and kindness.

The image of seniors seen by students

Among many positive features there are some principal ones such as: discipline, responsibility and involvement in artistic activities. Young people admire the old ones for their full-of-dedication behaviour reflecting their great motivation for work. One of the younger participants mentions: "I was surprised at their [seniors] engagement, and the fact that they are ready to specially go to the rental company for costumes only to use them once" (I 10)². The involvement was also seen in breaking personal barriers. "Some seniors were afraid of performing on the stage, but they overcame their fear and finally, they gave a wonderful performance. The audience present was huge [...]. Moreover, it was great to watch some seniors cope with stage fright and effectively overcome it – as one of the students says" (I 12).

According to students, an additional aspect of special overcoming oneself was breaking barriers in stereotypes typical of serious elderly people. Practising theatre etudes imposed certain experimental and innovational gestures, poses and characterizations which, at the beginning, raised a certain opposition of seniors. However, thanks to their personal engagement and the support from the younger participants as well as the attitude of the leader, it was possible to break the borders and boldly perform on the stage. One of the female participants indicates: "Such a surprise comes from each of them. On the one hand, we can see an elderly a little lost and confused, but on the other

2 The number of the interview is marked in parentheses, e.g. Interview number 10: (I 10)

hand, something inside the person bursts out and it is fantastic! In spite of their age, despite the fact that somebody walks on crutches, they can put the crutch aside and do their best or even more, as much as 200%." (I10)

On the other hand, the engagement manifested itself also in competition among seniors for the position in the group or for parts in the play. In the students' opinion, it did not result from the fear of being rejected but from the desire to exist as the main character in the play. Young people value seniors for their friendliness, frankness, support given and the experience from which they can derive universal life hints.

The picture of students from the eyes of seniors

The elderly value the students for what is attributed to their youth: beauty, visuality, graceful movements on the stage. Moreover, the young appear as persons who know what they want and possess certain defined perspectives.

Very often, in the description of students, there appeared such features as courtesy, politeness, open-mindedness, tolerance, empathy with the elderly and willingness to get in contact with them thanks to which they managed to build up relationships without any artificial distance: "[...] wherever I was, it was beautiful, helpful there is understanding sometimes so wonderful, not forced by anything" (I 6)

There are other qualities of the young valued by seniors such as their manner distinguished by special cheerfulness, spontaneity, freedom of expressing emotions and thoughts, enthusiasm as well as gentleness: "the young did not accumulate maliciousness which the older people relieve" (I3)

Theatrical group as the ground for mutual exchange of experience

Doubtless, shared participating in preparation of the performance is the ground for mutual cooperation, where, as one of the female participants says: "both seniors and students derive values from each other and it is a creative and fruitful exchange" (I 1).

What could the young learn from the elderly? As stated by students, seniors are calmer and more controlled, which enables them to be more consistent in creating coherent work and refining the details. Furthermore, the young are of the opinion that from the older they could learn dutifulness and deep involvement in artistic tasks. Among vital features admired by students, there was great perseverance of the seniors, which became a source of inspiration: "if a senior decides to overcome stage fright or other limitations, they will do it", (I 12), "besides they are not afraid of performing on the stage, regardless of what any of their friends will say" (I 12).

However, in the seniors' view, the younger could learn from them enthu-

siasm, fascination with life despite age and enjoying every moment of it. What is more, understanding, humbleness and reflection: "the young rush and rush and do not look around and we, the elderly, can already do it" (I 8). An important aspect regarded as a value passed down to the younger generations is experience: "some patterns, which we could not live without and they cannot either" (I 3), a way of looking at life, discipline, a lack of 'prima donna' behavior, which is a special kind of concentration but not on themselves.

As far as learning from the young by the old is concerned, the seniors mainly mentioned such characteristics as open-mindedness, being less fearful: "We are afraid of many things, even ashamed that somebody will laugh at us or make tactless remarks" (I 7). During classes in the transgenerational theatrical group, seniors also learn how to preserve their *joie de vivre* (joy of life), cheerfulness, freedom of behavior, spontaneity, freedom from the restriction imposed by physical appearance, impetuousness, boldness and courage. Seniors think that "the young come up with many more ideas which one can listen to or look at (I 1).

According to students, seniors can learn from them many helpful abilities necessary for existing in the contemporary world. As a result of frequent trips abroad, the older people become more eager to study foreign languages: "because transgenerational theatre goes abroad, they can see young people speak many foreign languages, and consequently they more willingly take part in different language courses" (I 10). Moreover, seniors working with the younger, learn to use different kinds of multimedia, for example, laptops or Dictaphones.

Influenced by younger people, seniors are willing to attend more classes, have quicker reactions and show increased commitment. Through such a contact, the elderly learn to gradually receive criticism.

Students claim that the elderly eagerly enter into the imposed subject or thought, whereas it is harder for them to create something on their own, so consequently, sharing work with the young, they have an opportunity to learn spontaneity, abstractness and originality in creation.

Difficulties, conflicts

The participation in the transgenerational theatrical group is a challenge both for seniors and for students. Therefore, both groups encounter special difficulties, whose overcoming might constitute another source of satisfaction. A certain obstacle for seniors in proper acting might be problems with memorizing, which makes it difficult for them to fully concentrate on performing. Another problem which touches the elderly is difficulty of getting rid of their conception or vision of the role. Any kind of criticism of

their suggestions is treated highly personally and affects further activities discouragingly.

As in every group in which many individualities cooperate there appeared certain conflicts. In the senior group misunderstandings usually appeared because of competition, as the older actors do their best to hold their position in the group.

Nevertheless, conflicts between seniors and students happened rather rarely since the seniors' approach to the students was more protective: "we treat students more like grandchildren" (I 2); students were not rivals to them. But if any misunderstandings arose, they concerned mainly the degree of the innovative character of the performance - seniors opted for more classical plays while the students preferred to take more up-to-date or even abstract roles that required huge stage courage.

The personal benefits from participating in a theatrical group joining generations

Taking part in a transgenerational theatrical group, seniors mostly felt self-satisfaction resulting from the fact of being in such a group of people, as well as hope and a big amount of energy: "I was just extremely happy, I left full of optimism, energy" (I 4), "more joy in comparison with a one-generation group, a possibility of learning, recollecting the behaviour we have already grown out of" (I 5). During classes seniors became aware of their enormous inner strength and a belief that they can overcome many things, despite the barriers related to age.

On the other hand, students had an opportunity to better know the elderly, observe them and develop emotional bonds: "I learn how to cooperate with them, how to treat, talk to. I learn patience, understanding. It is a fantastic workshop for a scientist, educator, tremendous lesson of tolerance" (I 13). A great advantage of taking part in this kind of group was also artistic fulfilling yourself, testing your own creativity in the event of a different view on ideas suggested by seniors.

The general atmosphere and hints for people starting the cooperation between generations

The vast majority of the older participants positively described the atmosphere prevailing during classes. It can even be said that they were delighted with the cooperation with the young which can be proved by the statement of one of the participants: "the mere presence (of the young) is necessary, just to feel better, decrease the average, stop feeling we are left on our own but see that somebody wants to be with us" (I 9). The elderly appreciated the element of youth in creating the general positive atmosphere, which can

be seen in the following words: “[...] I very much like young people, they introduce new spirit” (I 2) and “[...] the young make the atmosphere brighter (lighten up the atmosphere), as if you could grasp such a sign of youth with your hand, it is easier to remember being young, there is more joy, more brightness; [...] living together lightens the life up” (I 3). Whereas the young indicated the diversity of the atmosphere depending on such factors as: the stage of preparation for the performance, the degree of innovation of the assignment or the total agreement on a suggested exercise.

Taking into account different forms of work, the substantial majority of the respondents most prefer full integration – the division into mixed groups including both old and young. Seniors value peculiar innovation, inventiveness of the students; while the latter – a chance of observing the elderly and gaining from their experience and serious attitude to the tasks assigned. Both groups of respondents think that the most important features of the people realizing transgenerational cooperation are, among other things, mutual openness, tolerance for otherness, an ability of attentive listening to the interlocutor as well as a fruitful conversation, empathy, creativity, partnership and acceptance.

Among the hints for the people launching mutual transgenerational work, there can be found such pieces of advice as: openness, avoiding stereotypes, wrong convictions, concentration on what unites but not divides, resignation from orienting to individualism, increased perception of the potential of group activities, patience, keeping reasonable distance from oneself, creativity and friendliness. One of the female students mentions: “You have to be open with other people and remember that we were brought up in a different way and in a different reality” (I 12).

CONCLUSIONS

Drawing conclusions from the respondents’ answers, seniors and students working on the same assignment, which was the preparation of the theatrical performance, brings benefits for both of them. While being interviewed, seniors could not conceal growing enthusiasm which appeared when they recollected working together with the young. First of all, the contact with students was a source of positive energy, joy and delight which, as seniors notice, spread beyond the limits of a theatrical group and merged into other spheres of life. Being with young people made the elderly feel younger. During rehearsals they forgot about stereotypes associated with their age category and became more spontaneous, open-minded and cheerful. Getting more acquainted with young people, they challenged stereo-

types and prejudices. Undoubtedly, the participation in the transgenerational theatrical group provided them with a lot of satisfaction in many fields, contributed to better self-recognition and strengthened faith in their own possibilities. On the other hand, students were not only able to benefit from the experience of the older partners, learn responsibility and discipline, but, above all, witness the activity of the elderly full of energy and optimism as well. Thanks to it, in their minds there appeared a picture of a senior, different from the stereotyped sad vision of the old age – an actor – actively creating their role not only on the stage but also in an everyday life.

Based on the results of the research presented in this article, one can underline several aspects of mutual positive interaction of the old and the young, which derive from different experience of both generations. According to Grzegorz Grzybek: "The proper attitude to the world of values and goods is the art of life. A human being learns it (this art) all life long, and this in turn leads to experiencing happiness not only as a feeling, a state of joy but also the awareness that life is valuable and serves me – a being full of unlimited aspirations. In the art of fulfilling dreams and experiencing happiness, different generations can be really helpful to each other" (Grzybek, 2010, p. 29).

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Myths, legends and fables in an educational context

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MYTH AND LEGEND – COMPARISON TRIAL OF DEFINITIONS

ABSTRACT

The article shows the most important differences between myth and legend, in order to define them precisely. As it turns out, these two terms does not mean the same. In spite of this, we usually confuse them by treating myth and legend as synonyms. In modern times of intensive trans-cultural diffusion mixing up these words might be catastrophic in terms of individual and group identity.

Keywords: myth, legend, history, modernity, culture, identity.

The aim of the article is to show the similarities and differences between myth and legend. These two notions are usually misunderstood, which leads to the drawing of wrong conclusions about them. There exists, in our modern culture, a risk of confusing the definitions of legend and myth. On the one hand, we can observe the development of science and technology, which supplant irrational theories and interpretations of the world. On the other hand there is the post-modernism turn which fluidises reality (term used by Zygmunt Bauman) and makes the terminology equivocal. These two constitute perils for the modern world because the project of total demythologization of culture seems to be impossible (Kołakowski, 2003, p. 124) and legends strengthen our identity. Myth has been – and still is – present in the modern world, in various domains of everyday life and in science: in culture, philosophy, psychology and history. It is still an important notion which shapes social relations, just as legends create individual and social identity. Legends indicate the borders of thinking and consolidate cultural

rules. It is a part of the history of culture, re-created by each new generation. Both of these terms are crucial to understanding our own times.

There are many definitions of myth to be found in encyclopaedias, dictionaries of ethnology or sociology. They are useful to scientists representing various domains: sociology, ethnology, psychology and cultural studies. It is quite difficult to determine what myth in fact is. We will attempt to present selected definitions in order to indicate the most important distinguishing features.

According to Władysław Kopaliński myth is defined as a traditional story of unknown origin, the purpose of which is to explain customs, beliefs and institutions. Myth also contains a view accepted as true by a particular group. Moreover, the author mentions the Greek definitions of myth: expression, advice, order, proverb and a legend (Kopaliński, 2007, p. 287). As an example, W. Kopaliński's definition contains myths and legends of the Old Testament. It is quite difficult to separate these two terms – the differences between them are not obvious. The dictionary of ethnology defines myth as a story (narrow understanding) or as an archaic point of view (wider understanding) or as a universal form of conscience (overall understanding). The most common understanding of myth is a story. The second understanding is a synonym of the word "mythology". The last definition adds concepts such as political ideologies, stereotypes, fashion, propaganda and commerce. (Tomicki, 1987, pp. 244-247). Myth is also a story or a tale which attempts to explain the origin of the world and its people, natural phenomena and cultures. Myth is related to crucial events in the life of both the individual and the community. In contrast, "myth as an illusion means excessive and unjustified extension of the primal myth understanding" (Tarkowska, 1992, p. 250). In this way the author of the above-mentioned definition writes about an informal understanding of myth, e.g. the myth of America ("American dream"). Another statement about myth tells about "sacred story of the birth of gods and their acts, the creation of the cosmos, the origin of the first people, and natural phenomena, plants and animals, instruments and social institutions (*Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna. New Universal Encyclopedia*, 2004, p. 520).

As we can see, these definitions are not coherent, but we can say that they complement each other. In each of them it is possible to find common features: myth as a story with a traditional and primordial character, its significance and explanation of the origin of gods, the world and humanity. Myth is a type of narrative that relates not only to the past, but also to the present and future, because it is passed on to the next generation. The content of myth refers to a time beyond history – impossible to explain while referring only to tradition. In the structure of myth we can find rules which control social coexistence. According to Ryszard Tomicki, myth is also a cultural

code which shapes the natural and social order of our world (Tomicki, 1987, p. 245). It portrays models of behaviour and moulds them. We can say it has a cosmic character. Another feature of myth is credibility. If people stop believing in the content of a myth, it will disturb the order of the mythical world. In this kind of story, we may not only find humans, animals and gods, but also preternatural creatures.

Let us now consider definitions of legend. Has it something in common with myth, or are these terms completely different?

In the 1950s legend was defined firstly as the reading of the Holy Bible, Acts of the Martyrs or hagiographies during church services in the Middle Ages, and later as historical description (in poetic style) of saints' lives. Legend became then an important part of national literature. (Gloger, 1958, pp. 138-139). The author not only presented a detailed definition of legend, but also showed its transformation. According to W. Kopaliński, legend (also myth) is based on folk stories, narrating the lives of heroes, usually saints or martyrs (Kopaliński, 2007, p. 161). In "The Dictionary of Polish Folklore", legend is characterized as "a religious story" (literally "thing destined to read") in which saints usually appear (but not always, see "The Legend of bandit Madej") (Krzyżanowski, 1965, pp. 199-200). The modern definition underlines that legend is a fantastical story with miraculous plots, principally concerning the lives of saints and martyrs. Nowadays, legend provides much moral and worldview information for modern literature (*Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna. New Universal Encyclopedia*, 2004, p. 11). Much as myth, the term of legend is also difficult to define. Despite this, dictionaries and encyclopaedias refer to some constant features: description or stories of the lives of saints. The meaning of this term has changed; and new content has been added (fantastical and miraculous plots). According to W. Kopaliński, legend does not find confirmation in historical sources (Kopaliński, 2007, p. 161 – the author mentions that legend is a fantastical story containing historical events). On the contrary, the definition of Zygmunt Gloger denotes that stories about saints were drawn from Martyrs Acts. We can say that time in legend is partially defined, likewise the function of legend. Use of this term in modern literature provides content principally concerning worldviews – it refers to specific events from the past. If legend did not refer to a precisely-defined time and event, it would not become a point of moral reference. As in myth, preternatural creatures, and also fantastical ones, such as dragons or nymphs, appear in legends. Legend often (but not always) refers to a specific territory and social group, such as the legend of Cracow. Thus, in a different place and historical time it could be regarded as unreliable.

After representing the most essential elements of the definitions of myth and legend, it is worth to indicating their common features. Both myth and

legend are a type of story. Their narrative character can help the reader to identify with the main characters, and to adopt their specific attitudes to his own life. Moreover, both these stories are useful in looking for a description of the world (myth) or explaining complex moral situations. In both of them we can find the appearance of preternatural and fantastical creatures. To sum up, these are the only similarities between myth and legend, but a diligent researcher may find more of them. So, what differentiates these two terms? We can enumerate: function, time and authenticity. The function of myth, as previously stated, is to provide an answer to the creation of the world, and the origin of the gods and mortals; whereas the purpose of legend is "enrapturing the mind and lifting believers' hearts". (Gloger, 1958, p. 138). As a literary genre, legend was popular mainly in the Middle Ages and was used as a moral tale. Nowadays, legends also contain this feature, referring to the battle between good and evil. Other differences appear in the treatment of time in legends. Time in myth is not the same as time in legend. Mythical time reaches far into the past and extends into the present and future. Time in legends refers to events in the past. We do not know the authors of legends (the origin of folk stories is unknown), but in cases of legends about saints (for example about St. Christopher) we can more or less identify their origin. Time in myths is beyond history, but time in legends can be confirmed by historical sources. The cosmic character of myth causes no doubts as to its content. We may say that myth has a feature of totality: it embraces all fields of man's consciousness, and thereby closes another interpretation of the world. In contrast, if legend is related to a specific society in a specific country, and is not widespread in other countries, then it may be recognised as a false history. The Church plays a huge role in making legends universal, thanks to the canonization of those who appeared in legends as main characters.

The foregoing comparison shows that myth and legend do not tell the same story. There are more features which differentiate the two terms than characteristics which connect them. The function of myths is making order of the universe. They provide an answer to the origin of the world and its people. Nevertheless, nowadays we may not assign the value of building social order to myths. However, as Leszek Kołakowski said, myths are still necessary because they define reality and are a counterbalance to culture's threats. Currently, in these times of secularization, legends concerning saints seem to be relics of the past. In spite of their Christian origin, they are still a source of moral attitudes, which are still very important today.

In conclusion, in comparing the definitions of myth and legend, we need to emphasise their original meanings. It may prevent various misunderstandings about what is visible in literature for adults and children. In the

book *Myths and Magic of Herbs* we can read about legends in which plants are the main characters (white hawthorn or dianthus) (Maciotti, 2006, pp. 30–33). In the introduction to *Myths and legends from around the world*, the reader may find definitions of legend and myth which conclude that they are the same. (*Mity i legendy z całego świata. Myths and legends from around the world*, 2001, p. 8). It is necessary to add that these two books are written by Italian authors, so their understanding of myths and legends may be different. This observation confirms the theory of trans-cultural diffusion. So, our task is to restore the correct significances of myth and legend in order to avoid becoming the tools of destruction of native culture and our identity.

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BETWEEN ANALOGY AND METAPHOR – ON VISUAL TECHNIQUES IN COMPUTER SKILLS TRAINING OF SENIORS

*A good analogy is refreshing to the mind
Ludwig Wittgenstein*

ABSTRACT

In aging societies, such as the Polish society, the need for actions Ahmed to improve the seniors' quality of life is increasing. In order to meet these needs it is necessary to look for educational solutions that could address the needs and expectations of seniors. The development of information and communications technology (ICT) has made it vital to undertake initiatives aimed to minimize the results of e-exclusion and to present the advantages of using new technology to seniors. According to the authors of the present paper these goals can be successfully achieved when the presented contents are tailored to seniors' needs and limitations, and when they are presented in an attractive way. Thus, the present paper contains a description of computer skills training classes in which the educational potential of metaphor and analogy was used.

Key words: metaphor, analogy, seniors, education, new technology

Contemporary societies, including the society of Poland, are referred to as "ageing societies". That means that the number of seniors is growing, and along with it the necessity to provide seniors with opportunities of diverse forms of activity is increasing. These forms need to address the needs and the expectations of this social group while at the same time making it possible for them to find their own place within the dynamically changing reality.

Changes in civilisation, culture, the economy, as well as other kinds of change have a major influence on the quality of life of people in late adulthood. This fact makes it necessary to undertake a number of actions aimed at making seniors accustomed to the specificity of the contemporary changes. That is because the changes frequently cause a feeling of alienation among the elderly, and they lead to seniors' marginalisation, withdrawal, as well as leading to a sense of incompetence. To prevent the aforementioned phenomena diverse educational actions need to be carried out. That is because education can be a "bridge" between the past and the present. It allows one to cross safely from the world of the past to that which is new, unknown, that which causes anxiety. It is a tool that needs to be constantly improved for the sake of the common good. It is education that provides the opportunity to understand and accept change, to let one enjoy progress, in the broad understanding of the term, and, as a result, it is education that makes it possible to improve quality of life on many levels.

As it is commonly known, the increasing relative number of seniors among the general population causes them to become a social group that is the focus of increasing attention. At the same time, the interest in the elderly is growing, especially among producers of goods and providers of services. It is for them that the "silver generation" becomes a more and more attractive group of customers. Formerly this group was virtually ignored. Noticing the consumer potential in seniors has caused the range of offers tailored for them to change rapidly in the context of its scope as well as quality. This tendency pertains also to the educational offer. Foreign language and IT and communication classes appear to be the most popular. Because of the scope of the topic of the present paper the authors concentrate exclusively on the characteristics of computer skills training courses, which appear to be dominant from the perspective of the needs and the preferences of seniors.

One of the fundamental problems that people in the third age need to face is digital exclusion, which is the result of dynamic technological development. To combat the consequences of cyber-exclusion numerous educational initiatives are undertaken. They are aimed to promote IT and media education among seniors. Actions of this kind are carried out in government institutions, businesses, and NGOs. Their aim is to address the fears and the barriers that seniors have in connection with new technologies, to introduce persons in the third age to cyberspace and to the opportunities created by computers with internet access, as well as making seniors more independent.

The increase in popularity of the idea of lifelong learning, establishment of institutions aimed at education of seniors (such as the Universities of the Third Age), development of IT and communication technologies lead to

the increased interest in computer skills training. Along with it, the number of computer skills training courses and workshops for seniors has rocketed. There is also a growing number of course books and guidebooks, such as "Computers for seniors", "Using the computer step by step. A practical guidebook for beginners", "Internet for seniors", "PC for seniors". One should note, however, that the quality of such publications is variable. The quality of the such course books ought to be compared from the perspective of the content, the quality of print and layout, the number of pages, the list of contents, and the difficulty level. One also needs to take into account the information about the publisher and the author. Even a brief analysis of the course books for seniors allows for the conclusion that:

1. A large number of them are written by IT specialists who use terminology that is alien to people in late adulthood. It is often that difficult IT terms are explained with the use of other terms that are just as problematic, which makes seniors feel lost and confused. According to the seniors themselves³, the glossaries of specialist terms that are aimed at explaining the complex processes of using the computer not only fail to serve their purpose, but also discourage from reading further, or even form attending classes, because of the sense of incompetence that they create.
2. The authors of the books fail to take into account the fact that seniors use different versions of the same programmes; they do not present the differences nor do they explain them.
3. The authors of the course books seem not to have sufficient knowledge of the processes of aging and old age, education of seniors, psychology of aging, cognitive psychology, pedagogics, etc. The result is that the needs, expectations, and capabilities of seniors are not taken into account, and the limitations resulting from old age are ignored. That is why the people in the third age point out that the print is too small, the amount of information is too great, e.g., in the instruction manuals, the number of illustrations on single pages is too high, the use of fonts and colours is too chaotic. The low resolution of the illustrations – print

3 Conclusions from computer skills training classes with seniors. A collective analysis of the Internet skills training course books for seniors. The classes were organised at "Akademia Seniora" in Wrocław. Three groups of six people took part in the analysis. All that groups took part in a 15-hours course, with classes of 2,5 hours. 30 minutes of each class were devoted to the discussion about educational materials copied from the course books, and an analysis of the course books that were the source of the topics of the classes. The following aspects were taken into account in the analysis: layout, cover, list of contents, the declared and the actual level of difficulty, the number and quality of illustrations, the aesthetics of the book, the number of presented contents, terminology, etc. Analyses of the course books were continued in subsequent groups when course books compatible with the topics of the classes were used.

screens – is a major problem. Sometimes they are printed in greyscale⁴, which makes it difficult to compare them with the actual screen, or they are too small, which makes it impossible to identify all the details.

4. Some of the beginner level course books include information that seniors perceive as advanced. For example, the seniors point out⁵ using terms such as “using Excel”, “recovering lost files”, “protecting the computer from malware”, “updating the system – Windows Update”⁶, and many others, in beginner level course books. What can be concluded from this?

Undertaking educational challenges by seniors in the times of the contemporary dynamic changes appears to be essential. So seems to be the development of new curricula, teaching materials, as well as the numerous forms of activities for seniors. This pertains to the initiatives that take into account the capabilities and the limitations of people in the third age as a social group. At the same time one ought to bear in mind that with the increased number of the undertaken actions that quality should also be improved. That is why it seems to be essential to develop actions aimed to work out effective methods for the education of seniors. The methods need to be created on the basis of gerontological knowledge, in the broad sense of the term, the contemporary developments in cognitive psychology, pedagogics, as well as the practical conclusions drawn from education of seniors. The educators of people in their late adulthood are able to compare the newest propositions in training courses with educational practice, as, as a result, they can formulate conclusions that may improve the quality of seniors’ education, and, consequently, increase the quality of their lives.

An effort should be made at this point to attempt to answer the question: how should computer skills training courses be designed? The problem is

4 Sometimes entire course books are printed in black and white, which makes learning difficult, because seniors look for analogies during their IT training. See: Bonek, T., Smaga, M. (2014). *Internet dla seniora. Praktyczny poradnik dla stawiających pierwsze kroki w sieci* [Internet for seniors. A practical guidebook for those taking their first steps on the web] Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer. Price, S. (2009). *Komputer dla seniorów*, [Computer for seniors] Gliwice: Helion.

5 Conclusions from computer skills training classes with seniors. A collective analysis of the Internet skills training course books for seniors. See: Wieprzkowicz D. (2013). *Komputer dla seniorów. Obsługa komputera krok po kroku. Praktyczny poradnik dla początkujących*. [Computer for seniors. Using the computer step by step. A practical guidebook for beginners] Warszawa: Samo Sedno.

6 Elements of the list of contents of a course book that was analysed by seniors during IT training classes conducted by an author of the present paper, which was titled “A practical guidebook for beginners”. See: Wieprzkowicz D. (2013). *Komputer dla seniorów. Obsługa komputera krok po kroku. Praktyczny poradnik dla początkujących*. [Computer for seniors. Using the computer step by step. A practical guidebook for beginners] Warszawa: Samo Sedno.

quite broad. It would require an comprehensive study, which would have take into account the educational aims, methods, tools, profiles of educators, the scope of the discussed contents, and, last but not least, the specific character of the students in late adulthood. Because of the scope of the present paper the authors focus exclusively on the problem of the broadly understood educational methods. It is an opportunity to employ analogy and metaphor, perceived as educational techniques that are particularly effective in education of persons in their late adulthood. The dictionary definition of analogy is (1) similarity, concurrence, parallel features, (2) thinking by analogy – transferring the statements about an object to another object on the basis of the similarities between them (*Słownik Wyrazów Obcych*, 2005). The metaphor, in turn, is a stylistic figure in which a word or a phrase take on a new, figurative meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the particular words, a trope (*Słownik Wyrazów Obcych*, 2005). The usefulness of analogy and metaphor in IT training for seniors has been concluded from the analysis of the results of the research conducted by the authors of this paper as well as their extensive experience in teaching seniors.

The opportunity to use the aforementioned techniques of analogy and metaphor during computer skills training courses for people in their late adulthood is strictly connected with the communicational competences of the instructors conducting such classes. As it turns out, a high level of communicativeness of a trainer is crucial in the eyes of seniors. On the basis of the research carried out as part of the *@ktywne Senior*⁷ project seven features of a good instructor were defined: Starting with the most important one, they are:

- (1) openness and the ability to share knowledge easily,
- (2) dedication and helpfulness,
- (3) patience and understanding,
- (4) kindness and the ability to create a pleasant atmosphere,
- (5) effective management of the group and the time,
- (6) professionalism,
- (7) ability to express oneself beautifully (Jurczyk-Romanowska, 2012; Jurczyk-Romanowska, 2013).

The list has been developed on the basis of the statements of the seniors that were formulated during two stages of the training: during the research of the expectations that people in this age group have and during the conducted evaluation. The figure below presents the percentage of the features in the answers provided in both the stages of the research. The 94% in open-

7 Conclusions from the *@ktywne Senior* project are presented in “The Third Shift. Andragogical Reflections on The *@ktywne Senior* Project” ed. Ewa Jurczyk-Romanowska, Wrocław 2012. The publication is considered the Lower Silesian Course Book of Activities for Seniors by the Marshal Office of Lower Silesia.

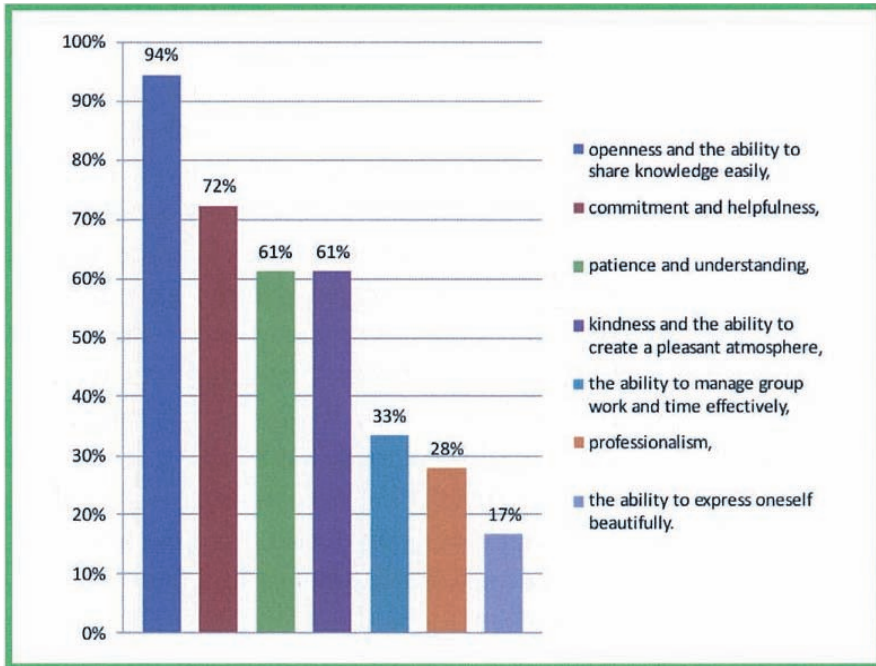


Figure 1. Features of a good instructor in the order of importance.

Source: developed by the authors, first published in: Jurczyk-Romanowska, 2012, p. 92.

ness and the ability to share knowledge easily allows for the conclusion that for seniors it is the single most important competence of an instructor. One should also take into account that professionalism was only the penultimate feature mentioned by seniors, and only 28% research participants considered this competence important. What seems interesting is that in the advertisements of computer skills training courses professionalism is always emphasised: “No stress classes, the oldest female student was 87 (!!!), and the oldest male student was 88 (!!!), it is never too late to learn, join our cheap and professional courses” (*Kursy komputerowe dla Seniorów, Emerytów i Rentistów*, n.d.). Teachers with years of experience: “Our experienced trainers work on the high quality of the courses, as well as concentrating on breaking the emotional barriers of seniors that result from the fear of the unknown, rather than a lack of technological competences” (*Fundacja dla Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, n.d.).

This is a case of a disagreement between supply and demand: the agencies that organise the courses believe that professionalism of the instructors is the decisive argument, while the seniors are more interested in courses conducted by trainers who are more open. This has a clear influence on the courses that are offered, where it is often that ICT specialists run computer

skills training courses for seniors. Seniors often think that such classes are difficult to understand⁸.

“Openness and the ability to share knowledge easily”, the feature that the seniors declared to be the most important one, was described as: “skillfully achieving contact with older people”. That is because, according to the participants, the classes should be taught “in a way that is understandable to the average senior”, and also “in a way that is interesting and clear to non-experts”. Therefore, computer skills training classes for seniors should be conducted by instructors who “have the ability to share knowledge with older people in a clear and simple manner”. The trainers need to “have the ability to let others understand what they know”, and to avoid “typical lectures-monologues, with no contact with the students. Seniors shouldn’t be treated like college students, and no barriers between the teacher and the student should be created”. The suggestion that “a method of direct contact with the students needs to be employed, because it makes it possible to really learn practical skills” is quite interesting. An effective instructor ought to “try and explain everything until it’s really understood and they should be patient in all the explaining, because we’re not young anymore”. That is why it is no wonder that among the features of a computer skills training course teacher the seniors mentioned: “clarity and comprehensibility of the presented information”, “explaining expressively and illustratively”, and “precise, comprehensive explanations” (Jurczyk-Romanowska, 2012).

The investigations carried out as part of the @kywny Senior project have become an inspiration to formulate further questions and to try to find answers to them in the research process. What we have been wondering about is what it is that makes seniors perceive an instructor as a person who is open and has the ability to share knowledge easily. This the question that we asked the seniors participating in the further editions of the @ktywny Senior project⁹. Observations of the classes ran by the instructors that the seniors evaluated highly in connection with the analysed feature were also conducted.

8 During the introductory classes – the first classes of the computer skills training courses – the author of the paper discusses seniors’ motivation to take part in the course. One of the frequently received answers is that they want to go to classes that are not conducted by IT specialists. That is because such teachers use difficult terms, they assume that the participants have at least some basic knowledge about using computers, and they select contents that the seniors perceive as advanced. The seniors see free computer skills training courses that are organised by specialists and where the students receive diplomas as interesting, but quite useless for absolute beginners. They say that what they want is no stress atmosphere, rather than specialist knowledge.

9 The first edition was organised in 02.03.2009 – 26.06.2009. Because of the great popularity of this project among seniors further editions were organised. They were organised until 2012.

When answering the aforementioned questions, the seniors would mention further features, such as patience, understanding and dedication, that they see as closely connected with openness. Certain hints can be found in the provided answers. They pertain to the behaviour of the teachers, and stress the importance of having direct contact with the students and repeating the same information frequently. The third area that was emphasised by the research participants was the manner of explaining and, first and foremost, making connections with the situations that the seniors know well, **making comparisons to the real world, using illustrative metaphors**. In their statements the people in their third age would underline that an open, communicative instructor “presents new information in a way that is easy to understand, uses that method of direct allusions (...) Often alludes to things that we already know, which is why it is easier for us to understand the new things”. Clear coexistence of features that ensure effective communication, behaviour of the instructor, and the illustrative and metaphorical way of explaining were present in a number of statements: “He/she explains with patience, makes comparisons to things we already know, so that even the problem students can understand. Clear explaining ‘until it hurts’”; “Conducting to classes in an understandable way, that is illustrative to an average senior, patiently explaining the doubts that are raised, illustrative way of sharing knowledge and explaining the differences between different computers by comparing them with the world that we can see around us”¹⁰.

The conclusions drawn from the observations present a similar picture. The instructors that the seniors saw as open and able to share knowledge easily were the ones that introduced the seniors to the world of ICT in a patient and calm way, without appearing to be impatient or disappointed, or showing any other negative emotions. These instructors did not overuse IT terminology, and when they introduced new terms they tried to explain them in a way that was clear for the seniors. In their explanations they would frequently make analogies to the everyday lives of seniors, their environment, and the objects that they know well. Such comparisons were used to explain the visual differences between the particular computer desks. The seniors would ask, for example, why their desktops were different, and the instructors would explain the differences by comparing computer desktops to actual desktops, tablecloths, the kitchen, or other elements that a person can arrange in diverse ways. The students were enthusiastic about this illustrative way of explaining. That is why one of the areas that we focused on in the observations was the analysis of how the educators used analogies and metaphors.

10 Fragments of the statements of seniors collected during the research organised as part of the @ktywny Senior project.

During the observations, that lasted 9 hours altogether, all the analogies and metaphors used by the 3 instructors that the seniors had selected were written down. It needs to be noted, however, that the observations were only carried out during the beginner level courses, on which the problems of using a computer, *Windows* and *Microsoft Office* were discussed, but no similar research was conducted on at the second stage of the course, were the seniors were getting accustomed to the internet environment. The analogies presented by the instructors whom the seniors had evaluated as open and able to share knowledge easily pertained mostly to the home environment. Only in one case did the teacher employ the metaphor of a trip abroad. The table presented below presents the relations to the broadly understood home environment that the instructors used during the observed classes.

Table 1. A list of analogies used by the instructors whom the seniors evaluated as open and communicative.

An office	The kitchen
books – files cupboards, drawers – folders paper folders – folders documents – files the office – my computer envelopes – folders, files switches – start/close buttons a pen – the cursor calculations – files, spreadsheets bookmarks – folder names a mobile phone – the Office assistant bills – spreadsheets a desktop – a computer desktop	cupboards, drawers – folders garbage – trash bin, deleting kitchen utensils – tools thermometer – task manager (statistics) groceries – files medicines – files garbage – deleted documents, trash bin plastic, paper, glass – types of documents waste paper – edited documents (reused) switches – start/close buttons
The living room	The garden
books – pdf files, e-books, text files plants – system gadgets, personalisation cupboards – folders CDs – MP3 files albums – folders personal belongings –personalisation newspapers – text files barometer – task manager (statistics) switches: how they look and where they are TV – the screen a tablecloth – the wallpaper things on a table – personal desktop settings	plants in the garden – personalisation, graphics a river – dynamics of the changes (the opportunity to personalise the settings) the sky – dynamics of the changes (the opportunity to personalise the settings) garden tools – the settings, the control panel

Source: developed by the authors.

The above table presents the diversity and richness of the comparisons used by the instructors to share information pertaining to the discussed topics. Some of the presented analogies might be somewhat surprising, that is why it needs to be emphasised that they are the result of a collective interpretation of the contents that was carried out in each group. Innovativeness of the instructors leads to the presentation of **analogies**, explaining new problems on the basis of the world that is well-known to seniors (“the desktops are different because of individual preferences, **just like** home interiors that everyone can arrange the way they wish to”). Through this process an association becomes understood by an entire group. In the further part of the classes the instructors repeat the association to build **metaphorical** meaningful constructions (“Now we **tidy up the house** and we remove the **folders** we don’t need”). Therefore, the same relation that was used for the first time in class can be called an analogy, but when it is reused figuratively during further classes it becomes a metaphor. It ought to be noted that the difference between the two notions is not clearly defined; it is quite arbitrary. One can employ the theory of the coexistence of analogy and metaphor to organise in the tables below.

COMPARISON OF METAPHORS AND ANALOGIES

Table 2. Comparison of metaphors and analogies.

	Metaphor	Analogy
Definition	An expression which consists of words that are not used in their literal sense (especially the basic sense) and in which they take on a new, figurative meaning	A relation between two objects based on their internal structures or similarities of the relationships within the compared structures
Structure	The subject (the source domain) and the medium (the target domain)	The basic and the target domains
The processes of creation and understanding	On the basic level it is the comparison of the juxtaposed domains in search of similarities	
The subject of the perceived similarities	Typically the surface structure of the elements.	Typically the deeper structure of the elements or the relationships between them.

Common functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explanation (introducing new terms, rules, mechanisms) - Creativity (transcending the formulaic, searching for nonstandard, original ideas) 	
Varying functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expressing the “inexpressible”, that is, communicating new meanings (explaining subtle meanings and phenomena that are difficult to verbalise) - Expressive character of a statement (improving the training skills) - Persuasion (changing the attitudes of the participants) - Therapeutic influence (moving around the participants barriers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharing knowledge (transferring knowledge and skills from the classroom to the environment in which the participants actually live) - Problem solving (combating the real difficulties expressed by the participants)

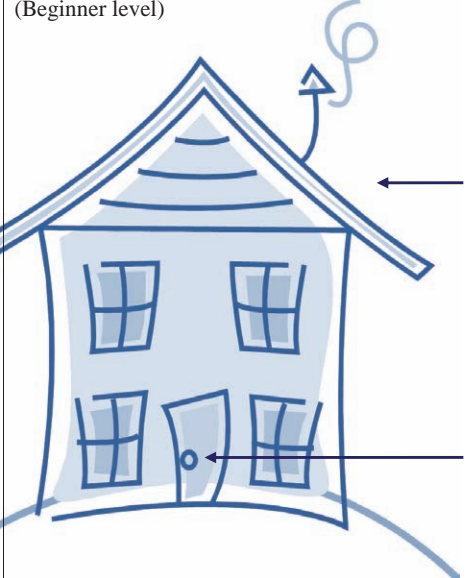
Source: Fortuna & Urban, 2013, p. 41.

From the perspective of the computer skills training course for seniors what seems to be the most important was the presentation of the above functions of analogy and metaphor, which include explanation (introducing new terms, rules, mechanisms) and creativity (transcending the formulaic, searching for nonstandard, original ideas). These functions were considered by the participants as important and making it easier to understand the “exotic content” of IT training courses. Finding good comparisons allows the seniors, who have no original experience with the cyberspace, to imagine, to make associations pertaining to certain rules and schemes that are necessary in IT training. The subsequent use of the formerly created associations acts as a trigger that makes it easier to remember the previously introduced information. The second function is essential, because revising is an integral element of all computer skills training courses – it is much more frequent than in the case of younger students¹¹. The coexistence of analogy and metaphor can be illustrated even more effectively with the use of the following example: First the instructor says that “the on/off button on

¹¹ The author refer to the experience gained while conducting IT training courses for the unemployed, organised as part of the projects financed by the Operational Programme Human Capital.

A house – metaphor of a computer

(Beginner level)




Windows – OS windows (query windows, folders).
The windows make it possible to see the inside of the house – the folder contents.

Examples of the use of analogy:


- (1) Introductory explanation of how a computer is built and of the basic terms. Asking the seniors to find possible analogies with which they can be substituted. Or presenting the house analogy and asking to refer the new terms to parts of a house.
- (2) Scattering the terms pertaining to a house and the terms pertaining to a computer: the aim is to match the terms. Alternative version: words and pictures, matched by analogy.

A house – metaphor of a computer

 Possible explanations:
Why are the computers different?


House- computer environments that you can arrange the way you like
The way a house is arranged depends on the taste the owner, so is the case with the computer and its user.
So: computer differ just like people who use them.

Door handle – on/off button
A metaphor of the on/off button
Press the handle and open the door to the house – press the button the turns the computer on



Main door – computer screen
When you use the handle to open the main door we come into the hallway in which there are doors leading to the inside of the house – metaphor of the start-up window with the login window

A lock/a key – login and password
In a house or in a block of flats there may live many people, that is why it might be necessary to lock the doors – metaphor of the profiles that require you to log in



Door to the house – the desktop
Having entered the house through the main door we can see the outline of the house, how the rooms are laid out, its style – the icons on the desktop, their layout.




Figure 2. A house – metaphor of a computer.
Source: Authors.

a computer is just like the light switch in your homes" (**analogy** – introducing the comparison). During further classes the teacher uses the introduced term as a **metaphor**: "let's open the doors to our computers". That is how the analogy helps to construct associations in the educational process, and the metaphor that is based on them serves first and foremost to quickly recall the associations, often in a humorous way.

When constructing the associations we can build a horizontal or a vertical analogy. The horizontal analogy consists in creating as many associations as possible regarding a single problem discussed in class. That means that for a particular problem/subject a number of analogies and references are found. It is spontaneous and unstructured. It is aimed to find the highest number of analogies possible, which allows the students to understand the introduced problem. The horizontal analogy is presented in table 1. These were collected during the observations of the training course. For example, the term "folder" has been substituted by such words as "drawers", "cupboards", "paper folders", etc. When creating a horizontal analogy we try to make associations with the highest possible number of terms connected with the everyday lives of the participants.

The second type of analogy that can be employed is the vertical analogy. It can be based on a single association (e.g. a computer – a house). In this case constructing analogies goes inwards. This means that searching analogies pertains only to the relationships between the objects. We look for a single association for a particular problem/subject. The explanation of the relationships between the elements is organised and systematic. The explanation of the analogy can also be based on a plot or a story that introduces that context of the analogy. "We can enter the house (the computer) only when we come and we grab the door handle (the switch), we open the main door (the computer screen), and then we..." An example of the vertical analogy is presented in the figure below.

Research conducted as part of the @ktywny Senior project indicates that instructors often use the horizontal analogy in a spontaneous and quite unconscious manner. They would employ a number of little analogies that were later used in a particular group to revise the formerly created associations, figure, metaphors. The research carried out at the Akademia Seniora indicates the use of the vertical analogy. On the basis of this it can be concluded that the seniors would also evaluate positively the development of a single, coherent and complex analogy which a group uses for a number of classes. The house analogy presented in the above figure can serve as an example.

Other researchers also point out the great potential of analogy. In the context of the use of this technique in education of seniors it should be empha-

sised that analogy proves effective where new terms need to be introduced and explained, "or a new inspiring idea to solve a problem" is presented (Fortuna & Urban, 2014, p. 11). Contemporary studies do not focus on the analogies of identical relationships "between the compared elements, but rather on their similarity and equivalence" (Fortuna & Urban, 2014, p. 11 in Getner, 1983). Researchers point out that analogy is defined as "a relation between objects, based on the similarity of relationships within the compared structures. In analogy two domains are always juxtaposed. The basic and the target domains" (Fortuna & Urban, 2014, p. 31). That is why the basic domain, in this case, is the environment well-known to the seniors (e.g. a house), and the target domain is the contents taught during the classes (the computer environment) (Fortuna & Urban, 2014, p. 31).

The same authors state that metaphor is a juxtaposition of words, their use in an untypical way. Because of such a juxtaposition the words take on new meanings. The juxtaposition is interesting, because it does not appear in everyday language (Fortuna & Urban, 2014, p. 11). It ought to be emphasised that the metaphors created during the computer skills training courses for seniors function only within the particular groups. They are not created in order to introduce new figures of speech that could be understood by the general public. „Juxtaposing words to create metaphors allows one to 'discover the figurative sense of expressions'" (Fortuna & Urban, 2014, p. 11). To exemplify, the phrase "to enter the computer" will be a metaphor understood by the group in which the association "door handle - computer on/off button" was constructed.

In the present paper, in the created analogies references are made to the associations between a house and its elements, but it needs to be pointed out that the richness of the associations depends only on the imagination of an instructor. This results in the high number of the possibilities to create metaphors that are aimed at revising the formerly constructed associations. That is why the use of analogy and metaphor techniques in computer skills training of seniors has an enormous potential and may serve to enrich the classes and make them more effective.

A number of reasons why an effort should be made to discover and implement new methods, techniques, and tools in the education of seniors can be stated. One of them is the fact that seniors as a social group of specific educational needs require the creation of educational methods that can meet their needs and capabilities. The methods that take into account the fact that seniors learn more willingly when:

- 1) The knowledge can be used practically, or it is related to their everyday lives,
- 2) When the educational process is voluntary and it takes place in a pleasant, no stress atmosphere,
- 3) When the new knowledge is related to the experience of the seniors and the knowledge they already have,
- 4) When the methods of presenting information are diverse and interesting,
- 5) When the new information is illustrated with real life examples, and references are made to that which is already known.

When taking these factors into account it should be pointed out that the use of analogy and metaphor meets the educational needs of seniors. Therefore, in the context of the expected positive results the method might prove particularly practical when used in, among others, computer skills training courses. That is because it makes it possible to avoid the problems that appear when traditional methods are employed; problems such as the fear of the new and the unknown, the unwillingness to confront one's own lack of knowledge, breaking the barriers caused by negative associations resulting from former negative educational experiences. Introducing the seniors into a context of a certain game of associations has positive influence on their motivation, it encourages them to make a collective intellectual effort, to be creative, and it invokes positive emotions. As a result, the education appears to be something quite spontaneous. It is no longer perceived in the traditional, formal way, and it becomes a fun through which one can learn. At the same time, it seems particularly interesting that stress and the distance to the new information disappear. It is possible to get accustomed to what is new. The new information is "dispelled". The sense of incompetence or a lack of knowledge is substituted by knowledge resulting from experience and the ability to think creatively. The use of analogy and metaphor can not only initiate, support, or reinforce the sense of competence, but also encourage seniors to create their own analogies and make their own associations. During the observed courses one of the students reacted enthusiastically to the comparison between the desktop and tableware which illustrated the differences in the layout of icons on the screen: "it's like the reflection of my face in the mirror: 'bright', 'gloomy', aging – but it's still mine and recognisable".

To conclude, according to Jacques Delors „continued education needs to constantly form individuals, their knowledge and abilities, and also their ability to formulate opinions and to act. It should contribute to the development of self-awareness, knowledge of the environment" (Delors, 1998, p. 19). That is why it is necessary to „recommend lifelong learning because of its flexibility, diversity and availability in space and time. It is the idea

of continued education that should be considered and developer” (Delors, 1996, p. 16). When this recommendation is considered reasonable, it appears necessary to make all the effort possible to educate seniors and, as a result, to improve the quality of their lives. The attempt that the authors of the present paper have made to notice educational potential in illustrative techniques of sharing knowledge is connected with the above idea, and it constitutes one of the few (so far) innovations in the methods of education of seniors. These problems appear to be a field far from being exhausted, and that is why they constitute an interesting area of research.

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Computers and images in the education of seniors

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AN ABSTRACTION, OUTER SPACE, A FAIRY TALE, A WEB, OR AN ENTANGLEMENT OF CABLES? – CYBERSPACE IN THE CONCEPTION OF SENIORS PARTICIPATING IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

In the times of the information society the phenomenon of the digital divide constitutes a major social problem, and seniors are one of the digitally excluded groups. On various levels of local government, in the actions of central government, in the EU programmes and, as a result, in all the three sectors of the modern state, actions are undertaken to combat digital exclusion within societies. The successfulness of such actions is supported by a deep analysis of the phenomenon. This can be performed through broad statistical studies or in-depth qualitative research. This paper presents the process of the birth of cyberspace and the problem of digital exclusion from the perspective of not only the lack of competences in using computers as tools, or the financial barriers that limit internet access. A substantial part of the paper is a qualitative analysis of the seniors' conception of the virtual world, which for them can be an abstraction, outer space, a fairy tale, a web, or an entanglement of cables, as mentioned in the title.

Keywords: information society, digital divide, digital exclusion, seniors, virtual world.

INTRODUCTION

We live in information societies, which are characterised by: firstly – the large extent to which information is used in the everyday lives of the majority of citizens, organisations, businesses, and secondly – the use of uniform or compatible information technology on the individual, social, educational, and professional levels. Furthermore, the citizens have skills allowing

them to transfer, receive, and quickly exchange information regardless of physical distance (*The Net Result. Social Inclusion in the Information Society*, 1997, p. 3). The postulate of the information society is being implemented by the majority of citizens, but not by all of them, which results in the phenomenon termed digital exclusion, e-exclusion, or the digital divide (*Digital divide*, 2014). Seniors are a major group among those digitally excluded. Dominik Batorski states that: „The greatest differences in using the internet are age-related. The internet is used by all young people (93% percent of people aged 16-24) and a decisive majority of those aged 25-34. Retired persons hardly ever use it – only 19.7% of all retired people, and only 10.6% of people aged 65 or more. What is more, there are no indications that the differences in age-related internet use could be beginning to change (...) The group of people who do not use the Web is dominated by seniors. Persons aged 45 and more make up to 84% of the people who do not use the Internet, and over half of those who do not use it are older than 60, 43.7% of them are retired” (Batorski, & Płoszaj, 2012, p. 50). That is why on various levels of local government, in the actions of central government, in the EU programmes and, as a result, in all the three sectors of the modern state actions are undertaken to combat digital exclusion within the information society. The successfulness of such actions is supported by a deep analysis of the phenomenon. This can be performed through broad statistical studies or in-depth qualitative research. This paper presents a qualitative analysis of the seniors’ conception of the virtual world.

FROM THE REAL TO THE VIRTUAL

On October 29, 1969, a project called ARPANET was successful in joining a number of computers into a web so as to make them safe from nuclear attack (Weber, 2009). The success was so spectacular that intensive actions were undertaken to try to connect computers within a world wide web. This was the birth of a new level of human life – the virtual level, also termed cyberspace. However, as the founder of the *Stowarzyszenie Polska Społeczność Internetu* [Polish Internet Society Association] Tomasz Kokowski claims: “In its childhood the Internet was treated as yet another toy, and its integral attribute was that to use it one had to possess certain ‘occult knowledge’. For a long time the opportunities provided by the Web went unnoticed, and it was only used for a number of its basic functions. The Internet revolution did not begin until the 1990s, that is, until the moment when its users received applications that were easy to buy and to use: this made it possible to not only benefit from, but also to provide information services” (Kokowski, 1997).

Therefore, the birth of the Internet – in Poland noted on August 17, 1991 – did not make the access to the Web possible for everyone. The date marks the first email sent abroad by the employees of the Department of Physics at the University of Warsaw (Maszkowski, 2012). The internet became commonly accessible a few years later.

The image of Polish participation in cyberspace can be read from commonly accessible statistical data that marks the dynamic growth of the number of Internet users between 1991 and 2003. The data was developed on the basis of the number of computers with an Internet connection in the particular years, so that one may infer about the number of devices (computers), but it is difficult to precisely measure the number of individuals who actually used the Internet (Krzemień, 2010). Nevertheless, the dynamics of the rise of the number of Poles gaining Internet access are significant – within the period of 12 years the number reached 8 million devices connected to the Web. In 2007 there was a computer in 53.7% of households, and in 2011 – in 71.3% (Berezowska, Huet, Kamińska, Kwiatkowska, Rozkrut, & Zych, 2012, p. 90).

Yet another measure of Polish participation in cyberspace is the analysis of the number of people logging on to the Internet. Data pertaining to the years 2001-2010 was collected and developed by the *MillwardBrown SMG/KRC Institute*. The aim of this institution is to research and to create profiles of individuals using the Web (*Net Track, n.d.*). The results of the studies signify that in 2010 over 50% of Poles above the age of 15 would use the Internet (*Net Track, n.d.*). Data collected for the *Social Diagnosis 2011* indicates that in 2003 only 14% of individuals over the age of 16 used mobile phones as well as computers and the Internet. In 2011, however, 85% had a mobile phone, 60% would use the Web, and 55% used all three of these technologies (Czapiński, & Panek, 2011, p. 299).

As it was stated in *Social Diagnosis 2011. The conditions and the quality of life of Poles* “what is more important than the wide spread of ICT is the increase in the significance of these technologies in various aspects of life, as well as in social and economic changes in Poland” (Czapiński, & Panek, 2011, p. 299). Information about the transfer of certain aspects of life into cyberspace can be provided by an analysis of the data pertaining to the registration of domains in Poland. On the basis of the statistical data for years 2002-2012 developed by the National Domains Record (*Krajowy Rejestr Domen, n.d.*) it can be inferred that the number of new internet domains would rise systematically (the only exception being the year 2012, however, the number of registered new domains nevertheless exceeds 100,000). Therefore, the number of websites presenting diverse contents, aspects of life, and various opportunities and perspectives of cyberspace is rising. On one of such websites an article titled *Co możemy znaleźć w Internecie?* [What can we find

on the internet?]) starts with the reflection: "If it's not on the internet, it does not exist. You can hear this opinion more and more often. Is it true? Is the real world really reflected in cyberspace?" (*Co możemy znaleźć w Internecie?*, n.d.). Taking into account the fact that the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century is characterised by an increase in the number of websites by 100,000 annually, one ought to deeply reflect on the processes of digitalisation of human life and on the social position of individuals who do not have the competences to participate in this process.

What is more, the global statistics provided by *IMS Research* indicate that in 2010 over 5 billion devices were connected to the Internet, with about 2 billion individuals accessing the Web (about 29% of world population) with the use of 2-3 devices. It should be noted that currently only 1 billion of devices with Internet access are computers; the number of mobile phones with an Internet connection is rising constantly (a forecast for 2020 indicates that the number of mobile phones with Internet connection will reach 6 billion!), and the other devices are TVs, netbooks, e-book readers, and other gadgets. It is estimated that in 2020 the number of devices connected to the Internet will exceed 22 billion, with the world population increasing by about 1 billion (Długosz, 2010).

Therefore, what is the image presented by the analysis of the above data? The existence of the virtual aspects of the human life is undeniable. There is a stable and irreversible process of the virtualisation of certain aspects of life that would appear to be reserved for the real world exclusively¹². The number of individuals who freely move within these two levels is increasing, while simultaneously those who only function within the real world are marginalised and excluded from certain areas of life in the information society. Their situation can be compared to that of the illiterate in societies dominated by the printed word (Gulanowski, 2012, p. 112).

This perspective is essential in IT education of the excluded. That is because in designing educational activities one may put emphasis on computer skills training, or choose a broader approach: to see education as an introduction to a different, still unknown cyberspace. The second approach appears justified, because "what one should focus on is not the practical use of a computer by individuals in their everyday and/or professional lives, it is the lack of this device in these individuals' awareness". (Golonka, 2009, p. 291).

Yet another conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis of the presented data is that the level of one's comprehension of cyberspace is strictly related to age. People who were brought up with Internet present in their

12 The website www.wirtualnycmentarz.pl (wirtualny cmentarz – a virtual cemetery) may serve as an example: it was designed to make it possible to mourn the death of our loved ones on the Internet. Retrieved April 09, 2014 from <http://www.wirtualnycmentarz.pl/>.

lives move in cyberspace differently: the presence of both the levels of social life is obvious to them and they can effectively participate in them. The perspective of the people who were adults when the Internet became easily accessible is also different – they use computers and the Web as working tools, sources of information, they can understand cyberspace, but they do not necessarily see it as equal to the real world. However, the situation of those who were entering their retirement age when the Internet became popular is entirely different. For this group of people the Web is something exotic, incomprehensible, and the inability to understand the laws governing cyberspace makes these individuals digitally excluded (Jurczyk-Romanowska, 2013, p. 110). Yet again, these conclusions are confirmed by statistical data – in 2012 people above 60 years of age made up only 6% of all Internet users (*Prawie 17,2 mln internautów w Polsce*, n.d.). In the *Social Diagnosis 2011* report it is stated that “computers at home are typically not used by seniors, by uneducated individuals, as well as annuitants and the retired (...) For a numerous and constantly increasing group of people who do not use computers or the Internet the problem lies not in a lack of access to these technologies. They typically do not use them because of a lack of motivation to use the technologies independently (it is often possible for them to ask someone for help or ask someone they live with to find something on the Internet for them). What is also important is the lack of knowledge about the opportunities provided by the Web, and the lack of skills necessary to use it” (Czapiński, & Panek, 2011, p. 300).

In the report it is also pointed out that: „The lack of a common access to ICT is noticed by local government, the central government administration, as well as some companies and it is often perceived as a problem: as a crucial factor in digital exclusion, or a lack of access to services, including those public services which are provided digitally. A number of initiatives aimed to popularise the use of computers and Internet is being undertaken. However, in order to make it possible to carry out actions adequate to a particular problem a proper diagnosis is necessary. Nevertheless, many initiatives aimed to popularise ICT and prevent digital exclusion do not address the real problems” (Czapiński, & Panek, 2011, pp. 303-304). In the document titled *Diagnoza i rekomendacje w obszarze kompetencji cyfrowych społeczeństwa i przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu cyfrowemu w kontekście zaprogramowania wsparcia w latach 2014-2020* [Diagnosis and recommendations in the area of digital competences of the society and prevention of digital exclusion in the context of support programmes for 2014-2020] Dominik Batorski and Adam Zajac discuss two types of barriers in accessing cyberspace: “hard barriers” – understood as infrastructural and financial limits, and “soft barriers”, which include the lack of knowledge and motivation, other psychological barriers,

self-exclusion, and the lack of necessary skills (Batorski, & Płoszaj, 2012, p. 12). The authors point out that the hard barriers are increasingly less important, and that the soft barriers are currently more significant (Batorski, & Płoszaj, 2012, p. 12).

The aim of the research presented below is to supplement other studies pertaining to the aforementioned soft barriers resulting in digital exclusion of seniors. The results presented below are part of the designed broader research pertaining to the motivation, the postulates, the expectations as well as the barriers and difficulties experienced in IT education of seniors. In the present paper the problem of the seniors' conception of cyberspace is discussed. This conception is crucial in designing educational actions aimed to prevent digital exclusion of seniors.

CYBERSPACE IN THE PERCEPTION OF SENIORS

Emphasising the threat of digital exclusion of seniors who at the moment when computers and the Internet became popular were entering their retirement age became an impulse to start research aimed to answer the question: how do the seniors perceive cyberspace?

The research subjects were the participants of a computer skills training course ran as part of the *@ktywny Senior*¹³ project. The research was conducted before the classes started, therefore, the people who provided the answers were sufficiently motivated (see: Jurczyk-Romanowska, 2012a, pp. 79-98) to start learning, and at the same time they lacked competences to use computers – participation in the course was to be their initiation in the virtual world. Answers to open-ended questions pertaining to the concept of cyberspace were provided in writing by 57 individuals.

First and foremost, the seniors would mention the **abstract character of the virtual world**, which in their eyes makes it an opposite of the real world. The expressions used here were: not real, unreal, “a make-believe”, utopian, “somewhere out there, something I cannot see”. “It is something abstract, imagined, elusive”; “Something that cannot be seen in the real space”. Seniors mention difficulties connected with understanding the term: “To tell you the truth, I have problems understanding [cyberspace – EJR], although I do know that it's something that someone has come up with”. At the same time, these people standing at the head of the path that was to introduce them to this incomprehensible world believed that their lack of comprehension would not be permanent. “I cannot express an opinion on the subject.

13 More information about this project can be found in the monograph *The Third Shift: Andragogical Reflections on the @ktywny Senior Project*. (Jurczyk-Romanowska, 2012b).

There are a number of scientific definitions of space. The one that was mentioned is rich and new, however, I do not yet understand it enough to write about it". "I have not yet grown to understand it, but maybe I will one day". Therefore, when entering cyberspace seniors have a very vague conception of what it is, and they concentrate on the unreality of this alternative world. At the same time they express their hope that the exotic character of cyberspace is not permanent and after gaining certain skills connected with the use of computers and the Internet a time will come to understand them. Nevertheless, they are also careful not to become dependent on this abstract world, because they can see certain dangers and they wish to comprehend them in their essence.

In the provided answers certain metaphorical associations were also often to be found. These usually pertained to **outer space and fairy tales**. Seniors mentioned the similarities between cyberspace and the outer space, constellations, or even certain phenomena that take place in outer space: "To me it is a 'Black Hole', just like in outer space", "a great space". "The world 'virtual' brings to mind outer space". They would also point out that just like the cosmos, cyberspace is limitless and constantly expanding. Just like the cosmos it is difficult to conceive and understand. What is interesting here is that cyberspace is perceived as something that was "discovered", rather than "invented"; as something that has always existed and waited for the level of humanity's technological development to allow people to use this space. At the same time, the fairy tale metaphors referred to the human creation of the virtual world. It is "an artificial world, an image, difficult to conceive but possible to be created thanks to graphics, animation, computer simulation – films (Shrek), computer games". Cyberspace is like a fairy tale "an unfinished story created by people who write on the internet", it is associated with "a lack of reality, a utopia, a fairy tale, a world that cannot be reached. It might be beautiful, but it may also be menacing, disgusting". Just like in fairy tales, in cyberspace one can find a number of magical, benevolent, inspiring elements, however, the seniors also mention its dark side which threatens those who do not have sufficient competences to use it, or for those who "let themselves be drawn into it".

In the seniors' answers there were a number of references to **cyberspace as a web**. On the one hand, the web was conceived to include devices: "the increasingly real connections: the internet, mobile phones, telephone networks, cable TV, some Wi-Fi – I give up". On the other hand, however, people are connected across the web – in this case we can see two extremes, with the opportunity to communicate provided by Internet access seen as the positive one. Nevertheless, the negative aspects lie in the lack of privacy and anonymity, which is mentioned by seniors as one the gravest dangers:

“It a web that is (currently) accessible, one that connects people, but it provides no privacy”. The third face of the web is that it connects pieces of information: “A great dark space, full of various pieces of information that do not always reach the right receiver; a lack of security, because no one can be really anonymous”.

It was sometimes the case that the seniors would equate cyberspace with **the inside of the computer** and the technical aspects of how it functions: “little processors, graphics cards, RAM, discs, servers, connections using radio waves, satellites, webs...”. That is why cyberspace is “the inside where all the complicated devices are connected with a whole lot of cables into one working computer”.

SUMMARY

In their research on to the phenomenon of digital exclusion of seniors the authors of the paper *Miedzy alienacją a adaptacją. Polacy w wieku 50+ wobec internetu* [Between alienation and adaptation. 50+ Poles and the Internet] also addressed the problems connected with the knowledge and the conceptions of seniors (50+) pertaining to the Internet. The participants in their research did not use the Internet at all, or they had very little experience with it. They point out that the research subjects have a certain vision of the Web, its uses and specificity, and at the same time their knowledge of this medium is limited. “It is often that the research subjects would only use certain language clichés (...) What is important here are the messages present in the media discourse, and the negative messages tend to get more attention” (Batorski, et al., 2010, p. 40). In the presented research results emphasis was put on the practical use of the Internet, and what the research subjects said typically referred to the use of the Internet in everyday or professional life. The conclusions presented in this paper are of a supplementary character, and the research would mostly focus on the conception of cyberspace. In their answers the research subjects tried to express what they know either through metaphors or through oppositions, they tried to locate the new space in certain areas of knowledge (outer space, a web) or imagination (an abstraction, a fairy tale). Regardless of the chosen perspective cyberspace was conceived as something alien, exotic, and distant. Such conception is important in the attitudes that seniors take in the process of IT education. This tendency is illustrated well by the answer of one of the research subjects: “I cannot conceive [cyberspace – EJR], I am fascinated by it and interested in it, but first and foremost I am afraid”. When designing educational actions one ought to take into account not only the intellectual and physical capabili-

ties of seniors, but also their conceptions. Learning to use computers and the internet in the case of this social group cannot be limited to the mechanics of how the devices are to be employed, but it should also engage seniors' imagination, creating an opportunity to enter a new, unknown world.

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MULTIMEDIA COMPUTER CLASSES – REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDIES

"From his cradle to his grave a man never does a single thing
which has any first and foremost object but one,
to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort, for himself"

Mark Twain

ABSTRACT

The topic of this paper concerns educational activity among elderly people which seems to be significant in relation to contemporary life changes. Author in the article describes the computer literacy-multimedia classes of University of the Third Age, a part of Wrocław University and presents the innovations in elderly education concerning the new technologies.

Keywords: computer, seniors, education, U3A, multimedia.

One of the main tasks facing modern societies, determined as aging societies, is to educate the elderly. Due to the extremely rapid development of civilization and the range of different socio-cultural changes, the process of lifelong learning is seen as essential. There is no doubt that the number of older people is increasing, and with it the demand for various services, including educational services. The areas to which special attention should be paid include education in new technologies, thus preventing the digital exclusion of older people. One of the methods designed to equip seniors with the knowledge and skills for operating a computer and the Internet, are classes conducted by various educational institutions (formal education), such as the Universities of the Third Age, which offer various horizontal, content and teaching methods. In order to expose the potential of computer classes, their relevance for senior citizens and society, the author of the article will use the conclusions drawn from a reflection on the effects of studies conducted at the University of the Third Age in the University of Wrocław.

“TELL ME A STORY PROJECT”: MULTIMEDIA COMPUTER CLASSES

Cyclical workshops in computer literacy, which took place in the University of the Third Age at the University of Wrocław and which became the impetus to make the above analysis, were one of the components of the “Tell Me a Story Project”, implemented within the framework of the Grundtvig Partnership Program. Classes lasted for four semesters and a group of a dozen seniors took part in them. The theme of the course was the representation of old age on the internet. The tasks of the seniors participating in the classes were: finding representations of old age in the virtual space, as well as their analysis, whilst acquiring competence in the field of computers and the internet.

DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Table 1. Detailed project description.

Details	Specifics of the implementation project.
Participants	Students of the UTA at the University of Wrocław.
Topics	The representation of old age on the Internet.
Duration	Four semesters.
Teaching method	Computer Workshops.
Content undertaken	Reflection – images of aging and older people in the virtual space, issues of the role and importance of new technologies, the digital divide, security in the virtual space, computer and Internet.
Assumed effects	Knowledge and abilities. Skills in the use of computers and the Internet. Knowledge of new technologies, how to create the image of old age and the elderly on the internet. Reflection: a deep reflection of the extent of aging and old age, creating the image, the digital divide, the importance of new technologies.
Sources of information / materials for analysis	Advertisements, forums, websites, information services, social networking sites, textbooks, own materials – prepared by the trainer.

Source: Author.

Tasks performed by seniors:

1. Searching content on aging and older people on the Internet
 - The purpose of this activity was to show seniors varied content about the elderly and ageing (videos, photos, texts).
 - Teaching seniors how to use a search engine for precise content searching on the Internet.

Effect 1 (reflection):

- seniors saw that information about old age and the elderly is diverse in terms of quality and quantity,
- the amount of virtual content relating to old age and the elderly was defined as significant,
- seniors saw the phenomenon of an increase in the amount of information (over time).

Effect 2 (new technologies):

- seniors learned to operate the internet browser and search engine,
- learned how to accurately identify and consequently search the content they are interested in.

2. Searching for specific visual materials, in accordance with the subject of the classes (photos and videos of the elderly) and it's archiving.
 - The purpose of this task was to familiarise seniors with the plurality of images of aging and older people on the Internet.
 - Familiarising seniors with the ability to search for specific content in the visual materials, saving visual materials, creating collections and archiving.

Effect 1 (reflection):

- seniors noticed that there is no single dominant image of old age, there are many. Older people tend to be presented in different ways.

Effect 2 (new technologies):

- the class participants learned to search for photos and videos, specify the effect of exploration, save them, categorize folders, create collections.

3. Analysis of the collected materials.

Effect 1 (reflection):

- seniors noted that the contexts in which old people are presented, information on older people, the elderly are varied. At their core harmful stereotypes can be seen repeatedly. There are also new developments and trends in imaging age.

Effect 2 (new technologies): ability to use collected archived materials.

4. Reflection – an image of ageing and older people on the internet.

Objective (reflection): performing a critical analysis of the images of senility.

Objective (new technologies): the creation of writing (essays, comments).

Effect 1 (reflection):

- seniors expressed their opinions on the images of the elderly and senility (found on the Internet). They made a critical analysis of ways of creating and perceiving these in virtual space. They compared their views with the opinions of other participants in the classes and the Internet users, and posted them in virtual space.

Effect 2 (new technologies) Familiarisation of seniors with a text editor work in Word), the creation of writing – essays, and comments and posts on Facebook.

5. Dissemination

1. Facebook – creating profiles: “Tell Me a Story Project – a computer group” and “Representation of old age – the discussion group”

- Objective (reflection): A discussion about ageing and older people in virtual space.
- Objective (new technologies) Teaching seniors to use Facebook, creating profiles devoted to the analysis of images of old age and multi-media computer classes

2. Blog – “Old age. How beautiful to be yourselves”.

Objective (reflection): Sharing the analyses of the effects of ageing and older people in virtual space.

Objective (new technologies): The ability to search for information in the blogosphere.

Effect 1 (reflection): The ability to take part in discussion in a virtual space (participants of the meetings), exchange of views, critical analysis of content. Creating a critical attitude towards media content.

Effect 2 (new technologies): Seniors learned how to: post pictures, articles, links in virtual space (Facebook). To enter comments and share content, and how to search the blogosphere.

Seniors taking part in computer classes have the opportunity to pursue goals that for people in late adulthood have emerged as the key ones. These are, among others:

- **taking reflection on:**
 - a. old age, the elderly – their social and economic situation,
 - b. the stereotypes of old age, ageism, their digital exclusion, marginalization, and social maladjustment,
 - c. the educational needs of the elderly (the process of lifelong learning).

- ning, education in new technologies, formal and informal education, the meaning of Universities of the Third Age),
- d. the context of the function of older people in the modern world (information society, the development of civilization, new technologies),
 - e. quality of life of seniors.
- **acquisition of knowledge (increasing knowledge) in the field of computer and Internet use:**
 - word and image editing programs,
 - Facebook, Google+,
 - Blogs,
 - Websites, portals, forums.

THE DRAFT OF CONDUCTED CLASSES

Conclusion:

The phenomenon of ageing – and therefore an increase in the number of people in so-called late adulthood – apparent in the general population, makes it necessary to increase the interest in the phenomena of ageing and old age, including the education of seniors. Because education is a kind of opportunity to improve the quality of life of older people, it creates an opportunity to counter marginalization and ageism. One of the key competencies which is noted in the context of seniors is learning new technologies. The number of older people who use a computer and the Internet is increasing from year to year. Along with this the awareness of the education of seniors is also growing. The belief that the digital divide is one of the factors affecting the sense of alienation and marginalization among the “greying population” is growing ever stronger.

By analyzing the educational opportunities designed for older people it is impossible not to notice that the dominant interest of seniors is learning new technologies. Training in the use of computers, Internet, and office equipment (scanner, printer) is becoming more and more popular. The number of companies and educational institutions in this field is growing, in emerging courses for seniors such as: “Computer course for seniors”, “Internet for seniors”, “E-senior”, “senior academy.” The range of subjects studied during courses is extremely diverse: Support for Microsoft Office, Open Office, graphics programs, Internet: social networking, e-shopping. This indicates that seniors are willing to accept educational challenges and response, based on the belief that knowledge of new technologies is becoming a necessity. The increasing number of attractive educational offers is therefore a response to

the social awareness of including older people in an effort to prevent and minimize the effects of cyber exclusion, as well as a response to the needs of seniors themselves. Older people are themselves expressing the need to develop knowledge of computer and Internet more vociferously, and an awareness of the need for lifelong learning, which makes it extremely important to express these needs, is increasing. As an example, we may quote the comments of Wrocław seniors who, when asked about the reasons for undertaking computer studies, replied:

Statement 1: „My situation was quite unusual, because my career had finished by the time designs were made on computers. When they became as common as TV I resisted furiously, thinking that sitting at the screen will harm the only eye I have left. I did not see the need to have one, because at that time I wasn't aware of the whole spectrum of the benefits of the Internet. But then it turned out that in order to be kept even in conversations with children, in the exchange of experiences, etc. it is essential to familiarize yourself with this new element of the life in the twenty-first century. Oh no, I could not remain in the previous century, did not want to be worse than the teenagers in the family. At the moment it is not necessary even to hinder your life. I intentionally did not write 'to make life easier', because the times have become such that by not being up to date with technology, it is more difficult in many ways.

[...] Computer literacy has become a necessity. But there is also an element of pleasure. In my case, 'photography' – those paper photos lingering in dozens of drawers are now in some mysterious way on my laptop. I'm still fascinated. Video chat with friends in distant countries is not the same as a phone call. Searching for information from many fields is richer than finding the entry in the encyclopedia. And so on and so forth – examples can be multiplied. At this moment I cannot imagine being without a computer, it would impoverish my life, even in the field of my hobby which I am developing more and more.”

Statement 2: “The computer is useful to broaden my knowledge of modern times: for example, writing official letters, administration, etc. and in order to feel more confident, and have the satisfaction that you have extended knowledge.”

Statement 3: “The computer makes it easy to access news, work, write letters etc, and the search engine can find a variety of interesting things. For example, in the morning I check the weather, and what's going on in Wrocław.”

Statement 4: "I use my computer now for reviewing the press, gaming, checking bus and train timetables, using encyclopedias, checking cinema theatre programmes, etc.. I do not really want to 'be apart' from the young people from my own environment. I want at least to understand what they are saying in general. Requests for help end up doing something instantly, but I still do not know how to do it in the future."

Statement 5: "Computer literacy allows me to obtain any amount of information from a variety of disciplines, and to keep abreast of the modern world and the environment of the young."

The reasons why older people decide to try to deal with the new technologies are varied. They include among the others:

- ambition – "a friend / colleague of mine is able to use the computer – so am I"
- curiosity
- fear of marginalization
- aversion to "being apart from the young generation"
- reluctance to "miss out"
- realisation that a lot is going on in the Internet
- setting themselves a challenge – they want to continue to learn and develop
- belief that the computer and the Internet are useful, making daily activities easier,
- use of new technologies as a source of entertainment
- Internet simplifies communication
- knowledge of new technologies ennobles and distinguishes them amongst their peers.

SUMMARY

Multimedia computer classes have become an opportunity to exchange knowledge, acquire new skills, and a place for reflection on aging and the elderly. They show not only the perception and imaging of ageing and older people in the Internet, but also create an opportunity to analyse them, which is all the more interesting due to the fact that this analysis is conducted by the seniors themselves. The results of this analysis conclude that the number of representations of senility is increasing. Images of old age and the elderly are varied, from a positively presented active old age – the so-called "third age" to a venerable old age – "fourth age" associated with the disease, and lack of independence. The themes around which topics on late adulthood

are focussed are varied: disease, medication, health care, social welfare, but also family, travel, leisure, education, shopping, and specialty products. Another interesting conclusion for seniors is the realisation that there are an increasing number of products and services aimed at seniors, suggesting that: on the one hand, that producers of goods and services recognize seniors as representing a growing social group of potential consumers, and on the other hand revealing a tendency to seek more effective and interesting solutions for improving the quality of life of older people.

The implementation of computer classes in the project "Tell Me a Story", was also a chance to increase the number of elderly using the new technologies and the Internet. Thus, apart from some very important reflections upon old age and the elderly, a desire to work against ageism has also been created. The first were based on searching for old-age stereotypes, and the second on it's neutralisation by discussion and analysis, the acquisition of gerontological knowledge and the implementation of computers with the Internet to combat digital exclusion.

Another important aspect of these activities was an exchange of insights by participants in the meetings, an exchange of opinions against the background of intergenerational activities, and the dissemination of the findings and analyses in virtual space: Facebook, blog, etc. The initiative creates an awareness that the search for new solutions in the field of education of the elderly is crucial, and is part of a strategy for lifelong learning which today is not only an alternative but a necessity, which seems to be confirmed by one participant of the computer classes, Irene: "Now I have persuaded a friend by praising the wide open window to the world that is the Internet - the opportunity to read newspapers, access knowledge on all topics - even such mundane things as cooking recipes - the ability to check cinema theatre repertoires and order tickets online, and the opportunity to check tram and bus timetables. It's the multitude of possibilities and the convenience which encouraged her. Yes, there is definitely a need to promote knowledge of new technologies, and to show how you can not only facilitate, but also enrich your life when you know how to handle all the new equipment."

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THE IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON THE CREATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE ELDERLY

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to define the importance of new technologies in the process of creation of an image of seniors. The article describes changes in the way of participating in a social life as a result of extremely rapid adaptation of technological innovations by society. It also points out numerous implications related to transformation of the social communication paradigm as a consequence of emerging new ways of communication. The article presents results of recent surveys about participation of the elderly in using of the new technologies and examples of usage of the potential of technological achievements by the elderly living in Poland.

Keywords: new technologies, seniors, image of the elderly.

The term “new media” was founded in the late eighties of the last century, but nevertheless it is continuously evolving, as its scope of meaning becomes outdated. In the beginning it referred to radio and television only, but following the development of technology and the introduction of new, digital communication, it has gained new meaning. Today, the press and electronic media using the techniques of analog recording are referred to as “traditional” or “old media”; while the term “new media” relates primarily to forms of electronic communication based on advanced, digital methods. These measures are based on digital recording technology, they therefore allow interference in the content of news and the modification of the message. The characteristic features of the new technologies are: the integration of different media in a single device – or multimedia, miniaturization of devices and an easier user interface.

New media have become the foundation of a new way of participation in social life, and changed the paradigms of social communication, by creating an opportunity to actively create content. As a result, the existing unidirectional and asymmetric communication model found in traditional media

has been replaced by a two-way exchange, in which the boundary between producers and consumers, or between senders and recipients of news, has disappeared. Thanks to this, everyone can share content on a global scale, without the interferences which govern traditional media messages created in the public sphere. "The widely understood development of the Internet, especially blogs, social networking sites and services that can share content, is revolutionizing the contemporary reality" (Jary, 2010, p. 114), making the new media and new technologies – as a form of information flow in society – a determinant of a new lifestyle. "You can even talk about an emerging media society, that is to say, where most of the social activities are carried out with the participation – sometimes decisive, usually significant – of media of all kinds, from mobile, TV and the Internet" (Goban-Klas, 2011, p. 64).

The use of modern technologies, particularly those related to the processing of information and communication is typical for information societies, in which knowledge is the most important element. It is worth remembering that one of the most characteristic features of the information society is information overload. In the forest of data there may be a problem with the perception of all events, as there are "too many available "paths" to consider every possibility, predict and examine it in a rational way" (Kamińska, 2007, pp. 29-30). In this situation, a network of contacts which will provide a reliable source of information and verify the incoming data, seems to be particularly important. Typical online communities, which are created through the use of various forms of communication – such as portals, social networking sites, newsgroups, instant messaging, blogs, chat rooms, IRC channels or e-mail discussion lists – may be helpful.

New technologies allow the creation of a virtual space, which – according to Marshall McLuhan – is an extension of the social space. Moreover, Esther Dyson points out that "the Internet community is a community in which people live, work and play" (Dolska-Zaghdoudi, 2010, p. 80). As a consequence, we can talk about transferring real life – until now played out in specific locations – to virtual reality, which becomes a substitute for traditional activities. New media has revolutionized reality, not only because they are part of an everyday exchange of our thoughts and ideas with our surroundings, but they have also led to the appearance of a number of new transfers and new symbols of quality. The Internet, therefore, is primarily communication on a global scale, a continuous and instant access to knowledge resources, which is devoid of temporal and spatial constraints. It is also a platform for the exchange of experiences, the presentation of opinions and views on any topic, and the exchange of information, regardless of distance.

This carries a number of implications – first of all "because the network society is no longer important as a space of places, but as a space of flows.

Time which once was measured in terms of space and distance has become a timeless time" (Bendyk, 2007). This means a fragmentation of chronology, occurring as a result of the exchange of messages via mediated communication. Such a form of communication interferes with the continuity of time, as well as cause and effect association, since different segments of the chronology can be put together again in isolation from the real flow of time. In addition, new technologies have contributed to a change in the perception of the passage of time: "the decrease in the importance of distance is accompanied by some kind of acceleration in the perception of time – sequencing of events is replaced by their simultaneity" (Nikiel, 2013, p. 71).

Changes resulting from the extremely rapid adaptation of technological innovations by society, and the widespread use of new media means that more activities have been transferred from the real world to the virtual world. Finally, "as a result of the computerization of society, anyone who has a computer and access to the Internet – and who sends emails, chats, blogs, and uses information from the Internet – becomes almost automatically part of the information society and parcel of the collective recipient, which is the recipient of the virtual space" (Dolska-Zaghdoudi, 2010, p. 80). Therefore access, to the virtual world becomes an important determinant of life, and allows full participation in social life. Unfortunately, most seniors are still deprived of this opportunity.

The growing importance of new technologies in modern life causes the social exclusion of people who do not have adequate skills to use technological advances. The increasing use of modern solutions not only in the public space, but "they are also used as a platform for contact with institutions (health care, administration), financial management (banking, on-line shopping) and contribute to strengthening the intergenerational divide, leading to the withdrawal of seniors from active participation in social life" (Kowalik, 2012, p. 192). Therefore, in the era of the information society, in which new technologies play a very important role, the elderly may have trouble finding their way.

From this perspective, the ability to use computers and the Internet has become an important element in connecting seniors with the modern world. "This skill can protect them against feeling lost and helpless in the information society and their cognitive, educational and social needs can be stimulated by it and developed" (Wachowicz, 2013). Use of the latest technological advances by seniors can meet the most important needs of retirement, which include: regular contact with others to prevent the feeling of loneliness, constant motivation to remain an active member of the community, and the inspiration to develop their interests.

It is worth noting that "full participation in social life and the opportunity to pursue their own aspirations, increasingly depend on the ability to use infor-

mation technology" (Kowalik, 2012, p. 187), so it is important that older people are able to skillfully exploit the potential of technological advances. How do seniors use them? The survey *Social Diagnosis 2013* (Czapiński, Panek, 2013), conducted by the Council for Social Monitoring, shows that more and more seniors in Poland are using the new technologies, but it is still the group which is least interested in using modern solutions. Among persons using the computer during the previous year, 37% were aged 60-64, and only 14.7% were over 65. The comparative results related to use of the Internet – therefore it can be concluded that computer skills for seniors is also associated with the use of the global network. Older people are the least interested in the use of smartphones – only 7.5% in the 60-64 age group, and only 3.6% of people over 65. On the other hand most, seniors declare the use of a mobile – 80.4% in the 60-64 age group, and 55.1% of people over 65. When considering the use of new technologies by the elderly, the diverse needs of this group should be taken into account. A person over 60 years of age, but who remains active professionally, has different needs to a person long retired. The same situation applies to social status, education, or other psychological, social or demographic features.

Table 1. Percentage share in the use of new technologies in different groups in 2013.

Age group	PC	Internet	Mobile	Smartphone	Not using	Using all of them
60-64	37,0	35,5	80,4	7,5	18,5	33,7
65 and over	14,7	14,1	55,1	3,6	44,0	12,8

Source: Czapiński & Panek, 2013.

The level of computer skills varies among users. 32% of respondents aged 60-64 and 24% over 65 declared their ability to use electronic mail, use file systems, operate word processors or spreadsheets, or create electronic presentations. In contrast, the ability to create and modify web pages, such as blogs or Wikipedia pages, requiring no major technical competence or knowledge of the coding, applies to as many as 21% of seniors over 65 and 20% of those aged 60-64, while 2% of respondents in both age groups declare programming ability. It should also be noted the relatively rare use of Internet resources – out of all other social groups, older people spend the least time on the network – a little more than an hour a day average is allocated for this purpose. What kind of information are they looking for? According to Łukasz Tomczyk "seniors in the global digital village are mostly looking for news on culture and entertainment, journalistic materials, as well as information regarding business, finance, law, sports, and motoring" (Tomczyk, 2010, p. 188).

The ever increasing intensive development of new technologies means that “direct perception of the world has been replaced by a perception of impressions mediated by the machine” (Loska, 2011, p. 33). Thus, not only has the way of life changed, but also the perception of the surrounding reality. Due to the fast pace of life, and a mass of information and knowledge constantly improved by new discoveries, modern seniors are no longer a good source of news. This is happening because, firstly – we are currently observing the constant and rapid exchange of knowledge in a more accurate way; secondly – modern society is looking for information on the Internet, and no longer from experienced people who were once the natural teachers in non-formal education. As a result, old age has ceased to be of value. To restore the rightful place of older people in society we need to work on rebuilding the understated prestige of seniors, which requires an increase in their self-evaluation and an improvement in the quality of life. In an age of widespread use of new technologies in everyday life, it is important to prevent the digital exclusion of seniors, and to teach them how to actively use the available tools in order to optimize their lives and actively participate in the creation of the image of old age.

The positive image of old age and the ageing process is mainly due to the activities of older people themselves. Increasingly, we can meet active seniors who, through opportunities given by social networking, give testimony to the true face of the elderly. It is also worth mentioning the numerous successful projects implemented through the initiative of seniors which help young people to appreciate the positive aspects of old age as a period of further activity and a need for personal development. Such projects may include both activities aimed at familiarizing older people with use of new technologies, as well as campaigns to promote the positive aspects of retirement. An example may be a number of activities implemented locally, involving two generations – teens and seniors – who can exchange knowledge specific to their age group. Despite the significant difference in age, participants exchange knowledge and experience, bringing together representatives from two different worlds. On the one hand, seniors can gain the skills necessary to adapt to the rapidly changing reality through the use of the latest technological achievements, and on the other hand they still feel needed, as they can educate young people by sharing their wisdom and experiences in – for example – the art of cooking.

By doing so, and also thanks to the support of traditional media in promoting the initiatives of the seniors and encouraging older people to be more active in social media, we can look forward to the presentation of realistic portraits of old age, which – unlike the stereotypical perception of old age – show and preserve a positive image of older people. It is through the active enhancement of the desired portrait of this stage of life that older people are once again prominent in the public sphere. That is why it is worth the

proper preparation of seniors to use modern technology – in words of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: “Man remains young, while he is still able to learn, adopt new habits and counter the opposition”.

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THE IMAGE OF OLD AGE – THE OPINIONS OF SENIORS FROM U3A OF UNIVERSITY OF WROCLAW

"There are two categories of invisible people: The old, and the nonentities [...]
Growing old here is a process of gradually turning invisible [...]
The only time old people are ever noticed is when they make trouble,
they're difficult, or they die."
Jonathan Carrol

ABSTRACT

The article reflects on the ways of creating the image of the elderly in media with special attention to the views of the seniors of UTA of University of Wrocław. Mediated by the media discourse the images of the elderly are becoming more common and therefore the author's attempt at reconstructing the postmodern strategy of the rendering of late adulthood seems to be an important topic to consider.

Keywords: image, old age, U3A, internet, media, body, advertising.

More and more is written and said about the ways in which old age is perceived and imaged. Scientists as well as the public, mass media, new media, producers of goods and providers of services are interested in the topic of seniors. Because of the increasing number of seniors, the interest in them is growing, and, as a result, they become more and more "visible". As the Central Statistical Office of Poland points out, in 2020 over 24% of Polish population will be older than 60. The average life expectancy of women will exceed 80, and 60 for men. Statistics, therefore, appear unambiguous. The number of seniors in the general population increases constantly and there are no indications that the situation might change in the foreseeable future. Norbert Piķuła states that: "the increase in the number of the elderly is a crucial element that influences the contemporary world. The prolonging

of human life and the concurrent decrease in the number of births are the characteristic features of ageing societies" (2012, p. 21).

The average life expectancy of a European in the countries of Western Europe is 77 years of age (Szczycka-Kubisz, 2000). Apart from the phenomenon of the ageing of the population that the author of the paper mentions above, a different phenomenon is observed at the same time. It is the prolonging of life expectancy. It is most clearly visible in the so-called "developed countries"¹⁴, in which it is simultaneously connected with "a decrease in natality, an increase in well-being and quality of life. The well-being is connected with an easier access to healthcare, increase in the quality and scope of social insurance, better social and living conditions, popularisation of general knowledge and knowledge about health which increases the quality of life, the work of national and international organisations aimed to support active social living of seniors" (Steuden, 2000, p. 15).

As it may seem, the situation of seniors in Europe is changing, and the changes appear to be positive. There is a growing number of institutions, projects, programmes, companies, associations, foundations, and related initiatives that are tailored for the elderly. One ought to consider, however, whether the situation of seniors in Poland, as well as other European countries, can be really deemed satisfactory. When analysing the diverse ways in which old age is perceived and imaged the author of the present paper noticed that despite the numerous actions aimed to improve the seniors' quality of life, their situation is often far from satisfactory, and the spectrum of such initiatives is hardly complete. Stanisława Steuden notices that: "the problems of old age are more and more often a subject of reflection and research pertaining to many aspects of life – family, social, economic, legal issues, as well as questions of worldview and morality. [...] That is why the necessity of in-depth personalist reflection – related to systems of values, the meaning of life and death, the meaning of suffering, human dignity, the right to live – aimed to protect human beings from breaches of their rights as well as dehumanisation and treating people as objects and commodities" (Steuden, 2000, p. 9).

The image of old age, which the author of the present paper has chosen as the subject of her considerations, presents a certain interpretative context for the problem of the socio-economic situation of seniors. It reveals a particular way in which society looks at old age, how they "create" it, how they perceive it, what they know about it, how they judge it, what they can see in it, what they overlook, what they are afraid of, how they wish to see it, what old age means for them, and what it does not. The search for the answers to the above questions can be undertaken on many levels. Social imaging of old age is one

14 See: Steuden, 2000, p. 15.

of them, because, as Emilia Garncarek claims "old age can be called social destiny, since it is society which decides who will be named an old person, how old age is seen and how it is defined" (Garncarek, 2005, p. 196).

All societies create their own images of old age and they are all responsible for these images. They are responsible for all individuals that they call: old people, seniors, the pensioners, the retired, people in late adulthood, the elderly, those in the autumn of their years, those in the third and the fourth age, the grey-haired, the hoary. The level of social awareness of this subject is not quite satisfactory, just like the level of knowledge of the last stages of human life. It is typically constructed around common knowledge and erroneous convictions and stereotypes. It should come as no surprise, then, that the very notion of being old triggers negative responses. Late adulthood, contrasted with the cult of a young, strapping, hard body, is seen as a "necessary evil", and old people are considered a "burden to society", while, as Brian M. Foss points out, "a society can be judged according to its attitude to old people. Some even believe that a truly civilised society would make old age the high point of human life" (Bromley, 1969, p. 9).

There is no uniform, commonly accepted image of old age, there are many. There is also no general agreement as to the definition of old age. Ss Steuden defines it as "a subsequent developmental stage in human life, in which the speed of changes, set goals, needs and the opportunities to fulfil them may vary, however, the stage draws one towards the end of their life" (Steuden, 2012, p. 9). "In social awareness the time of old age is seen as the one where physical and mental strength decrease gradually, a person struggles with illnesses, and often becomes physically and mentally senile" (Steuden, 2012, p. 18). Jean Pierre Bois, in turn, explains that "old age is first and foremost a personal experience, and only less importantly it is a social and cultural creation" (Bois, 1996, p. 313). Georges Minois adds that all cultures "have their own images of an old man and they judge old people according to this standard" (1995, p. 327). How should one, then, describe old age? For the sake of the present paper the author has decided to analyse the statements of seniors from the University of the Third Age at the University of Wrocław that took part in a discussion group. The subject of these meetings that were organised throughout four semesters in 2013 and 2014 was "the image of old age".

Who is a senior? Researchers of many different branches of science have been seeking to find an answer to this question. Nevertheless, no single definition can be seen as generally accepted. The seniors who participated in the group discussions have themselves attempted to answer the formulated question. The subject of the old age is certainly difficult, and they decided to analyse the image of old people in mass media, films, advertisements, the internet, fiction and non-fiction literature. An additional advantage of these meetings was

that the seniors would also reflect on this specific stage of human life. When they were asked to say what comes to their minds when the word "senior" is mentioned is a discussion, the participants replied that a senior is: "a person older than 70", "a grandpa/grandma", "a retired person", "a person in the third age", "a person in the retirement age". Furthermore, spontaneous associations connected with old age were verbalised as: "the stage when you have time for yourself", "the time when you become dependent on others", "when you have health problems", "when physical and mental conditions worsen", "the time to reflect and sum up", "the time to take care of ill parents and spouses".

Among the many interesting opinions of seniors that were expressed in relation to old age, the author wishes to draw attention to the conviction that starting a discussion on late adulthood presents a risk of simplification and generalisation. That is because it is assumed that "an old person" is older than 60. How should we, then – ask the seniors – call the people who are older than 70, 80, or 90? Is it correct to use the term "senior" to denote someone who is older than 60 and still works, takes care of their parents and lives an active life? How should we call the parents of the previously mentioned 60-year-olds? Are 60-year-olds and 90-year-olds the same? Is adding the so-called "hoariness" to the whole spectrum of the "names of old age" a solution to the problem? According to the seniors from the discussion group it is not.

There is no single definition of old age and late adulthood, the participants of the meetings claim. It is impossible to define a boundary that one has to cross to become old. There is also no single image that is suitable for this stage of life. On the contrary, the participants of the discussion group point out that: "there are as many images and definitions as there are seniors", "old age is an experience, it is how you live it and how you observe it. There isn't a standard, a scheme, old age is personal question", "One does not choose to be old, it just happens. It isn't something you look forward to", "A senior – this can be an active or a passive person, there is no rule here, I think that if you are active you will still be so when you are old, but I don't think there is a regularity".

The time of old age is uniquely diverse, however, it is impossible not to notice the tendencies to label this period through generalisations. The generalisations that are used in relation to late adulthood include those that reduce old age to a number of outside attributes, such as: grey hair or baldness, wrinkles, liver spots, crutches, walking sticks, wheelchairs, walking frames, knitting wool and needles¹⁵, rocking chairs, prosthetic teeth, berets, shawls, tea pots, tea

15 "A few days ago, an article in Wysokie Obcasy made knitters furious. The article suggested that knitting is the pastime of old village women on the verge of extinction and third world countries, which provoked some well-deserved outrage [...] It is time, then, to say it loud and clear – I KNIT BUT I'M NOT OLD!, article by a blogger Yadis: "I love knitting but I'm not an old woman". <http://yadis.pl/2080/kocham-dziergac-ale-nie-jestem-staruszka.html>.

cups, tea, carts for carrying groceries, and many others. Although it is common knowledge that such an understanding of old age is based on stereotypes, it still remains in the minds of not only the elderly – the seniors themselves – but also young people, who have the chance to observe many varied images of old age. Students of pedagogics at the University of Wrocław, when they were asked to visualise an elderly person, they presented an image concurrent with the stereotypes, even though they clearly knew that, as they would universally claim, that the image is false and full of schematic, conventional beliefs. The justifications for such a perception of old age are the following opinions of seniors as well as students: “such an image of old age is deeply rooted in our culture”, “it’s been like this for ages”, “how else can you present a senior?”, “that’s exactly what seniors look like”, “it’s a telling simplification”, “everyone knows who we have in mind, even though things have changed today”, “that’s how some old people really look”, “nobody takes any actions to change this image, and the media work to reinforce it”, “it is too early for the changing image of seniors to remove the one that has dominated so far, we need more time”.

What needs to be added to this outline of the image of old age are those features that the participants of the discussion group mentioned as a lasting basis of the contemporarily prevalent representation of old people. These are, among others: worsening health, increase in the amount of free time, conservative attitude towards life, concentrating only on one’s family and immediate environment, a lack of independence. What also needs to be mentioned is the broad scope of words and expressions that come to mind when we ask about old age: gossip, nosiness, bigotry, conservatism, malice, peacefulness, hospitals, illnesses, being tired of life, waiting for death, care¹⁶. The word “senior” brings to mind such expressions as: “old geezer”, old coot, elderly person, senior, grandma/grandpa. The online dictionary of Polish synonyms – Synonim.net – supplements the list with the following: synonyms of the word *staruch* [old geezer]: *anty*, *cherlak*, *cherlawiec*, *chodzący kościotrup*, *chuchrak*, *chuchro*, *chuderlak*, *chudziak*, *cień człowieka*, *dziad*, *dziadek*, *dziadowina*, *dziadunio*, *dziadyga*, *dziadzina*, *dziadzisko*, *grat*, *grzyb*, *matuzal*, *matuzalem*, *mizeractwo*, *mizerak*, *mizerota*, *nestor*, *pierdziel*, *piernik*, *próchno*, *pryk*, *ramol*, *rupieć*, *senior*, *skóra i kości*, *słabeusz*, *starowina*, *starowinka*, *starszy pan*, *staruszek*, *stary grzyb*, *starzec*, *strzęp człowieka*, *strzęp ludzki*, *suchotnik*, *szkielet*, *tetryk*, *trep*, *truchło*, *wapniak*, *wrak*, *zgred*, *żywy kościotrup*, *żywy trup* [an antique, a weed, a runt, walking dead, a skinny, shadow of a man, old man, grampa, a crock, a nestor, an old fart, skin and bones, a weakling, an old gentleman, an oldie, an old fart, a grump, a con-

16 These expressions are typically found in articles: on the internet, internet forums, in spontaneous statements, even the seniors themselves used them during the discussion on the stereotypes pertaining to old age.

sumptive, a skeleton, a corpse, a wreck, a buzzard, a living skeleton, etc. (*Internetowy słownik synonimów języka polskiego online*, n.d.).

According to the seniors from the U3A at the UW, old age is not a time of joy, even though, as they claim, it is possible for an old person to lead a satisfying life. A statement of one of the seniors may serve as a confirmation of the above: "old age is no joy. There's always the fear that serious illnesses can come and they will result in disability, senility, and in dependence on others and consequent suffering. It is the unknown that mostly pertains to the Old. But, on the other hand, there can be many happy moments in old age. When you are old you can have some peace at last – you can forget about work and bringing up children. You finally have time to use some freedom, to develop your interests, to be more active culturally, to make new friends and stay in touch with the old ones".

Old age, the image of which is often contrasted with youth and the prevalent standards of beauty, created by popular culture and mass media, is rooted in an extremely complex context. On the one hand, old age is presented as the reverse of youth, treated as a dire consequence of the body growing old, "an enemy you need to fight", "a condition, an illness that needs to be prevented or treated", and on the other hand the group increases in number due to the aging of the society. It turns out that we witness a social polarisation, where on one end there are the attitudes that glorify youth, that is, the cult of hard body, and on the other end there are the attitudes that aim to make old age a valuable and interesting period of life.

"I know I'm old, but I can't believe it. I know my years and that more and more often I don't feel very well, but on the other hand there's this thought in my head – old age is no concern of mine, I still feel young. So far." – one of the participants of the meetings stated. How does one define the limits of the senior age? Some of the seniors assume that the boundary of the old age is the time when one retires. This they believe to be a defining moment in life. Others, in turn, mentioned worsening health. For one of the participants the birth of her grandchildren was the defining moment, for Mariusz it was the death of his wife, for Teresa it was the point when young people started to leave free seats for her on buses and trams. Therefore, it turns out that the limits of old age are conventional in the scientific context, but they are also an elusive moment of one's biography, connected with the individual process of aging. According to the seniors: "It's hard to say when old age comes, in most cases society defines the limits, you don't even have to feel old". "First and foremost, the beginning of old age needs to be defined. I can't accept this 50+, 60+ notion. People of this age still work, they are professionally active in many ways, they follow their careers. I personally know a 50-year-old, 'a young mother', because she had a child at 42", "Many of us at the U3A, even though we're definitely 60+, 70+,"

think of old age as something that will come sometime in the future. Now we go to our classes, we travel around Europe and further, we attend organised gym classes, we go dancing – we live our lives to the fullest!”, “Yes, we do get ill, there are even some major surgeries, but they aren’t necessarily connected with old age, because anyone can get ill”, “And “My reflections on old age” – it will come, of course, in many years. I know some old people – they are, first of all, my parents (both 88), they are my mom’s friends 91, 87, 90 years old, even though they are seriously ill, they are still active, only one lives in a home”, “Me and my peers at the U3A aren’t old yet – ca. 70 years of age. It’s the age of late adulthood”, “I’m lucky to still have both of my parents. So I’m a child and they are old. It’s in them that I see old age with its symptoms that aren’t very nice. Because, truth be told, late old age is neither beautiful, nor happy. But it doesn’t matter”, “Old age is no problem of ours, when it comes we won’t call it joy, but... ‘you can’t always get what you want’”, “First of all, I don’t like the terminology, the criterion of age, when you call people 50+, 60+ old”, “This age is still connected with being professionally active, you can often work on your career, the health isn’t so bad and there are many plans to follow. Of course, I know – it’s not youth anymore, but it’s not old age yet. Maybe that’s middle age, I’m 66. I never ever think of myself as an old person, although there are situations when other people, healthcare (the opportunity to get yourself examined free of charge before you are 60) try to convince me to think so”.

According to the seniors, a part of society is convinced that people over 60 are old, they lead passive lives, and their activities are limited to “sitting on a bench, gossiping, and going to church”¹⁷. These assumptions are considered wrong. Of course, such a style of living in the old age is preferred by a part of the population, however, according to the seniors in the discussion group, it is not as widespread as it may seem, especially when one takes into account big cities. The following are some examples of the comments that seniors had to confront; the statements have been made in relation to how seniors spend their free time and generally to the lifestyle in old age: “social isolation, lack of initiative, interests, and dedication, lack of creativity and fear of change. People also mention the seniors’ tendency to limit themselves to the roles of grandpas, grandmas, babysitters, people taking care of family relationships”.

Other phenomena that are frequently associated with old age are loneliness and isolation. According to the participants of the discussion group the people in the so-called late adulthood experience many negative phenomena, such as social isolation, which is the matter of circumstances or choice. Passiveness, lack of initiative, shallow social relations and withdrawal can be connected with number of tendencies, which include the need or the willingness

17 Statements by seniors from the U3A at UWt.

to limit social contacts, unwillingness to enter into new relationships, distance between the elderly and their families and friends. According to participants of the meetings, even though there are quite a few groups of seniors who are characterised by passive lifestyle, it is impossible not to notice the increasing number of seniors who prefer to live actively. Old age, as the participants of the meetings noticed: "can be a time of unique and diverse activity", "a time of action and development and joy aimed to help one to be fulfilled". It can even be called a "regained time", because "after 'freeing yourself' of all the family duties you can at last concentrate on yourself and your own needs. You can do what you never had the time to do before, you can follow your passions, find new ways of spending your free time". "There are many ways to make the approaching old age more joyful, you have to work so that all these illnesses don't get the better of you. You have to be able to find happiness in little things, for example, in that the winter has finally gone away and we have this wonderful spring. It doesn't matter that in the spring the rheumatism is worse, that you get headaches more often, but it makes you so happy to hear birds sing, see flowers in the squares, watch happy young moms push their baby carriages, make plans for the summer". That is because old age, as the participants of the meetings claim, "should not be a time of service. A stage when you find fulfilment only in being a grandma, a grandpa. A time when you only concentrate on taking care of family relationships". Certainly, there is nothing inherently wrong with such an attitude, but "it should only be one of the ways to live your old age, rather than a one and only perspective". As Olga Czerniawska states, lifestyles in old age result, on the one hand, from necessities, and, on the other, from opportunities (among others, finances, place of residence, health) that individuals have, and they can vary. O. Czerniawska enumerates a number of lifestyles in old age, among them the following: a completely passive lifestyle, family lifestyle, gardening lifestyle, social association lifestyle, homocentric lifestyle, and religious life style (Czerniawska, 1998). Taking into account the number of different options that the seniors now have, especially those residing in big cities, one should note that the above proposition of lifestyles in old age could be developed.

With the popularisation of the Universities of the Third Age as well as other institutions offering education and recreation for seniors, the broadening of the offer of products and services for older people, the ways in which people spend their time in late adulthood have changed, and with them, the ways of experiencing old age have altered. At the Universities of the Third Age, in foundations and institutions that aim to work for seniors there is a broad spectrum of propositions, which include promotion of active living among seniors. Similar actions are undertaken by companies, individuals, the government and local government institutions. Among the initiatives

that seniors may benefit from there are: sport, art, and amateur events, and last but not least, educational ones. The latter of the activities can be implemented through formal, informal, and non-formal education: courses, workshops, training courses, e-learning, lectures, conferences, symposiums. The initiatives from the number of those that are intended for seniors that are the most popular include language courses (*Kursy dla seniorów*, n.d.) and computer skills training courses (*Sekcja Klubu Aktywnego Seniora we Wrocławiu propozycje na 1 kwartał 2013*, n.d.). Physical activity is also very important for seniors, although the interest is typically connected with health issues rather than pure motivation. The seniors from the U3A at UW_r confirm the above opinion, because they claim that they often take part in various kinds of activities aimed at improving their fitness, such as yoga, exercises, and dancing. That is the reason why they are beginning to be an attractive group of customers. They constitute a target group that is of constantly increasing interest, which, in turn, results in the development of the offer of sport activities for seniors. That is why it comes as no surprise that, especially in big cities, one may come across: "a gym for seniors" (membership for seniors: fitness, dancing, individual dancing, classes with a personal trainer), membership in a "Nordic walking club" (*Gimnastyka dla Seniora – Warszawa Ursynów*, n.d.; *Senior w Rivierze*, n.d.; *Sekcja Klubu Aktywnego Seniora we Wrocławiu propozycje na 1 kwartał 2013*, n.d), the offer of a "Spa treatment package", "Self-defence training course", martial arts, a climbing course, etc.

There is also recreation: trips/holidays for seniors, individual and group offers: <http://www.rainbowtours.pl/wczasy-dla-seniora>, which are also becoming an increasingly more attractive and popular way of spending leisure time for seniors. Among the broad range of offers intended for older people one can also see: one-day and longer trips and tours, <http://www.rainbowtours.pl/wczasy-dla-seniora,turnusy,turnusy>, holidays and holidays with rehabilitation, <http://www.btsejor.pl/index.php/turnusy-rehabilitacyjne>, as well as many other "attractions", "solutions", and "promotions". What is particularly interesting is that on the internet one can find advertisements of travel agent's that focus entirely on seniors, <http://www.btsejor.pl/>. Even a quick analysis of the offers intended for older people leads one to the conclusion that the number of products and services offered to this specific and previously marginalised group is rising rapidly. The impact of this situation on seniors' consumer choices cannot be ignored. These choices, in turn, change seniors' lifestyles. Irena states: "It makes me very optimistic to be able to meet people who are 70, 75 or older at the U3A. You can't say that they're old. They are full of enthusiasm and they go to the gym, they go swimming, they do Nordic walking, they go on trips that last many days, they learn new languages. So, there are many types of old age. What is their secret?"

The lifestyles of persons in late adulthood may concentrate around Seniors' Clubs, U3As, associations, foundations, a variety of circles of hobbyists. They can focus on questions connected with education, in the general sense of the term, self-development, art, and sport. They can be expressed by being engaged in theatrical groups, music, self-help and religious groups, voluntary work, social action, cultural events, etc. That is why the conviction that old age is the time of withdrawal and a passive waiting for death is not entirely justified. However, old age can also meet the above description, for many reasons, including objective ones (e.g. living in the country, a lack of or a limited access to education and culture), or subjective ones. One of the students at the U3A pointed out: "Old age consists of many elements – surely, with time, the stuff we're made of gets worn, everything deteriorates with time – but I and many other people think that old age is a state of mind, not the body. If we have energy, passion, plans and dreams, if we live active lives, we meet friends, travel, go to the cinema, the theatre – then I think we're not old in the general sense of the word".

Yet another association that is almost spontaneous when one reflects on the activities of seniors is "free time". It is the consequence of quitting employment and becoming a retired person – it presents itself as a fundamental problem. That is because "to be old" in the common understanding means to "have time", "not to have any duties". In reality, however, it usually boils down to being responsible for the organisation of one's free time, having to think about it, being responsible for the shape and the quality of life in old age. Because, having ceased their professional activities and family responsibilities, old persons are, in a way, "beyond time and duties", they are often treated as not active. Is it true, however, that seniors are condemned to being passive?

Analysis of the statements made by the seniors from the discussion group lead one to the conclusion that people in old age constitute a very diversified social group. This diversity pertains also to their activity. It is their opinion that: "there's never enough time for us, because we have so many things to do – they are: taking care of our grandchildren, gardening – in the spring it demands a lot of attention, concerts, theatre (very often), U3A classes, visits to the doctor's, which we don't want but which are sometimes necessary, and then there's the computer, which, once we learned how to use it, turns out to be a great thief of time". Another senior explains: "I know people who are passionate about bridge, I know people who aren't young anymore who go swimming every week, I am myself a member of the Polish Association of the Lovers of Orchids. I'm impressed by my friends from Szczecin (my peers) who have been going to dancing classes for a couple of years, they dance the tango, and it is said that you need years to learn the tango. My hobby is contact

with people who, just like me, are passionate about something, and spending time with others is, as I've mentioned before, one of the most important elements of our lives". The following statement is also worth quoting: "And I've just had some really terrible experiences, I was treated for depression - and now I'm feeling alive again and I've regained the will to be active. Trips, interesting classes and the computer that I have never had the chance to use before! And there are all these happy people - who play bridge, who paint, sing, take photos, who are passionate about history, etc. who have set up all these sections - that's incredible! I've always admired my older colleagues who are so full of energy, full of joy of learning new things, of going on exhausting trips that go on for days etc., etc. I have myself started to take part in the Culture Section, which is connected with working, with being busy, and I'm really happy about it all and it gives me energy for new challenges and projects".

When trying to address the question presented above, the author of this paper leans towards the proposition that due to the growing range of increasingly more attractive offers of spending free time (adjusted to the needs and expectations of seniors) it is more and more often that seniors choose to live active lives in their old age. The spectrum of choices, especially in cities is so attractive that, as the seniors themselves point out, "you can always find something for yourself, if you only want to". That is especially because there is a growing group of seniors with access to the internet, which is why they can follow diverse media messages which, in turn, constitute a source of knowledge about the offers that are tailored mainly to the needs of seniors.

One of the many topics that were selected for discussion by the group was the creation of the image of old age in mass media, new media, and advertisements. To answer the question what the image of old age in the media was the seniors would answer: "It's not bad. It could be changed a little, e.g. in advertisements where old people only appear in ads for medicines and glues for prosthetic teeth, which confirms the image of the old as sick people with no teeth, the image that the youth have". "The image is getting better, but there are still commercials that I find annoying, these are the ones where old people have grey hair and prosthetic teeth". "The media messages are usually concerned with medicinal products, health, sometimes insurance, there aren't many interesting ads for seniors". In the opinion of the participants of the discussion group the images of old people in advertisements turn out to be: "diverse", "there are more and more of them", "they can be insulting", "they focus on physiological aspects", "they are usually presented in the context of medications, illnesses, health problems", "they are based on stereotypes", "the seniors in advertisements don't look natural, they're artificially young, active and happy", "products for seniors are often advertised by middle-aged people", "seniors hardly ever appear in roles other than: grandpa,

grandma, an ill person". According to the seniors, the image of people in old age in advertisements mainly focuses on problems connected with health and looks: painkillers, dietary supplements, injury dressing materials, medical equipment, cosmetics, etc. The strategies of this kind, in the opinions of the discussion participants, are not well-received by old people, on the contrary, they lead to many doubts and controversies resulting from, among others, the fact that they are based on stereotypes. The stereotypes present an extremely bleak picture of old age, which is shown as the stage in life connected with illnesses, disability, and aesthetic problems. While it is certain that persons in late adulthood undeniably experience negative results of ageing, emphasising only the negative aspects of this period of life does not serve to construct positive attitudes towards old age nor does it make it easier for the seniors to cope with this time in their lives.

Old age, according to the participants of the discussion group, in the common understanding of the phrase, is a stage in human life that is devoid of any positive aspects. It implies that the "losses" weigh more in the balance. The advantages of being a senior are often ignored, or perhaps they are not noticed at all. It appears to be justified that seniors are anxious because of the results of presenting old age in the context of its deficits, which, as a consequence, leads to reinforcing the fear of old age that is nevertheless deeply rooted in the imagination of our society. According to the seniors the advertisements that focus on products for seniors that are aimed to prevent or treat the results of the aging of the body mainly visualise old age as a "problem". They present it as an illness that one should be ashamed of, as something that should be feared and avoided, undoing, at the same time, all the attempts made to "dispel the myth of old age" and to bring it back to its deserved place within the "culture of youth".

Contemporarily, creating a social acceptance of old age appears to be one of the most important actions that should be taken to improve the quality of life of seniors. Initiatives of this kind ought to be organised by the seniors themselves as well as the society in the broad understanding of the term, because aging of the body is a phenomenon experienced by everyone. What should be done, then, to change the negative image of old age? The seniors suggest that: "seniors need to be presented in different social roles, natural dimensions of old age should be shown, the nomenclature used by the creators of media messages ought to be changed, such as: 'removing the symptoms of aging, combating the signs of aging, declare war on the aging of your skin, say no to wrinkles'¹⁸, seniors should be supported in constructing a positive self-assessment, there need to be actions aimed to raise social awareness and gerontological knowledge, there should be social campaigns to make people sensitive to the prob-

18 A paraphrase of advertising slogans, ads of skincare products for mature persons.

lems of old people, actions aimed to promote intergenerational cooperation, positive aspects of old age need to be emphasised, and the range of products and services for seniors should be broader". When working together with seniors to find new opportunities to present images of older people in advertisements, the author decided to recall some of them. The first of the opportunities is the proposition to put seniors in various contexts, social roles. The second one is to avoid the roles that are stereotypically connected with old age – to present seniors in the roles of: persons who spend their free time actively, who travel, work, and inspire others, persons for whom personal development is important, who work for the local community, who are engaged in politics and social issues, who have awareness and who think independently, and who are interested in state-of-the-art technology, and who want to be fit. The third proposition: "I have such a vision – an old lady, or mister, outside, advertising, for example, sport equipment (of course, no mountain bikes, something regular, like Nordic walking sticks), sport and tourist clothes during walks with their grandchildren. That should present an image of a person who is old, but still active. I can see seniors introducing and reviewing new books and promoting reading to children. Not just all these medications and cooking in the kitchen, as if it were the most important place." Fourth proposition: "I would have seniors advertise culture, good manners, intellect, but unfortunately these aren't commodities. Theatrical plays aren't advertised, new books, audio-books for people with hearing problems, delicious dishes in wonderful restaurants are not advertised, etc. The latter is only advertised by the young and the beautiful. But being a seniors is not just health problems and fading good looks, which can be stopped or even brought back with surgeries. Being a senior is also connected with wisdom, charm, good manners, and knowledge that can be passed on to others." Fifth proposition: "nowadays old age, or late adulthood, is treated as a commodity that you can advertise and sell". Sixth proposition: "you cannot help but notice that most attention in this context is paid to women. All the ads of cosmetics, medicines, fitness clubs, cosmetic surgeries show women. It is as if old age for men did not exist. Well, there is this prostate problems campaign with a man going to the toilet at night. [...] But most of them show women". Seventh proposal: "there was once a nice commercial, where this grandma – cool and lively – drove with her grandson and reminded him of many things to do. Grandma, how can you remember all this stuff, asked the grandson. Of course, it advertised some 'Bilobil'. But this woman was so young in her demeanour, it was nice to watch. And gluing back those falling out prosthetic teeth or medicines for urinary incontinence make these ads disgusting, and the old age along with them. On the other hand, one should not overdo it, with all these wrinkled models in miniskirts, in schoolgirl tube socks on veined legs, to me it's all quite disgusting, too. You shouldn't overdo it".

In order to complement the image of old age that, according to the participants of the discussion group, is being created by mass media, the author has chosen to quote some opinions of seniors pertaining to the image of old age on TV and in the press – the first statement: seniors “in films and TV series are presented in a good way – they are wise, outgoing people. In the comedies that I can remember, especially the one with Meryl Streep, they are also nice, even when they are funny. There’s nothing mean there. There are Seniors’ Clubs on local channels, and they are surely very popular”. Second statement: “it’s not bad. That’s just my opinion, it’s not supported by any in-depth observations, because I hardly ever watch TV (only when I’m at somebody’s place, and that’s not much)”. The third statement: “even in the press you can find things that aren’t just for the beautiful and the young. Unfortunately, these magazines are so expensive, they cost almost as much as books”. Fourth statement: “Each age group has its own joys and problems. And they all deserve to get their fair share of media attention”.

To sum up, it needs to be emphasised that there is no single image of old age, there are many – although it is undeniable that there are some elements common to this stage of life. The images are diverse and their number is growing. In the past few years seniors have been noticed by producers of goods and providers of services, the mass media, and the new media. As a result, through the mediation of the media discourse they have become a social group that is observed with increasing attention.

The subject of old age is highly controversial, the attitudes toward it and the opinions about it differ greatly. Nevertheless, representatives of the world of science as well as public opinion have become interested in the subject of the elderly, and the number of erroneous opinions about this period of life and the stereotypes connected with it is still high. It appears necessary to do all that is feasible to improve the image of old age, to “dispel its myth”. This is not an easy task. It is, however, indispensable, because we are an ageing society. Discussion on old age can be difficult, for the young and for the old. It invokes many contrasting emotions and, although it is a natural phenomenon, the attitudes toward it are extreme: acceptance, rebellion, denial, negation. Nevertheless, it is essential, because it deepens the knowledge about this phenomenon that is the destiny of all people – or perhaps is it a privilege? To encourage further reflection the author quotes some thoughts by Mark Victor Hansen and Art Linkletter, who maintain that the second half of your life is not “to apologize for old age or try to avoid it, but to show you that it can be an incredible time of freedom and discovery and learning and purpose – if you approach it with the right frame of mind. Old age is a privilege. How are you using it?” (Hansen, Linkletter, 2006, p. 24).

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