A RecomMendation letter

for NGOS IN PoLAND

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| Date | Name of the project | prepared by |
| 15 April 2018  Poland, Wrocław | *Old Guys Say Yes To Community*  16-204-021604  KA2-AR-9/16 | Dr Malgorzata Malec Rawinski  Dr Rozalia Ligus  Dr Arkadiusz Urbanek  Mgr Kinka Trzmielewska |

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**1 introduction**

According to the Eurostat's long-term forecasts, the percentage of older people (over 65 years of age) until the year 2060 in the EU will increase from 17% by 2008 to 30%. At the same time, it is forecasted that in the post-communist countries, the participation of older people will exceed 30% and Poland this participation will reach 36.2%. The percentage of people over 80 years old of the total population in 2008 will also increase from 4.4% to 12.1% in 2060 (including 13.1% in Poland).

Therefore, one of the social and economic priorities of the majority of the European countries is to maintain or acquire an adequate level of employment of people at the age previously considered as post-productive age. Therefore, one of the most important goals of the social policy in the era of an aging population is the promotion of active aging and extending the period of the professional life.

Apart from the low level of employment of the older people, Poles, as a result of economic and social changes, were and still are retiring relatively early in the comparison to the other EU citizen. In 2002 only 26.1% of Poles aged 55 – 64 were professionally active.

Retirement, regardless of gender, is treated by many of the respondents as a state being cut off from the world or even as a road that leads to illness and death. It is not without reason that Burgess calls retirement a "role without a role", pointing out its unquestioning and social devaluation. Positive aspects of professional work can be clearly seen in quantitative researches - on the indicator of subjective health assessment. Retired people, who were still working, assessed their health better than those who did not work. In qualitative research, the narrators pointed out the advantage of work, which is its organizational function, revitalizing existence, and in general action and activity mobilization. A significant advantage of the work, which is emphasized in the quality interviews, are also contacts with other people and the fact that the work gives the feeling that you are needed, important that you can give something of yourself to others. A retired person feels “useless”, almost a symbol of nonproductive life. This is not identical with the social position or respect – it is only about the lack of explicit social role, especially in the case of men. A negative feature of retirement, that affects mainly men, is the danger of falling in malaise and apathy.

The lifestyle of older people should be described as passive. The most common activities that are undertaken by older people include: Watching television – 98% among the group of elderly people participating in the study; Going to church – 88%; Meeting with friends at home – 88%; Reading books, newspapers, magazines – 84%; Listening to radio, music – 82%; Going on a stroll, hiking – 75%; gardening – 70%.

Older people often get involved in helping their families: 59% - take care of grandchildren / great-grandchildren; 45% - help children / family to run their home; 32% - takes care of a spouse or other elderly, sick, disabled people in the family[[1]](#footnote-1).

**2 The DESCRIPTION of THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

As the data revealed considering the poor health of a large group of seniors and natural physical and mental barriers growing with age, increasing the group's involvement in activities that go beyond current living needs is an extremely difficult and complex task for social policy at the central and local level. There is no reason to expect that seniors will prefer activity for the benefit of the local community or the entire national community in relation to other forms of activity, such as activities for the benefit of the family or self-development and the extension of one's own knowledge. The older people are expected to be active in choosing how to spend their time, while this activity is to serve the development of a senior, improve its condition and strengthen its social position. The majority of respondents of Social Diagnosis 2013 aged 60 and over show activity to a large extent However, it is not always an activity aimed at the local community and solving the problems appearing in it. Older adults are much more involved in solving issues arising in a closer or further family. Many older people are active in the religious field, devoting time not only to prayer and participation in services, but also to activities within religious organizations.

For obvious reasons, the largest group of active people or those who could be activated are people in the first phase of old age. Older people are becoming more and more conscious participants of activities for the benefit of the local community, engaging in the activities of various organizations, as for instance disseminating knowledge, hobby, religious. In intergenerational integration projects implemented as part of the ASOS (Social Activity of Older People) program, financed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy[[2]](#footnote-2), many senior people who have formal membership in the organization are contractors. Men typically include political parties, sports clubs, local government authorities and circles of interest (eg. hunting, motoring or fishing). Social and religious organizations, committees of residents and organizations promoting knowledge (Universities of the Third Age) are more feminine. In villages, towns and cities if the older men are in public their activities concern much on continuing their former skills.In Poland, there is the lack of research of older men lives and activities. Older men in Poland are definitely less visible in educational activities proposed by Universities of the Third Age or Senior Clubs. However the movement of Men’s Shed has arrived to Poland as well. There are three Men’s Sheds in Warszawa, Słupsk and Wrocław that have been set up few month ago. Thus, in the future those Men’s Sheds might be good places to research men’s well-being and learning in Poland. Nevertheless, project **Erasmus +** **“Old Guys say Yes to Community**” can give some insights and recommendations. The research is based on the data collected in the project **Erasmus + “Old Guys say Yes to Community”** conducted by four partners from **Slovenia, Estonia, Portugal and Poland** since 2016, key action: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices. The project and has started 1st of September 2016 and will end 31st of August 2019. The project aims to foster inclusion of older man over 60 years old (especially with low education) in learning and education activities to positively affect their well-being, health, social life and to contribute to their re/up-skilling. One of the project output was conducted research and collected data. Each partner interviewed in selected communities a sample of 90-100 men 60+.

Our project proved how our societies have failed to prepare an appropriate ground for the inevitable demographic, economic and social changes in the last few decades. In particular, it showed that our societies have not recognized the disappearance of older men from community activities - not so much due to death, illness, financial or other deprivation, depression, dementia, etc., but mostly due to isolation, uselessness and needlessness in the contemporary way of life. The **Recommendation letter for local community authorities in Poland** thereforepresents our main findings, which can foster strategy and policy implementation for lifelong learning, longevity society and ageing population in local environments (with the emphasis on older men).

**3 The DESCRIPTION of THE researched COMMUNITies: THE BACKGROUND OF STRONG AND WEAK results/achievements**

Recommendations are based on extensive qualitative research on inclusion of older men (60+) in local communities in Poland, which was carried out in the spring of 2017 in several different communities spread across the Poland: Sobótka, Jędrzejów, Żmigród, Poznań, Brzeg, Turek, Żuki . The research includes two focus groups, 99 in-depth half-structured interviews, 10 case studies of good practices, and a review of existing academic literature and Slovenian and European policies on education and inclusion of elderly adults of local communities for better quality of life. However, the research mainly has done in four municipalities/communities: Turek community: municipality of Turek, Żuki, Brzeg municipality, Jędrzejów community and Żmigród community. Every examined community has different conditions, various opportunities that create multiple options for initiatives that can be offered to older guys.

After analyse of the collected data we have recognized some barriers that 60+ men face in Poland, in research communities. We treat them as a kind of backgrounds/help to provide some recommendations we.

The list of recognized barriers face by men 60 plus.

* Low pensions – limits their life plans. The money they get from the state (a pension) is OK as long as the older men are healthy, as long as they don’t need curing themselves or going to the doctors, when you live reasonably you can save money for holidays.
* Afraid of being lonely – afraid of wife’s death- presents of wives keeps them in save balance.
* Transparency in the social life - because of age they often feel excluded from social activities . Older men offer support, experiences, knowledge “ but people don’t vote for them” – the younger generation does not appreciate the knowledge, experience and practice.
* Low involvement in social actions - lack of experience of democratic participation in different groups (formal and informal). Associate models from the past block them to be socially active.
* Longing for grandchildren because of their territorial distance.
* Slow acceptance and understanding of changes in physical and mental condition (longing for good health from the past).
* Ambivalence in health and well-being - “carpe diem”– everyday activities depend on everyday well-being and condition.
* Limited number of friends - lack of social contacts at work milieu, most of the time friends don’t live anymore – “there is nobody to call” “some people are rejected from my pocket-calendar”.
* “Life monitoring” - unconsciously ‘thinking/learning’ to be ready for death. (Taming the death - learning to tame the death)

**3. General RECOMMENDATIONs for LoCAL COMMUNITY AUTHORITIES AND GOVERNAMENTAL INSTITUTIONS IN sLOVENIA**

The results of the conducted research allowed to identify three basic needs, which were indicated by research seniors - men aged “60 plus” from four local communities.

The need:

1. To give meaning to one’s own actions,
2. For reciprocity and understanding in social relations
3. To be heard

**Ad. 1. The activity of senior men must have a significant sense for them**

Data analyses show that understanding the meaning has a subjective character. One can distinguish two groups of men, for whom the meaning of actions has different significance. The first group consisted of active men, for whom retirement forced such a type of activity that compensated the of lack of occupation (instead of work). The sense of their actions is given by the inner need for activity for themselves. The second group were men, for whom activity makes sense if they work for other (non-family) people. Activity engage them in small groups of joint action, such as landowners' associations, unions of cooperatives etc.

**Recommendation:** the role of the local authorities and NGOs is to implement animation programs, that will give meaning to the activities that are part of the role of a senior (grandfather) in the family or local community. The involvement of the authorities is a necessity and is connected with creating the conditions that are crucial for overwhelming the shyness and fears of men against social exclusion. It is possible by creating small interest groups that are co-moderated by seniors and supported by their animator / facilitator. An additional form of action may be exposing the role of a grandfather / senior in relations with children.

* It is important to create meeting places and intergenerational dialogue: cooperation programs for seniors with kindergartens or schools, where older men naturally enter the role of grandparents, transferring their knowledge and experience to younger generations. A good example of such practice may be Swedish “Granddad Project’. Granddads help out in all kinds of ways. They do whatever needs to be done, under the direction of the teacher. So, for example, they assist individual pupils with their work and accompany students during excursions outside the school. They help pupils solve conflicts. They accompany students during their breaks and in the dining hall at lunch. They also help “new ones” adjust to their new school and feel secure. (Ann-Kristin Boström(2004) Intergenerational Learning in Stockholm County in Sweden, Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 1:4, 7-24,: <https://doi.org/10.1300/J194v01n04_02>

Another example is „Iskry 2” Project, financed from the Governmental Program for Social Activity of the Elderly People (ASOS), which was implemented in a few schools in the area of Dolny Śląsk. The project successively introduces the idea of seniors’ voluntary service in primary schools.

* Courses for sustaining professional activity. According to the assumptions of the Silver Power idea, local programs require cooperation with local entrepreneurs, who create a space for professional activity for men during the transition process between employment and retirement. This period turned out to be important for the level of personal readiness for activity for many of the surveyed seniors. The programs of professional activity are currently justified in Poland, due to the central programs of rebuilding vocational education, in which there is room for men to move from the role of an employee to a job teacher in the form of internships at the employer.

**Ad. 2 The activity of senior men requires social reciprocity and understanding in social relations**

The results of the research pointed out important for men issues, related to the social reception of their efforts and activities. Men "60 plus" emphasized that even if the family accepts their activity in the local community, they still feel the difficulties in social contacts and experience the disapproval from the environment for which they try to act. Negative feedback causes that the attempts to be active are abandoned, only grief is left and the feeling that as seniors they are not appreciated. This may be a personal problem related to the difficulty of seniors to accept criticism or negative feedback, but there is a space for action by local authorities.

**Recommendation:** Local authorities May create situations that will promote actions taken by men “60 plus”. They can also strengthen their sense of value through organizing new forms of activities and learning. An example of such practice might be courses on modern technologies. Only few respondents declared computer and Internet usage. Most of them have cell phones, but mostly these are “older” models, not modern Smartphone’s. An attractive idea would be a course on modern technologies regarding the usage of computer, Smartphone or tablet. Schools equipped with computer labs could be helpful and teachers who teach computer science at school could be trainers for seniors.

Another suggestion for local authorities and NGO, which would strengthen in men the sense of importance and social/local membership, is creating so called *Mens’ Sheds* or community sheds. They are organisations that originated in Australia, to advise and improve the overall health of all males. They normally operate on a local level in the [community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community), promoting [social interaction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_interaction) and aim to increase the [quality of life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quality_of_life). Over two decades, the men's shed movement has mushroomed from the ground up to become a strongly networked international movement, not only in Australia, but now Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, and continental Europe. (B. Golding, 2015, *The Men's Shed Movement: The Company of Men,* Common Ground Publishing). Those are places where men create their own space and take actions, that are based on their experiences, skills and needs. It is a non-formal space of everyday voluntary activity and in some sense an organization that gives men in the community a chance to be active and a chance to develop. These sheds function within the given society and their participants are mainly men in different age. These are the places (that look alike garage, sheds or workshops), in which men through common actions and works, build own identity in comparison to other members. en come to these places to use their potential and spend their free time productively. They perform carpentry, blacksmithing, welding, renovation works, repair broken equipment, etc. Any work, help and even presence and hearing of the other is important. There is no compulsion, everyone does as much as he wants and what he can do. It is a grassroots initiative of men, which shows great opportunities for learning and activities of men, including older ones. In Poland the idea of Men’s Sheds is slowly “sprouting” – one community functions in Warsaw, another in Słupsk.

**Ad. 3 Activity of senior men is determined by the need to be heard.**

In the interviews, appeared some statements that there is a need for activity that could guarantee to be heard by the local community. This is particularly important for men, who undertook social, political or journalistic activities in their past. In many cases, it turned out that this determination was disappearing when the community and local authorities did not engage in a dialogue. Therefore, the activity turned out to be unproductive and men’s willingness to offer their experience, responsibility and sense of duty – left unanswered.

**Recommendation:** local authorities should create space for common actions, pointing out beneficiaries such as institutions, educational agencies etc. which are interested in personal goods, social and cultural capital, which is brought by active men “60 plus”. An example of such practice would be Local Senior Clubs (operating in every town) and also Senior Councils. Their aim would be: the integration of seniors/men, meeting the needs and problem solving of this group of men. Local authorities should help Senior Councils to make their actions independent from the local executive authorities, support the application implementation. Among the examined communities, there is a few Senior Councils (Żmigród, Jędrzejów, Brzeg), nevertheless, their members are mostly women (often active in many public places). It would be beneficial to take actions that would strengthen men activities.

Local authorities tend to indentify older people (including men “60plus”) with disabled ones. Although local authorities in their long – term strategies of development consider social and demographical changes and they understand the need to create the conditions for life – learning of mature people, they still treat older people as “weak” and/or handicapped.

**Recommendation regarding psychophysical health**

Improving the quality of psychophysical health of older men is based on two important factors: physical activity and the ability to develop different interests and social contacts. Many questioned men were underlining their physical activity (such as riding a bike or running). They also emphasized their help in organizing different forms of active free time such as:

* Cycle clubs, bicycle rally

Most of the participants did not complain about their health problems, they described their conditions as good, satisfactory. Creating a cycling club or organizing bicycle rallies is a good form of activating seniors and a chance to combine sports with touristic. It would be crucial that seniors themselves could be organizers, supported by the people connected with the local authorities (if there will be such a need).

* Sport section for seniors

A sports club open for seniors / men

Many municipalities offer such sport objects such as gyms, football and tennis courts. The school offers sports hall and table tennis. For several years, many communities launched own football courts called Orliki. These sport objects is looked after by a sports animator (very often a physical education teacher), who could also lead a sport section for seniors.

* Fan zone – for those who are passively interested in sport

The gathered data shows that older men are interested in sports, they watch various jumps, matches and sports games. Moreover, they also like to discuss these topics. Creating of fan zones would promote men integration, their solidarity and prevent social isolation and exclusion. These zones could be located in club rooms or schools (using big TV screen or a projector only).

**SUMMARY**

The gathered data allow to formulate the following conclusions.

The proposed activities for older men should be a kind of a bridge between professional work and leisure time (generated after retirement). These activities should be adequate to men’ needs and local opportunities. These actions require the external patronage of the local institution. On the one hand, this institution should be like an animator of social relations. On the other hand, it should create conditions to strengthen the values and importance of older men in a local community. Therefore, it should aim to create the space in which a person can be heard by others (children, youth etc.). Such activities should have a measurable character and indicate the specific value of productivity and usefulness of actions taken by older men. Moreover, it should ensure the idea of reciprocation in the community. Reconciliation is to act as positive feedback, especially in the form of benefits such as: the right to use the municipal recreation offer, local infrastructure that is a real support from local authorities. In the course of the interviews, the need to maintain independence and effective coping of senior men in changing social realities was emphasized, which emerges as a crucial factor in proposing activities for older men. It is important that the proposed activities are useful, practical, stimulate to action and at the same time strengthen independence and mental and physical fitness

1. Review based on an announcement from the research *Ways of spending time by seniors,* Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), Warsaw, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ASOS [↑](#footnote-ref-2)