



Old Guys Say “Yes” to Community

**Review of the Recommendation
for the local authorities and NGO in Poland**

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The aging of the European societies has become one of the major concerns in the XXI century, drawing more and more attention in the last few years. Rapidly growing, the population of the older people affects the social and economic policies of state – changes the situation and functioning of local labour market, services sector, national health and insurance policies, education and more. It becomes an impulse for a government in its search for the new social and economic solutions.

There are two major issues regarding the aging that modern societies currently struggle with. There is a substantial increase in number of retirees and a significant fall in total fertility rate, causing slow but steady depopulation. The dynamics of this process is of unprecedented strength and as demographers predict, it would cause deep and long-term changes in modern society structure. On the one hand, the inevitability of change provokes a rumination on the old-age phenomenon, on the other, triggers a pursuit for new and more efficient ways of profiting from the elders potential and life experience.

*A Social policy for Older People 2030. Safety – Participation – Solidarity*¹, signed by the Council of Ministers on the 26th of October 2018 (in accord with the proposition of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social policy), determines the most important trends in social policy for the older people in Poland, providing detailed solutions for all of the most important areas of their lives, e.g. safety, health care, countermeasures against loneliness, active participation in society and adequate accommodation of infrastructure. The policy provides a series of activities aimed at helping the elders and resolving the most burning issues, such as encouraging a positive reception of the old age in society, active participation in social life, supporting activities of all sorts, creating favorable conditions for the inclusion of the older people in global economy and labour market, for solidarity and intergenerational integration. The policy also emphasizes the importance of education-related activities ‘for and to the older people’, of education through the old age and in it.

¹ *Polityka społeczna wobec osób starszych 2030. Bezpieczeństwo - Uczestnictwo – Solidarność*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/polityka-spoeczna-wobec-osob-starszych-2030-bezpieczenstwo-uczestnictwo-solidarosc>.

Supporting the elders in their activities has been acknowledged as one of the most important issues that modern European governments currently face. As a result, there is a growing number of projects, plans and offers for a sub-population of the older people. It makes **the idea of active aging** possible and real, helps to improve the quality of life for Seniors. A perfect example of such activities is an international project Erasmus+ – Old Guys say „Yes” to Community, which aims to ‘include men of the +60 group in educational and pro-development actions, to improve their quality of life, self-esteem, physical condition, social life and to re-activate their skills, in favor of local societies. Those projects and activities correspond with the general EU policy for the older people and the *Social Policy for Older People 2030* (including local authorities initiatives).

Erasmus+ Old Guys say „Yes” to Community – the guidelines

- As noted, there is a necessity of increasing the number of courses and workshops for the 60+ men, who are statistically less active and engaged in the societies they live in. However, it should be put into consideration, if those forms of social activation are to be aimed exclusively at men. Also, it is still not determined, if it should be a bottom-up initiative or rather an institutional / governmental programme.
- It is rightly recommended to increase the offer of computer workshops for seniors, as it is one of the key competences for lifelong learning concept. The key competences for lifelong learning, as per the EU Council recommendation from the 22nd of May 2018, are those “which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, sustainable lifestyle, successful life in peaceful societies, health-conscious life management and active citizenship²”. Those competencies, being a set of personal knowledge, skills and attitude, prepare for taking self-reliant actions and decisions regarding personal life and development. One of them is the digital competence, which „involves the confident, critical and responsible use of participation in society”³.

² Zalecenia Rady z dnia 22 maja 2018 r. w sprawie kompetencji kluczowych w procesie uczenia się przez całe życie (2018/C 189/01), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN).

³ Therein.

The older people may achieve new digital skills through participation in computer workshops, as suggests the *Recommendation...*, which are gaining in popularity throughout the world, especially amongst men. A cultural participation survey carried out in 2014 (*Badanie Uczestnictwa ludności w kulturze*) states, that statistically more men than women use computers (29,9% to 23,2 %) and the internet (29,6% to 22,6%), particularly for reading newspapers. We could therefore venture a statement, that more computer workshops for the older people may result in an increase of life activity of male seniors (in its social and educational aspects), and in gaining new skills to “be able to use digital technologies to support their active citizenship and social inclusion, collaboration with others, and creativity towards personal, social or commercial goals”⁴.

- The authors draw attention to the necessity of prolonging working lives, emphasizing its role as “one of the most vital issues of social policy in face of the rapid aging of societies”. The trauma caused by the transformation of social role – from an employee / employer to a retiree (in post productive age) – implies a lot of mental changes. As Alfred Sauvy pointed out, ‘the retirement – guillotine system is cruel, although humanitarian to all appearances. Such a brutal ‘cut’ tends to cause – especially strong during the following year – mental disorders, often with fatal consequences”⁵. The authors of the *Recommendation...* has drawn similar conclusions from one of their surveys - “employed retirees felt physically better than the unemployed ones”. In their quality check, the authors indicate organization aspect in work as its key advantage function. The act of organizing improves men’s existence by breathing new life into it, obligating them to act. One of the very advantages of work, stressed in several quality surveys, was the ‘constant contact with people and the feeling of being needed. [...] It is not equal to social rank or respect – the important part is the lack of an explicit social role, especially in case of men. The negative feature of retirement, affecting mostly men, is falling into apathy”. Men, as showed in a research carried out in twelve European

⁴ Zalecenia Rady z dnia 22 maja 2018 r. w sprawie kompetencji kluczowych w procesie uczenia się przez całe życie (2018/C 189/01) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN).

⁵ Sauvy A., *Granice ludzkiego życia*, Warszawa 1963, p. 111.

countries by Rafael Di Tella, Robert MacCulloch and Andrew Oswald, tend to stand a loss of employment far worse than women⁶. It is reflected in the labour force participation rate in Poland, which in the second quarter of 2018 reached 8,1% for the people between 60-65 years of age, and was higher for the 60+ men, reaching 8,5% and 7,9% respectively⁷. The conclusions from the research carried out by the *Recommendation...* authors are similar to those of the ALK i SMG/KRC research, which concerns the opinions and demeanors of the employees over 50 years old regarding their employment situation. The survey states that „the employment gives elderly people a sense of security (83%), enables preserving social relations (81%), make them feel needed (80%), is a source of income (78%), a chance of fulfill a specific task (78%), is a strong in-group membership incentive (75%) and allows further personal development (74%)”⁸.

The results of the project Erasmus+ Old Guys say „Yes” to Community shows that the retirement, gender notwithstanding, is seen as an isolation from the world, even a path to disease and death. The following suggestions of the *Recommendation...* authors seem therefore justified:

- There is a growing need of places of cross-generational interaction and dialogue (“cooperation programmes for seniors in schools and nurseries, where they can assume their innate role as grandfathers, handing down life experience and knowledge”). The results of three editions of the programme *Seniors in action* (conducted since 2008 by the Association of Creative Initiatives ‘e’, financed by Polish-American Freedom Foundation), among others, indicate that the intergenerational initiatives foster creating positive relations between the elderly and youth, showing the participants reciprocal advantages, allowing them to move beyond the stereotypes; those activities lead to mutual understanding between generations, raise the self-esteem of both groups and conduce

⁶ Di Tella R., MacCulloch R., Oswald A., 2001, *Preferences over Inflation and Unemployment: Evidence from Surveys of Happiness*, „The American Economic Review”, no. 91(1).

⁷ Kancelaria Senatu, *Aktywność osób starszych. Opracowania tematyczne OT-672*, Biuro Analiz, Dokumentacji i Korespondencji, Kancelaria Senatu, styczeń 2019.

<https://www.senat.gov.pl/gfx/senat/pl/senatopracowania/170/plik/ot-672.pdf>

⁸ Badanie ALK i SMG/KRC, *Przekonania i postawy pracowników powyżej 50 roku życia wobec własnej sytuacji zawodowej*, 2011.

to satisfaction of their needs⁹. The cross-generational projects and programmes can comprise biography making or memoirs, introduction to local history, traditions, customs, ceremonies, symbols; local activities, including neighbourhood integration projects for different age groups; bringing together sport and science enthusiasts of every age, voluntary service for seniors in favour of children and young people and vice versa¹⁰.

- There is a need of workshops that would help retain labour activity of the elders.

One of the major issues of the labour market in European Union is the rapidly aging workforce. As a result, the labour market needs to accommodate itself to the older people requirements, expectations and limitations, as well as introduce new age management organisational strategies in private companies, organisations and institutions. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofund)¹¹ identifies eight dimensions of age management: job recruitment; learning, training and lifelong learning; career development; flexible working time practices; health protection, promotion and workplace design; redeployment and transition to retirement¹². To be able to rise to the challenges of workforce aging, existing goals and priorities of the governmental education policy need redefining. A major role should be played by the **continuous education**.

In modern perspective, the continuous education relates to all forms of education, fulfilled within the school structures and outside them – in every stage of human existence. In accordance with the definition enunciated during the Nineteenth Session of UNESCO General Conference in Nairobi in October 1976, and the accepted *Recommendation on the development of adult education*, the education of adult is „the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools,

⁹ Tokarz-Kamińska B., Krzyżanowska Ł., *Dobre praktyki w działaniach międzypokoleniowych na podstawie doświadczeń programu „Seniorzy w akcji”*, <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.pan-pps-iid-17-art-000000000011>.

¹⁰ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

¹¹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *A guide to good practice in age management*, Dublin 2006.

colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development”. The need for implementation of workshops aimed at retaining the labour activity of elders, as underscored by the authors of *Recommendation...*, is part of social policy of the European Union for the older people and gives directions in the constitution of framework for policies of aging societies, including Poland. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the situation of labour activation of Polish seniors is far from acceptable. Poland is in the 30th place among 35 countries of OECD. The undisputed leaders in this area are Iceland, New Zealand and Sweden. In those countries, seniors not only stay on the labour market longer, but are included in a number of labour activation programmes. Given that, Polish employers should re-consider their employment policy, to match it with the older people capabilities; propose supplementary trainings; create and implement a more efficient work incentive programmes, which would encourage the new retirees to continue their labour activity.

- The authors rightly recommend creation of so called **Men’s Sheds**, seeing in them as “a possibility for men to study/monitor their good mood and informal processes of men’s education in Poland”. “Man’s Shed” is an initiative directed mainly to men, but it does not mean that women are not allowed to benefit from it. “Men’s Sheds” are rapidly gaining in popularity in Poland. So far, they have been created in Warsaw (2016), Słupsk (2017) and Wroclaw (2018).

The Man’s Shed in Wroclaw is a result of cooperation between multimarkets „Jula”, Wroclaw department of Polish Committee for Social Welfare and Wroclaw Center for Social Development – Wroclaw Center for Seniors.

- *This project [Man's Shed] meets perfectly the expectations for activation of seniors in general and is an important part of Jula's responsible business policy. „Men's Sheds” are open for everyone, but we are particularly interested in increasing the activation level of seniors. The elders will benefit from this activity improving their mood and health, but the local community will also have its share by making use of the life experience and knowledge of the older neighbours.* – **points out Tomasz Wienke, executive director of Jula Poland¹³.**

– *„Man's Shed” is a place provided with a vast array of tools, which are available to use for free. For do-it-yourself enthusiasts await drills, saws, spanners and hammers – almost everything you can find in a regular workshop. I invite all DIY enthusiasts, not only men, but also women, to Nadodrze in Wrocław. [...] I recommend it!”* – **encourages Jacek Sutryk – the President of Wrocław.**

– *In Australia the idea was very well received. People of all age groups willingly spend their time there (in Man's Sheds). I assumed, it might work well in Poland as well.* – **emphasizes Mira Stanisławska-Meysztowicz, a chief of Foundation 'Our Land' and originator of Men's Sheds in Poland.¹⁴.**

Summary

Reaching the retirement age and cessation of employment activity is an important stage of human life. Being an example of a 'rite of passage', it changes the roles from an employee to a retiree. As a result, one must reconsider his life goals, values and rules, as well as choose a new strategy for a smooth change between those life stages. The end of employment opens a new chapter in life, is a turning point for so far unknown circumstances – often seen as a possibility or a threat.

¹³ Moch B, *Na Nadodrze otwarto „Męską Szopę”*, <https://www.wroclaw.pl/na-nadodrze-otwarto-pierwsza-we-wroclawiu-meska-szope>

¹⁴ There.

Preparation for retirement stage is, as Robert Havighurst claims, one of the most important tasks during the old age. It has its consequences: embracing and accepting a new role (of a retiree); general change of lifestyle; maintaining social relations and making new friends; finding a new, satisfactory activity/hobby instead of work.

The retirement process involves a lot of agents, conditional on the previous lifestyle - working hours, rank, age, sex, total amount of savings, the expected pension and family situation. Those factors are crucial to the individual decision of leaving the working life in the past; condition the personal approach towards the retirement and result in the retirement accommodation process positive outcome.

The experts agree, that a key to gaining satisfaction during the old age is activity of all types – physical, social, educational and cultural. In consequence, supporting projects like **Old Guys say ‘yes’ to Community**, seems to be not only a need, but a must. As shows the survey *Adult education* (2016), the older people in Poland are less active in educational aspects of life, which are measured by formal, informal and extra-formal participation rate. Despite the increase of this subpopulation in the total share of general education (6,1 pp. comparing to 2011), participation in any form of education during the 12 months previous to the survey was declared by only **25,6%** respondents between 60-69 years of age – whereas the total percentage was of 45,9%¹⁵. The results of that survey, as well as recommendations of the **Old Guys say ‘yes’ to Community** authors show, that it is necessary to support and create possibilities for the older people in their strive for new forms of activity, accommodated to their needs and areas of interest. Active participation in projects which can raise the spectre of their social roles (pupil, mentor, coach, teacher) is also vital, especially for the increase of the older people welfare and realisation of the active aging idea.

¹⁵ Based on the GUS data, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/osoby-starsze/osoby-starsze/informacja-o-sytuacji-osob-starszych-na-podstawie-badan-glownego-urzedu-statystycznego,1,2.html>