

Examples of institutional forms of supporting senior citizens' activity in Poland. A comparative perspective in the context of a training visit in the Netherlands.

A study visit organized by the Museum Broecker Veiling as part of the "Inclusive Museums" Erasmus+ project has presented the development of senior policy pursued by social organizations and, above all, by cultural institutions in the Netherlands. Attention was paid to voluntary activity and forms of employing the elderly, at one and the same time focusing on the difficulty in recruiting young people for voluntary work.

It is mostly women who predominate among the active seniors in the Netherlands. They often comprise those women who have never worked before, as while implementing the traditional model of the functioning of a family they stayed at home and looked after the children. Some of the volunteers are people who used to work in completely different positions, and following their retirement they wish to pursue their passions in cultural institutions. This type of work satisfies first and foremost the psychological need of socialisation and self-development. Mature employees are visible as staff of museum shops, information points, ticket offices, restaurants and as guides.

The activation of seniors through volunteering is not as popular in Poland as it is in the Netherlands and in other partner countries of the "Inclusive Museums" Erasmus+ project. This results mainly due to different law and social conditions as well as the lack of such a tradition.

According to the data of the Statistics Poland, the number of people who finished their professional work in 2018 amounted in Poland to 6.4 million, 58% of which were women. The average pension currently amounts to the net amount of PLN 1,860 (which is equivalent to ca. EUR 442). This is the amount a statistical pensioner has at their disposal per month. The elderly population is differentiated by age, health condition, wealth, family situation, education, living conditions, knowledge and experience, as well as by their physical and mental capabilities. Their activity is to a large extent dependent upon the state of their health. Subjective and objective indicators show that it is not satisfactory in Poland.

The activity of the seniors in this context should not be seen solely as an opportunity of prolonging their paid professional or voluntary work. It has a broader meaning, as it applies to all activities in the social, political, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic sphere. The level and scale of activity of older people depend on many factors. Architectural and urban barriers in cities, undeveloped transport or its complete lack outside of city borders, objectively and subjectively long distances to places with an offer of spending one's leisure time all limit such activity.

What serves the purpose of including the seniors in the area of social life are, for instance, senior councils that have been being established in Poland since 2013, which support municipal authorities in preparing the activities that would prove friendly to the elderly. Thus far, 300 senior councils have been established in Poland. Moreover, in the Silesian voivodeship there operates the Silesian Council for Seniors. The council is a consultative and advisory body comprising 20 members who are socially active in cooperation with the marshal of the Silesian voivodeship and support the process of strengthening and developing the regional senior policy. The council's term of office lasts 3 years. Its main objectives first

and foremost constitute the following: to integrate the environments of the elderly, create a platform for the exchange of good practices, inform and support the seniors' environments, build a social space that is friendly for the oldest residents, and include the issue of ageing in the regional strategic documents, which makes it possible to give a direction for the regional senior policy.

In addition, the Silesian voivodeship has introduced a Silesian Senior Card. It is an offer of special services, discounts and rights allowing persons who have reached the age of 60 to access the resources of cultural institutions as well as recreational and educational services in the area of the Silesian voivodeship. Information on the activities of the council as well as matters of significance for mature residents of the Silesian voivodeship may be found at <https://seniorzy.slaskie.pl/news>.

One of the most popular ways of activating seniors, in particular in larger urban centres, is the more and more common access to cultural goods and lifelong learning institutions supported by authorities at all levels. Education and participation in the culture are to improve the quality of life, provide the seniors with an opportunity of remaining present in a changing reality on an equal footing with other generations. This may additionally prove to be a chance to emancipate, change something in their lives, and catch up on the educational backlogs. It is also a very important way of building social bonds, meeting new people as well as combating social exclusion and a sense of loneliness.

The most popular form of educating the seniors in Poland are the universities of the third age. The establishment of the first such facility dates back to 1975. At the beginning, they were being established at universities in large cities. At the turn of the 21st century, their number increased rapidly. Already back then the universities of the third age took various organizational forms: not only under the auspices of a higher education institution, but also as independent non-governmental organizations and units run by local cultural centres, libraries and social welfare centres. The main reasons behind the rapid development of these facilities in Poland include the growing number of the seniors, the increasingly better educated people reaching the retirement age and the implementation of a substantive and financial support for such institutions. The universities operate first and foremost in metropolises and medium-sized cities, whereas only ca. 11% of them operate in the countryside.

The universities of the third age prevent the seniors from being excluded, help in establishing and maintaining contacts, and improve the status of an elderly as a seeking and creative person. Part of the facilities not only educate and integrate the seniors, but also conduct therapeutic and rehabilitation activities. Each such university operates a bit differently, and most of them have become so popular that one has to wait for months so as to become a listener, even despite having to pay for most of the classes. Highly popular are those of them that are less formal and put an emphasis on the aspect of integration. This type of universities conduct "lighter" classes, organize numerous events allowing the seniors to establish and develop social relationships, and sometimes implement social and voluntary projects. However, they are increasingly criticized for treating their listeners as passive recipients of not very useful content and for not fulfilling their mission as regards activating the elderly for civic activities. It is nevertheless important to remember that even in the dynamic stage of development of these institutions (according to the Statistics Poland, 640

universities of the third age operated in Poland in 2018), over 100,000 people (83% of whom are women) participate in their classes, and almost 12% of them are people up to the age of 60. What is more, in Poland there are almost 9 million people who are 61 years of age or older.

What is needed while facing such a challenge is a better than thus far identification of various forms of organized support for senior citizens' activity. The main role may be played here by activities aimed at reducing the loneliness of older people who do not wish to participate in the labour market or are no longer able to do so. Due to the decrease in the number of multi-generational families and the migration of younger people for work purposes, the solitude of the elderly both in their families and in the local community is becoming an ever greater challenge. Activities limiting such solitude may be conducted as part of various social projects that develop relationships in the community. And it is the cultural institutions that for a symbolic fee provide the seniors with an opportunity of participating in specially prepared lectures, workshops, meetings and other forms of spending one's time among people of a similar age and with similar interests are becoming more and more important as regards the activities described.

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Based on:

1. Martyna Dominiak, *Przeciwko terrorowi aktywizacji*, "Polityka Senioralna" no. 1, <https://polityka.zaczyn.org/tag/aktywnosc-seniorow/>
2. Maria Zrałek, *Czym jest polityka senioralna?*, "Polityka Senioralna" no. 1, <https://polityka.zaczyn.org/tag/aktywnosc-seniorow/>
3. Marta Szostak, *Rady seniorów*, "Polityka Senioralna" no. 4, <https://polityka.zaczyn.org/tag/aktywnosc-seniorow/>
4. Karolina Kwiecińska, *40 lat UTW w Polsce*, "Polityka Senioralna" no. 2, <https://polityka.zaczyn.org/tag/aktywnosc-seniorow/>
5. <https://seniorzy.slaskie.pl/news>
6. ZBP InfoSenior 2019 report. Polish Bank Association 2019
7. Information on the situation of the elderly in Poland for 2018. Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. Warsaw 2019