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Social and Economic Aspects of Educational Activity of Elderly People in Poland and Spain – A Comparative Study

Abstract

The major research problem is the comparative study of circumstances of elderly people's educational activity in Poland and Spain. The object of the research is to pay attention to the issues regarding to educational needs, opportunities for education and developing the cognitive processes in elderly people as well as the methods of organisation of institutions involved into this area of activity. The objective of this article is to at least attempt to present institutional measures offered by the said countries relating to this age group, especially with regard to the support of their cognitive development and the idea of lifelong learning. One of the article's elements is showing the good practice regarding to these problems, which are well worth being paid attention to and being established in the Polish educational practice toward elderly people.

Keywords: Education, Activity, Elderly People, University of the Third Age, Institution

Introduction

Contemporary demographical changes in societies make the problem of elderly people's education more and more significant. Having reached the retirement age, as well as having finished the stage of their working lives, elderly people do look for other forms of mobilisation in order to actively participate in various areas of social life. They search for new

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motivators to be active and acquire those abilities, which before, for some reasons, turned out to be unattainable. The civilisation and technological progress and increase in life expectancy affect the necessity of constant improvement of seniors' educational qualifications.

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Ageing of Societies in the Light of “Lifelong Learning” Concept

Population ageing is characterised by regular decrease in birth along with accompanying extension of life expectancy. This problem touches contemporary societies in many fields, either on the individual level, or the local, national or global one. The effects of population ageing might be of demographical, economical or social nature, including health or educational one, as well. The statistics and prognosis show this phenomenon is likely to run and run.¹

Ageing affects the reduction of activity in broad sense and, in consequence, the quality of life. This effect might consist of such elements as social and occupational exclusion, deteriorating of health condition or financial situation. Contemporary seniors are generally of a worse social status and have a worse individual attitude to their own senility compared to prior cultures.² What is more, ageing of societies has led to global trans-

¹ M. Polakowski, *Spoleczne i ekonomiczne konsekwencje starzenia się społeczeństw a główne kierunki reform systemów emerytalnych w Europie (Pension systems reforms in EU in the context of demographic changes)*, „Studia BAS”, no. 2(30)/2012, pp. 169–170, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=f0a41695-8b28-46bf-8b3f-44ae88d3f7fb%40pdc-v-sessmgr02> (access 8.08.2020); B. Szopa, *Konsekwencje procesu starzenia się społeczeństwa. Wybrane problemy (The Consequences of an Ageing Population. Selected Issues)*, „Problemy Zarządzania”, vol. 14, no. 2(59)/2016, pp. 24, 28, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7172/1644-9584.59.2>.

² B. Szopa, op. cit., p. 32–33.

formations within the scope of a family model and arising difficulties in constructing intergenerational solidarity.³

The process of population ageing affects directly the way a society functions as a whole. Not only does it have the impact on the evolution of a population demographical structure, but also on the organisation of particular sectoral policies of a state, especially of economical and social policies, including health, housing and educational ones. Thus, „an applied policy of a state is adjusted to current demographical tendencies so as to alleviate the effects of ageing, to properly satisfy people’s needs in various areas and to fully take advantage of its potential.”⁴

Therefore, a mode of country and society functioning is transformed, especially in the field of economical and technological development. Bogumiła Szopa mentions the necessity of “reconstructing the model of production and consumerism, as well as the model of saving and investing”.⁵ Andrzej Klimczuk in turn notices that launching new technological solutions might lead to reduction of undesirable aftereffects of ageing societies. He lists, among others, such initiatives as *universal design*,⁶ *welfare technology*,⁷ *silver economy* concept and *gerontechnology*.⁸

³ A. Rokicki, *Starość nie znaczy bierność – współczesne metody aktywizowania seniorów (Senelity Does not Mean Passivity – Contemporary Methods of Making Seniors Active)*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin Polonia”, Sectio J, vol. 29, no. 1/2016, p. 188, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17951/j.2016.29.1.185>; *Starzenie się społeczeństwa polskiego i jego skutki (Ageing of the Polish society and its consequences)*, Opracowania Tematyczne, Biuro Analiz i Dokumentacji, Kancelaria Senatu, Kwiecień 2011, p. 11, <https://www.senat.gov.pl/gfx/senat/pl/senatopracowania/15/plik/ot-601.pdf> (access 12.09.2020).

⁴ M. Polakowski, op. cit., pp. 170, 173–174, 177; *Starzenie się społeczeństwa polskiego i jego skutki (Ageing of the Polish society and its consequences)*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁵ B. Szopa, op. cit., p. 25.

⁶ It applies to “solutions relating to the design of utilitarian objects and objects of public space”, which ensure “accessibility for all, regardless anyone’s mobility impairments”. A. Klimczuk, *Modele wielosektorowej polityki społecznej wobec ludzi starych i starości w kontekście zmiany technologicznej (Models of multisectoral social policy towards older people and old age in the context of technological change)*, „Public Governance / Zarządzanie Publiczne”, vol. 32, no. 2/2015, p. 41, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=8f01fe25-69f2-49e6-888c-826-c50586bdb%40sessionmgr103> (access 8.08.2020), O. Gassmann, G. Reepmeyer, *Universal design – innovations for all ages*, in: *The Silver Market Phenomenon. Business Opportunities in an Era of Demographic Change*, eds. F. Kohlbacher, C. Herstatt, Springer, Heidelberg 2008, pp. 125–140, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-75331-5_9.

⁷ “Technical solutions assisting people in need to solve their everyday problems, especially in public space”. A. Klimczuk, op. cit., p. 41, T. Mørk, G. Vidje, *Focus on Welfare Technology*, Nordens Vålfärdscenar, Stockholm–Dronninglund 2010.

⁸ “This term refers to study on technologies, products and services dedicated for elderly people, which assist them in nearly every aspect of life, especially in maintain-

An adequately adjusted educational policy, especially adult education is to alleviate undesirable aftereffects of changes in demographical structure. Beneficial impact of education on the consequences of ageing societies have been spotted by some global entities, including UNESCO, OECD or the European Community. The “lifelong learning” idea was already supported by UNESCO in the 1970s and the 1980s.⁹

In 1996 the Ministers of Education of OECD countries, including Poland, adopted the policy of lifelong learning to assure “economical, social and cultural consistency”.¹⁰ The implementation of this concept was directed to improve the situation on labour market, which is reduction of problems such as unemployment and deficit of qualified workers.¹¹ In the years 2007–2013 the European Union deployed *LLP – Lifelong Learning Programme*. One of the sectoral programmes forming *LLP* was *Grundtvig* (adult education).¹²

The “lifelong learning” concept is carried on until now in the framework of various programmes and educational initiatives. The European Commission considers the development of education and culture as a fac-

ing their health condition and sense of self-worth, improving residential conditions and everyday life, mobility and transportation, communication and management, work and relaxation”. A. Klimczuk, *Modele „srebrnej gospodarki” w Unii Europejskiej w ujęciu porównawczym. Próba wprowadzenia do dyskusji (“Silver Economy” Models in the European Union in the Comparative Approach: An Attempt to Introduce Discussion)*, „Problemy Zarządzania”, vol. 14, no. 2(59)/2016, p. 44; C. Burdick, *Gerontechnology*, in: *Encyclopedia of Gerontology*, ed. J.E. Birren, Academic Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 627–629, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-12-370870-2/00080-9>.

⁹ J.A. Morón Marchena, *Educación y personas mayores (Education and elderly people)*, „Revista Electrónica Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado”, no. 17(1)/2014, p. 112, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6018/reifop.17.1.198871> (access 01.02.2020).

¹⁰ *Resumen. Aspectos económicos y financieros del aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida (Overview. Economics and Finance of Lifelong Learning)*, OECD 2002, p. 2, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264195868-sum-es.pdf?expires=1582490801&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=EA6B8EFD2AA8BC24E9C39DB8A510EB0B> (access 23.02.2020).

¹¹ M. Gębska, *Polityka edukacyjna Banku Światowego (Educational policy of the World Bank)*, Wyzsza Szkoła Pedagogiczna TWP w Warszawie, Warszawa 2007, p. 120.

¹² Its name comes from Mikołaj Grundtvig (1783–1872), an educator, the author of the “lifelong learning” idea. At present, Grundtvig is included into the programme Erasmus+ and “is mainly focused on co-operation within the scope of adult education from the so called unfavourable groups, namely the disabled, the elderly, from national and ethnic minorities, people with low qualifications, inhabitants of regions with hindered access to an educational offer for adults”. A. Włoch, *Edukacja Europejska. Założenia, perspektywy, funkcje społeczne. Krytyczne spojrzenie (European education – assumptions, perspectives, social functions. A critical look)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2016, pp. 97–98, 109–110.

tor which might largely contribute to deal with difficulties such as ageing society or progress of new technologies. It is emphasised, amongst others, that there is either a need for dissemination of trainings which allow to obtain new qualifications within the field of innovation and digitisation or the necessity of drawing up a new programme within the field of digital education. Indeed, studies point out that nearly half of all Europeans at the age of 16–74 do not have sufficient digital skills. Nowadays, a good deal of institutions are engaged into the increase in digital literacy of citizens of all the Member States until the year 2025.¹³

Due to the regularly growing number of elderly people and subsequently, the growing need for education within this social group, as well as due to the developing global tendencies relating to the “lifelong learning” idea, in Europe and all over the world started to appear the Third Age Universities (hereinafter referred to as: TAU). In both Poland and Spain first facilities of this type, began operating in the 1970s. Currently, they exist under various names, they are in various organisational and legal forms and enjoy various sources of finance.

In Spain there are “Third Age Auditoriums” (*Aulas de Tercera Edad*)¹⁴ or “University Programmes for Elderly People” (*Programas Universitarios para Personas Mayores, PUPMs*). Owing to those programmes, a significant number of elderly people may take part in classes aiming their personal development, improvement of human relationships, knowledge updating and getting to know new vocabulary and tools enabling them active social integration and access to information. Elderly people may take part in university activities or even get an official degree with no sense of social exclusion.¹⁵

In Poland TAUs are entities of various organisational and legal forms. As a rule, the major number of them operate as associations. Other or-

¹³ *Edukacja na całe życie (Lifelong education)*, Komisja Europejska, https://ec.europa.eu/poland/news/171113_education_pl (access 1.02.2020); *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture. Innovation and digital in education, The Commission's Contribution to the Leaders' Working Lunch*, Gothenburg, 17 November 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/leaders-working-lunch-innovation_en.pdf (access 1.02.2020).

¹⁴ *CEATE*, <http://ceate.es> (access 9.02.2020).

¹⁵ C. Bru Ronda, *Los Programas Universitarios para Mayores en España: análisis y evaluación de las enseñanzas universitarias para mayores en España y Europa (University Programmes for Elderly People, analysis and evaluation of university education for elderly people in Spain and Europe)*, Repositorio Institucional de la Universidad de Alicante 2008, pp. 1–2, <https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/30089/1/bru-programas-01.pdf> (access 5.02.2020); *AEPUM*, https://www.aepumayores.org/sites/default/files/dip-tico_aepum_castellano.pdf (access 12.02.2020).

ganisational and legal forms include: universities or colleges, community centres, non-governmental organisations of another main form of activity, continuing education centres, libraries, foundations, social aid institutions and others. For more than a half of these facilities the most important purpose of activity was education, further integration and activation of elderly people; self-help and support for the development of regional culture in the smallest degree.¹⁶

Social and Economic Aspects of Educational Activity of Elderly People in Poland and Spain

The aforementioned demographical circumstances of ageing societies and accompanying consequences are crucial and current – in different degrees they apply to all the countries of the European Union. Michał Polakowski observed that in the year 2010 there was a lower percentage of those under 65 in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe compared to the countries of Western Europe.¹⁷

Figures of the Spanish report “Getting old on the net” (*EnR, Envejecimiento en Red*) from March 2019 seem to back up this tendency. According to the document, in 2017 Spain took the fifth place in the European Union in terms of the number of elderly people just behind Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain.¹⁸ According to the figures of Eurostat of 2019, the number of people at the age of 65 and older stood at 19.4%, which places Spain just below the European average (20%). To compare, the percentage of people over 65 in Poland in 2019 stood at 17.7%.¹⁹

The author of the article titled: “Pension systems reforms in EU in the context of demographic changes” draws attention, though, that the prognosis encompassing the period until the year 2060 predicts the situ-

¹⁶ *Uniwerytety Trzeciego Wieku w roku akademickim 2017/2018 (Universities of the Third Age in the 2017/2018 academic year)*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Urząd Statystyczny w Gdańsku, Warszawa, Gdańsk 2019, pp. 15–17, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/uniwerytety-trzeciego-wieku-w-roku-akademickim-20172018,11,2.html> (access 21.02.2020).

¹⁷ M. Polakowski, op. cit., pp. 169–170, 172.

¹⁸ A. Abellán García, P. Aceituno Nieto, J. Pérez Díaz, D. Ramiro Fariñas, A. Ayala García, R. Pujol Rodríguez, *Un perfil de las personas mayores en España, 2019. Indicadores estadísticos básicos (A profile of the elderly people in Spain, 2019. Basic statistical indicators)*, Madrid, “Informes Envejecimiento en red”, no. 22/2019, pp. 5, 13, <http://envejecimiento.csic.es/documentos/documentos/enred-indicadoresbasicos2019.pdf> (access 2.02.2020).

¹⁹ *Eurostat, Population: structure indication*, <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do> (access 23.02.2020).

ation will reverse: the number of elderly people will be higher in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.²⁰ This prognosis seems to be affirmed by the rate of growing participation of elderly people in the structure of population. Spain is distinguished by a higher percentage of elderly people in relation to the total population than Poland but the rate of growing participation of elderly people in recent years have been higher in Poland.²¹

On the other hand, the expected life expectancy at the moment of birth is longer in Spain than in Poland – according to the figures from the year 2018 it is 80.7 years for men and 86.3 for women. In our country it is accordingly 73.8 years and 81.7 years.²² As for the average life expectancy at the age of 65, in Spain it is 19.1 years for men and 23 years for women. It is one of the highest scores in Europe and across the world. In Poland it is accordingly 15.8 and 20.1 years.²³

In the context of the “lifelong learning” idea, according to the figures of Eurostat from the year 2018, almost twice as many Spaniards at the age of 25–64 (10.5%) as Poles (5.7%) learn life-long.²⁴

Hence, Spain is a good example of a highly developed country of Western Europe, whose multisectoral policy, as well as educational, institutional and technological solutions appear to better answer the difficulties caused by ageing society and ensure better living conditions for elderly people. The country has also greater experience in adjusting suitable poli-

²⁰ M. Polakowski, op. cit., p. 173.

²¹ Eurostat, *Population structure and ageing*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Population_structure_and_ageing (access 23.02.2020).

²² *España – Esperanza de vida al nacer (Spain – Life expectancy at birth)*, <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/esperanza-vida/espana> (access 24.03.2020); *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 r. (The situation of older people in Poland in 2018)*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Urząd Statystyczny w Białymstoku, Warszawa–Białystok 2020, p. 25, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/osoby-starsze/osoby-starsze/sytuacja-osob-starszych-w-polsce-w-2018roku,2,1.html> (access 16.02.2020).

²³ A. Abellán García, P. Aceituno Nieto, J. Pérez Díaz, D. Ramiro Fariñas, A. Ayala García, R. Pujol Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 15–16; *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 r. (The situation of older people in Poland in 2018)*, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁴ According to the figures from the year 2018 only 11.1% of the EU citizens at the age of 2–64 learn life-long. Sources give that in the framework of European initiative of development, the European Commission strives to increase this indicator up to 25% in the year 2025. Eurostat, *Adult participation in learning, 2018*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190517-1> (access 23.02.2020); *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture. Learning throughout our lives, The Commission's Contribution to the Leaders' Working Lunch*, Gothenburg, 17 November 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/leaders-working-lunch-lifelong-learning_en.pdf (access 1.02.2020).

cies and economical strategies since the problem of ageing societies has already affected it in a greater extent than the Polish society.

The base of the comparative study of educational activity of seniors in Spain and Poland is the differentiated population structure of these countries with the geographical areas relatively comparable in size and so the total population throughout the recent decades.²⁵ Perhaps the educational practices applied by Spain together with the pursued social and health policies, could be the inspiration for Polish initiatives designed to elderly people in the social and economic aspect.

Education of ageing societies is of fundamental importance for social and economical issues. It seems that the issue of broadly understood activity and activation of elderly people is put forward to take care of their resources at most.

The material tool of the international range to compare unused potential of the population 55+ in various sides of life is the indicator of active ageing. Thanks to this indicator it is plausible to monitor progress of individual states within the area of “[...] establishing optimal opportunities in the scope of health, participation and safety to improve the quality of life of people during their old age”.²⁶

A European ranking suggests that in 2018 in most areas Spain took significantly higher positions than Poland. The exception was the issue of employment of elderly people, in the field of which Poland overtakes this country placing on 20th position (see: Table 1). In Spain the factor of people, who continue their occupational activity at the age of 65 or older, is very low compared to other OECD countries and in the year 2017 it was over twice less than in Poland. Both countries remain under the EU average.²⁷

From the economic point of view, the issues related to maintaining occupational activity of elderly people seem to be the most important. Their extended stay on labour market is beneficial not only to active ageing (see: Table 1), but it also beneficially affects the development of economy in a certain country and an individual financial situation of seniors. The key role in the question of employment of elderly people plays a level of education and lifelong learning.

²⁵ In 1990 the population in Poland was 38,110,782 and in Spain – 38,867,322. This number in the following years has remained relatively on the same level in Poland (in 2020 it is 37,734,000) and in Spain this number has significantly risen (in 2020 it is 46,481,000). *Liczba ludności Europy (Europe's population)*, <https://www.populationof.net/pl/europe/> (access 10.08.2020).

²⁶ *Aktywność osób starszych (The activity of the elderly people)*, Opracowania tematyczne, Kancelaria Senatu, Biuro Analiz, dokumentacji i korespondencji, Warszawa 2019, p. 4, <https://statswiki.unece.org> (access 25.03.2020).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

Table 1. The Active Ageing Index (AAI) by area for 2018 in Poland and Spain

Specification	Areas			
	Employment	Social participation	An independent, healthy existence	Possibilities and conditions conducive to active aging
Poland	20	23	22	21
Spain	22	17	13	12

Source: *Aktywność osób starszych (The activity of the elderly people)*, Opracowania tematyczne, Kancelaria Senatu, Biuro Analiz, dokumentacji i korespondencji, Warszawa 2019, p. 8, <https://statswiki.unece.org> (access 25.03.2020).

PwC studies show that elderly people being better qualified remain occupationally active longer. It might be caused, among others by a greater competitiveness of seniors in relation to young, well-educated workers and the nature of work of highly qualified people (including accountants, business consultants or lawyers) which simply means better working conditions for the further occupational activity during the period of senility.²⁸

It is not uncommon that constantly evolving labour market new appearing jobs result in requirements of skills updating or permanent re-training. Getting newly qualified makes elderly people more attractive for employers from one hand and, on the other hand, it helps to use their potential at most. The great variety of educational solutions is the response to increasing demand in this field. Urszula Jeruszka pays attention to the particular role of informal education (trainings and courses of different sorts, coaching, etc.) to gain a greater occupational activity of elderly people and at the same time the growth of their attractiveness on labour market.²⁹

Extended stay in occupational activity might have a beneficial impact on a financial situation of elderly people and subsequently on improvement of quality of their lives. Bogumiła Szopa remarks that the main elements increasing the chances for independent functioning of seniors in good conditions are high revenue and a level of education.³⁰ It also seems that an advantageous financial situation, similarly to a previous course of

²⁸ PwC *Golden Age index*, 2018, p. 38, <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/golden-age/golden-age-index-2018-final-sanitised.pdf> (access 6.09.2020).

²⁹ U. Jeruszka, *Edukacyjne wspieranie zatrudnienia osób w wieku 55+ (Educational Employment Support for People Aged 55+)*, „Education of Economists & Managers / Edukacja Ekonomistów i Menedżerów”, vol. 53, no. 3/2019, pp. 75–76, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0013.5256>.

³⁰ B. Szopa, op. cit., p. 33.

internship are significant determinants positive for educational activity amongst elderly people.

The economic status of Spanish seniors improved after the year 2008, thanks to which they did not extensively feel the negative effects of the economic crisis. The factor of poverty risk in 2017 was the lowest for people at the age of 65 or older compared to other age groups. Yet, since 2015 it has been increasing. Also in Poland the range of extreme poverty in the year 2018 turned out to be the lowest for the oldest generations; however, it increased in relation to the year 2017.³¹ Therefore, the assumption stating that “although the threat of poverty decreases with age, its durability increases”³² finds its confirmation.

The observed tendencies of increase in this area might lead to reduction of access of seniors to educational institutions. Both in Spain and Poland, TAUs charge their students, which might be an obstacle for those being in a worse financial situation.³³

On the other hand, more extensive financial sources of elderly people might have an influence on their behaviour in the sphere of consumerism since the potential of elderly people was spotted in another field. According to assumptions by the National Institute of the Senior Economy, *silver economy* is a new branch of economy in Poland assuming, among others, existing of a new platform of a complex system of management of various services, being an answer to the needs of consumers at the age of 60 or older. At the same time, a good deal of national and international organisations persuade they are the most stable group of consumers in terms of revenue, with, among others, increased demand for using the ICT market and modern, interdisciplinary educational services.

In Spain it was observed that the education level of population goes down with age. Among elder age groups there is still a significant percentage of people with no education or the illiterate even though there has been a significant increase in education level of elderly people and a decrease in the number of the illiterate in the last 40 years. This improvement was mainly caused by betterment of educational policies and

³¹ *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 r. (The situation of older people in Poland in 2018)*, op. cit., p. 35; A. Abellán García, P. Aceituno Nieto, J. Pérez Díaz, D. Ramiro Fariñas, A. Ayala García, R. Pujol Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 28.

³² B. Szopa, op. cit., p. 33; M. Lis, M. Potoczna, *Zagrożenie ubóstwem w Polsce w ujęciu dynamicznym: badania budżetów gospodarstw domowych z lat 2002–2011 (Dynamic dimension of poverty risk in Poland: research based on household budget surveys 2002–2011)*, „Polityka Społeczna”, no. 3(492)/2015, <https://polityka-spoeczna.ipiss.com.pl/resources/html/article/details?id=202062> (access 25.10.2020).

³³ *Uniwerytety Trzeciego Wieku w roku akademickim 2017/2018 (Universities of the Third Age in the 2017/2018 academic year)*, op. cit., p. 13; C. Bru Ronda, op. cit., p. 30.

biological departure of older generations with lower education. In Poland, in the last years the increase in education of the population at the age of 15–64 has been noted owing to the reforms carried out in the educational system. In 2016 more than a quarter of the population at the age of 60–69 took up different forms of education. It is well worth mentioning that educational activity of the Polish population in this age range increased compared to the year 2011.³⁴

Educational activities offered by TAUs are popular in both Poland and Spain. The opportunity of broadening knowledge and getting new qualifications in various fields, as well as contact with others might increase elderly people's self-esteem and strengthen their social and family position. Owing to the acquired skills they can achieve a greater degree of independence and self-reliance, by which they become a lesser burden for their families and with greater self-confidence they can take part in social and public life.

The key issue seems to be perceiving senility itself either by elderly people or their families and the rest of society. Apart from professional exclusion, they can face social, public or domestic discrimination.³⁵ Teresa Amezcua-Aguilar and Eva Sotomayor-Morales say that social participation of seniors is an essential part of active ageing and a possible way of diminishing social and economic inequalities they become victims of.³⁶ From the aforementioned figures (see: Table 1) it may be concluded that social activity of the elderly is higher in Spain than in Poland. Bogumiła Szopa remarks that elderly people in our country are generally characterised by passive attitude, supposedly it being a result of overall poor health condition.³⁷

³⁴ A. Abellán García, P. Aceituno Nieto, J. Pérez Díaz, D. Ramiro Fariñas, A. Ayala García, R. Pujol Rodríguez, op. cit., pp. 35–36; *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 r. (The situation of older people in Poland in 2018)*, op. cit., p. 63–65; *Kapitał ludzki w Polsce w latach 2014–2018 (Human capital in Poland in the years 2014–2018)*, Analizy statystyczne GUS, Urząd Statystyczny w Gdańsku, Ośrodek Statystyki Edukacji i Kapitału Ludzkiego, Warszawa Gdańsk 2019, p. 31, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/> (access 23.03.2020).

³⁵ B. Szopa, op. cit., pp. 32–33, for: A. Leszczyńska-Rejchert, *Człowiek starszy i jego wspomaganie – w stronę pedagogiki starości (The elderly people and their support – towards old age pedagogy)*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2010.

³⁶ T. Amezcua-Aguilar, E. Sotomayor-Morales, *La participación social de las personas mayores, una cuestión de estructura de oportunidades. Los casos de Jaén (España) y Esslingen (Alemania) [The social participation of the elderly people, a question of structure of opportunities. The cases of Jaén (Spain) and Esslingen (Germany)]*, „Paraninfo Digital”, no. 13(30)/2019, p. 1, <http://ciberindex.com/index.php/pd/article/view/e30090> (access 11.09.2020).

³⁷ B. Szopa, op. cit., p. 34.

The author of an article titled “The Consequences of an Ageing Population. Selected Issues” adds that social and professional exclusion of elderly people might deepen the negative effects for a society especially when it comes to the break of natural intergenerational continuation. It is mainly about elderly people’s unused experience and skills, which is undeniably a remarkable source of knowledge and value for domestic, occupational and social environment.³⁸

Andrzej Rokicki warns against the worsening lack of intergenerational dialogue and even the possibility of conflict occurrence in the face of intensive ageing societies.³⁹ Małgorzata Halicka and Emilia Kramkowska point out that promoting activities of intergenerational character might serve to overcome negative stereotypes on senility.⁴⁰ Perhaps a greater pressure on educational reactions of elderly people with younger generations could not only enhance mutual knowledge through exchange of experiences but it could also diminish possible hazards caused by rapid demographical changes.

Educational activity contributes to intergenerational integration. Both Poland and Spain offer solutions, which are opportunities for various generations to meet up. An interesting example is a project of the Spanish Confederation of the Third Age Auditorium (*Confederación Española de Aulas de la Tercera Edad, CEATE*⁴¹) within the framework of cultural volunteering service: “Elderly cultural volunteers to show around Spanish museums to children, adolescents and pensioners”. The initiative has been operating since 1993, gaining particular recognition of the European Union.⁴²

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 32.

³⁹ A. Rokicki, op. cit., pp. 189–190.

⁴⁰ B. Skoczyńska-Prokopowicz, *Funkcjonowanie społeczne współczesnych seniorów – perspektywa aksjologiczna i wybrane regulacje prawne (Social functioning of the elderly in the light of the values and legal regulations)*, „Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization & Management / Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Seria Organizacja i Zarządzanie”, no. 85/2015, p. 478, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=d0e51c96-674d-4f7e-a153-c7655d5397b8%40pdcv-sessmgr04> (access 8.08.2020), M. Halicka, E. Kramkowska, *Uczestnictwo ludzi starszych w życiu społecznym (The participation of elderly people in social life)* in: *O sytuacji ludzi starszych (The Situation of Elderly People)*, ed. J. Hryniewicz, Rządowa Rada Ludnościowa, II Kongres Demograficzny 2012, Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych, Warszawa 2012, p. 36, https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/16118/O_sytuacji_ludzi_starszych.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (access 6.09.2020).

⁴¹ A non-profit organisation operating to promote health, quality life and lifelong learning of elderly people. It is registered into the National Register of Associations of the Ministry of Home Affairs. *CEATE*, <http://ceate.es> (access 9.02.2020).

⁴² Ibidem; N. Hipólito Ruiz, R. Moreno López, E. Arias Fernández, *Experiencias innovadoras y buenas prácticas en Educación Social (Innovative experiences and good practices in Social*

Other examples include: „SECOT: The Elderly Volunteering Service for Business Consulting” (*SECOT: Voluntariado Senior de Asesoramiento Empresarial*)⁴³ or “Elderly Filmmakers” (*Cineastas Mayores*). These initiatives help to overcome negative stereotypes concerning senility and they boost social activity of seniors.⁴⁴ At Polish TAUs elderly people may, amongst others, join intergenerational clubs.⁴⁵

Besides, Poland and Spain are the European countries where most TAUs are based on a French model. It is characterised by, amongst others, direct linking-up facilities involved into education of elderly people with a university or college. Co-existence of seniors and young people in university centres is, therefore, a circumstance which favours integration.⁴⁶

A significant element taking into account the intergenerational cooperation and at the same time help those in need, is social activity of elderly people. Both Polish and Spanish TAUs offer projects, in frames of which elderly people may participate in voluntary work and be engaged into help offered to other seniors, children and adolescents or sick and disabled people as well as activities aimed at environment protection.⁴⁷ In

Education), Nau Llibres, Valencia 2017, p. 73, <https://books.google.pl/books?id=PU0oDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA77&lpg=PA77&dq=proyectos+educativos+innovadores+para+personas+mayores+espa%C3%B1a&source=bl&ots=oYmHuTNAJP&sig=ACfU3U3k1wBSmJ6au6R4dchlQsi80Cf-7w&hl=pl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjY1-yQn-J3oAhXppIsKHRETD8kQ6AEwAXoECAsQAQ#v=onepage&q=proyectos%20educativos%20innovadores%20para%20personas%20mayores%20espa%C3%B1a&f=false> (access 21.03.2020).

⁴³ N. Hipólito Ruiz, R. Moreno López, E. Arias Fernández, op. cit., p. 74.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, pp. 72–73.

⁴⁵ *Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku w roku akademickim 2017/2018 (Universities of the Third Age in the 2017/2018 academic year)*, op. cit., p. 76.

⁴⁶ Ł. Tomczyk, *Edukacja osób starszych. Seniorzy w przestrzeni nowych mediów (Education of the elderly people. Seniors in the space of new media)*, Difin, Warszawa 2015, pp. 67–68; A. Gołdys, Ł. Krzyżanowska, M. Stec, Ł. Ostrowski, *Zoom na UTW. Raport z badania (Zoom on the TAUs. Research report)*, Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych, Warszawa 2012, p. 80 and E. Trafiałek, *Edukacja, integracja i aktywizacja ludzi w starszym wieku. Polska a Europa (Education, integration and activation of elderly people. Poland and Europe)*, in: *Seniorzy w rodzinie, instytucji i społeczeństwie (Seniors in the family, institutions and society)*, Wyd. Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Marketingu, Sosnowiec 2005, p. 79; J.E. Valle Aparicio, *Educación permanente: los programas universitarios para mayores en España como respuesta a una nueva realidad social (Lifelong learning: University programs for older students in Spain as a response to a new social reality)*, „Revista de la Educación Superior”, vol. XLIII(3), No. 171/2014, p. 122, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resu.2015.03.003>.

⁴⁷ *Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku w roku akademickim 2018/2019 (Universities of the Third Age in the 2017/2018 academic year)*, op. cit., pp. 33, 86–87; *La participación social de las Personas Mayores (The social participation of the Elderly People)*, Colección Estudios Serie Personas Mayores, Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales (IMSERSO),

this manner, they can feel useful supporting others on one hand and on the other hand they can actively participate in social life. Social activity of elderly people brings a wide range of social and economic advantages and it strengthens their position in a society.⁴⁸

It seems that education may have an impact on boosting social participation of seniors and subsequently reinterpretation the concept of senility and the change of its social paradigm. Besides, the adequately aimed educational policy towards all generations could increase the social awareness and reveal chances and multi-level potential of senility.

The increase of elderly people in contemporary societies leads to the development of tuition, especially in terms of technological solutions and progress in medicine. Education of elderly people, either of formal, “out-formal” or informal character within computer and digital technology might not only boost their attractiveness in the professional field but it might also facilitate their functioning in more and more automated reality, which, more often than not is unfamiliar to them.

Educational profiles for elderly people offer classes within computer and internet Technologies, at the same time strengthening seniors’ participation in vast nets of an information society. The knowledge acquired in this manner favours active ageing not only in the sphere of employment or social participation, but it also affects using institutional activities of educational character which become easier.

Broadly speaking, in Spain, among people after 55 years of age a decrease in the number of those who have digital skills is distinctly noticeable. Interestingly, in the years 2007–2018 it was noticed that the digital division between elderly people and the age group of the highest degree of digitalisation (16–24 years of age) was reduced. In the year 2008 only 7% of people at the age of 65–74 used the Internet and in 2018 this percentage was already 47%. What is more, there is a relationship between an education level and using the Internet. According to this criterion, people at the age of 65 or older use “the net” in the following proportions: 2.6% of illiterate, 11% of those who completed primary school, 38.4% of high school graduates and 75.5% of those having a degree. Moreover, a percentage of those using the Internet rises along with their material status.⁴⁹ In Poland

Ministerio de Educación, Política Social y Deporte, Madrid 2008, p. 99, <https://www.imserso.es/InterPresent2/groups/imserso/documents/binario/11005partsocialmay.pdf> (access 12.09.2020).

⁴⁸ *La participación social de las Personas Mayores (The social participation of the Elderly People)*, op. cit., pp. 33–34.

⁴⁹ A. Abellán García, P. Aceituno Nieto, J. Pérez Díaz, D. Ramiro Fariñas, A. Ayala García, R. Pujol Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 36; M.J. Vidal Domínguez, J.M. Labeaga

in the year 2018 nearly one third of people at the age of 65-74 declared regular using the Internet (more than in the previous year). Nearly three fourths of those in this age group having a degree regularly went online.⁵⁰

Participation of elderly people in educational activities and getting digital qualifications increases their regular access to information and, subsequently to raising their awareness, the health one, as well. Both Polish and Spanish TAUs offer, apart from computer technology and internet courses, classes and lectures on medicine and health.⁵¹ Furthermore, the research of the Spanish project AEPUMA pointed out that participation in University Programmes for Elderly People causes positive affects in cognitive functioning and it has a beneficial impact on psychical and physical health of seniors. Greater activity and integration cause a reduction in loneliness and subsequently these factors lead to elimination of such disorders as depression or the sense of dependence on others.⁵²

It is well worth noticing that Spaniards estimate their health condition better than Poles. Almost half of Spanish seniors consider their health to be good or very good. In Poland almost half of elderly citizens consider their health condition as average and only about one fourth as good (23.8%) or very good (1.9%).⁵³ The health improvement in these societies is also confirmed by the regular increase in lifespan. Bogumiła Szopa emphasises that the health condition of Poles, generally felt by them as weak, causes the reduction of their activity in various fields, including social, professional or educational ones.⁵⁴

An incredibly significant matter, favouring active and healthy ageing, is educational programmes and technological improvements helping in

Azcona, P. Casado Durandez, A. Madrigal Muñoz, J. López Doblas, A. Montero Navarro, G. Meil Landwerlin, *Informe 2016, Las Personas Mayores en España. Datos Estadísticos Estatales y por Comunidades Autónomas (2016 Report, Older People in Spain. State Statistical Data and by Autonomous Communities)*, Colección Personas Mayores, Serie Documentos Técnicos y Estadísticos, Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales (IMSERSO), Madrid 2017, pp. 470–471, https://www.imserso.es/InterPresent1/groups/imserso/documents/binario/112017001_informe-2016-persona.pdf (access 5.02.2020).

⁵⁰ *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 r. (The situation of older people in Poland in 2018)*, op. cit., p. 69.

⁵¹ *Uniwrsytety Trzeciego Wieku w roku akademickim 2017/2018 (Universities of the Third Age in the 2017/2018 academic year)*, op. cit., pp. 29–31; C. Bru Ronda, op. cit., pp. 28–29.

⁵² C. Bru Ronda, op. cit., pp. 21, 35.

⁵³ A. Abellán García, P. Aceituno Nieto, J. Pérez Díaz, D. Ramiro Fariñas, A. Ayala García, R. Pujol Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 23; *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 r. (The situation of older people in Poland in 2018)*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁵⁴ B. Szopa, op. cit., p. 34.

everyday functioning. One of the innovative projects implemented in Spain is creating a supermarket called *Covirán* tailored to the needs of elderly people by individual approach and special services.⁵⁵ Another example is a platform named *Stimulus*, which is used by applications for tablets. It is for stimulation and cognitive rehabilitation by means of interactive exercises and it is dedicated to people at risk or showing deficiencies in cognitive processes in result of a disease or an injury.⁵⁶

In the capital of Poland appeared, amongst others, a project titled “The Dots of Digital Support for Seniors”, organised by the City Hall of Warsaw together with the Association Creative Ones 50 Plus. The principal aim of the initiative is education of elderly people within new technologies with the intention of enhancement of their independence. Other popular ventures in Poland are taxicabs free of charge for those at the age of over 70 or an option of taking advantage of free assistance in minor domestic faults.⁵⁷

Also, the abovementioned Silver Economy supports modern solutions. According to the director of innovation *Atendo*⁵⁸ Luis Barros, „silver economy is going to be the key to innovation, creating jobs and economical growth”.⁵⁹ One of the targets of this branch of economy is use of new technologies, which will make it possible to reduce costs and, at the same time, increase the efficiency and quality of life in the time of independent and peaceful old age. Barros also notices that “we should educate on life cycles, valuable aspects of old age and what can be considered a success for modern societies. We must enhance their strength and improve the vision of what it means being a senior”.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ B. Caballero, *12 proyectos innovadores para un envejecimiento activo y saludable (12 innovative projects for an active and healthy ageing)*, Sociedad de la Innovación, <https://www.sociedaddelainnovacion.es/12-proyectos-innovadores-envejecimiento-activo-saludable/> (access 21.03.2020); *Covirán, el supermercado adaptado a los mayores (Covirán, the supermarket adapted to the elderly)*, ABC, https://www.abc.es/familia/consumo/abci-coviran-supermercado-adaptado-mayores-201512091702_noticia.html (access 21.03.2020).

⁵⁶ B. Caballero, op. cit.; *Stimulus, App profesional de estimulación cognitiva (Stimulus, Professional cognitive stimulation app)*, <https://stimuluspro.com/> (access 21.03.2020).

⁵⁷ *Programy senioralne (Senior programs)*, Zdrowy-Senior, <https://zdrowy-senior.org/kategoria/programy-senioralne/#> (access 23.08.2020).

⁵⁸ *Atendo*, <http://atendo.es/es/> (access 31.08.2020).

⁵⁹ *Senda Startup*, <http://www.sendastartup.es/es/actualidad/luis-barros-silver-economy> (access 31.08.2020).

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*; <http://www.sendastartup.es/es/actualidad/silver-economy> (access 31.08.2020).

Conclusions

The aforementioned information shows how important education is on each stage of a human's life. Not only due to the ageing workforce and taking place transformations on a labour market in this connection but also changes in other social and economic aspects, as well as health and individual ones. It occurs that lifelong learning affects the quality of life and active ageing and, in consequence, improvement of aspects such as: health condition, financial situation, participation in domestic and social life. As Katarzyna Ferenz writes “[...] acquiring knowledge on every stage of life is an autotelic value. It is a crucial element of the sense of quality of life”.⁶¹

On the other hand, Łukasz Tomczyk rightly emphasises that actually one of the most significant factors having beneficial impact on educational development of elderly people is demographical transformations. Furthermore, the research proves that participation in lifelong learning among elderly people is, in a great extent, conditioned by their prior educational and professional practices, as well as their health or financial situation. It has also been noticed that there is a bigger chance to continue lifelong learning among those who hold a degree.⁶² All the social and economic aspects, which have been mentioned, in the authors' feeling, are the foundation of conditions deciding on activity course and educational possibilities of the elderly.

Undeniably, the problems of bettering the solutions of “silver” education refer to both Poland and Spain. The conducted analysis points out the countries almost immediately answered the idea of “lifelong learning”, the sign of which was the TAUs start-up. Attention was paid to the necessity of creating attractive educational offers encompassing many fields on different levels. On the other hand, both countries basing on the idea of “active old age” aim to the development of this relatively new pillar of education, attempting to adjust it to changing educational needs and professional activity of seniors and their situation on a labour market. From many studies one may conclude that the increase in the quality of life and technological development mean a greater lifespan in such countries. In this way, elderly people may remain in a good physical and mental condition for a longer time and, subsequently, may con-

⁶¹ K. Ferenz, *Edukacja całożyciowa człowieka w świetle zadań rozwojowych (Lifelong human education in the light of developmental tasks)*, in: *Edukacja w przebiegu życia od dzieciństwa do starości (Education in the course of life from childhood to old age)*, eds. M. Kowalski, A. Olczak, Impuls, Kraków 2014, p. 38.

⁶² Ł. Tomczyk, op. cit., pp. 59–60, 64.

tinue their education and actively take part in professional, social or cultural life.

The above characteristics proves that mental capacity of elderly people are unused in a great extent, especially in Poland. This condition remains in contrary to the potential neurobiological, psychological or social capacity of seniors. It occurs that an elderly person is able to achieve intellectual success on a similar level to those from younger age cohorts.⁶³ A lot shows that maintaining intellectual efficiency depends, in fact, on an individual, mostly due to a leading lifestyle and suitable stimulation of brain.

The analysis of literature points out that in the compared countries it is possible to spot the increase in level of education among elderly people. It has probably something to do with the improvement of seniors' situation in the field of employment, participation in social life, health and other conditions being beneficial to active ageing of individuals. In the nearest future it will be essential to watch out for the measure of poverty since it might affect the seniors' participation in the process of their further learning.

The research shows that a range of possibilities in the institutional area is unusually varied and still it is being enriched with new ventures that fit in primary aims of education of elderly people. They apply to improvement of their quality of life, physical, mental and social condition. Participation in classes may help seniors integrate with people of different ages, which reduces their sense of loneliness or social exclusion. Besides, during lectures and tutorials not only mental processes are awakened but new cognitive skills are acquired, as well. Subsequently, it has a positive impact on themselves, their surroundings, families and a society as a whole.⁶⁴

Polish and Spanish institutions are entities of different organisational and legal forms, which Take advantage of different sources of funding.

⁶³ W. Wnuk, *Potencjał osób starszych (The potential of the elderly people)*, in: *Wyzwania współczesnej gerontologii (Challenges of modern gerontology)*, eds. P. Błędowski, A. Stogowski, K. Wieczorowska-Tobis, Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Humanistycznych i Dziennikarstwa, Poznań 2013, p. 24, A.M. Kettner, *Zdrowie seniorów jako element wpływający na jakość życia i potencjał intelektualny (Seniors' health as an element influencing the quality of life and intellectual potential)*, in: *UTW przeciw wykluczeniu, dla społeczeństwa wiedzy (TAUs against exclusion, for the knowledge society)*, ed. J. Gulanowski, Wrocław 2012.

⁶⁴ C. Pinilla Rojas, *Adultos mayores y programas universitarios: el envejecimiento activo (Seniors and university programs: active ageing)*, Congreso Internacional de Pedagogía Social, Pedagogía Social y Desarrollo Humano, XXX Seminario Interuniversitario de Pedagogía Social, Sevilla 2017, pp. 260–261, <https://idus.us.es/bitstream/handle/11441/74431/Adultos%20mayores%20y%20programas%20universitarios%20el%20envejecimiento%20activo.pdf;jsessionid=62B2BBA16AD6533719448291FDE9854E> (access 5.02.2020).

The research concludes that public funding is not at all the only material aspect deciding on education of adults in the compared countries. Using the figures of Eurostat from 2015 it is worth mentioning that among the 28 member states financial outlays for education of adults are on average at the level 5% of GDP. Spain spends on this purpose slightly less money (a bit more than 4%) than Poland (a bit more than 5%).⁶⁵ Despite this fact, almost twice as many people in Spain as in our country take up education at the age of 25–64.

It seems that the key role in this area is played by determinants connected with active ageing of individuals, which is health condition of an individual, their material status and previous education. In both countries it is relatively easy to notice the directly proportional relation between using the computer technology and the Internet and a level of education. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of people using the Internet and a decrease in digital skills refers to the eldest age groups in particular.

The review of the literature prompts to recognise that a significant educational role in an information society is played by digital skills. Gaining these skills and their development prevent exclusion in the space of new media and give a chance to deepen reading and self-education in online courses and trainings. As a rule, acquaintance to new technologies prompts safe functioning of seniors in their everyday lives, as well, which makes it easy to satisfy their cognitive, health, living, technical or social needs. Responsible development of intellectual potential of elderly people is, hence, of vital importance in terms of a society and economy. This could be recognised as a civilisation challenge of modern societies and the measure of active ageing in 21st century.

Perhaps the most complex task for European societies is reorientation in the context of perceiving old age by both elderly people themselves and a population in general – in the face of observed demographical transformations. The key issue is to create the right conditions for elderly people so that their potential could be put in good use and could be suitably developed. It is a must to strive for limitation of negative impact of factors such as lack of social and health awareness, which might lead to discrimination and the sense of exclusion. Education is the best, if not the only way to break the moulds.

⁶⁵ *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture. Education: contributing to skills and jobs, The Commission's Contribution to the Leaders' Working Lunch, Gothenburg, 17 November 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/leaders-working-lunch-education_en.pdf (access 1.02.2020).*

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