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## UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE – A PLACE OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVE AGING

### 1. INTRODUCTION

When people retire, they do not cease to be interested in the world surrounding them. Obviously, their priorities and needs change, however they still remain interested in life in all its dimensions. The constantly growing population of older people, especially those aged from 70 to 80, are independent, maintain physical and mental activity, and moreover – an important aspect from the point of view of the current analysis – are willing to participate in various forms of activity. It forces modern western societies to alter not only the perception of their place and role in society but also to change the approach in satisfying their needs.

The answer to the needs of widely understood active aging was the idea of universities of the third age, which arose in the 1970s. The first institution of this type was founded in France in 1973 and operated by the University of Toulouse. Its founder was a professor of law and social sciences – Pierre Vellas. Many years of research and close contact with environments of older people, analyzing their needs, aspirations and interests led him to create the concept of an institution developing interests and skills of this age group. In the implementation of this innovative, for its times, idea, he used his family experiences, thoughts and knowledge about old

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age which he had been accumulating for years<sup>1</sup>. He convinced the authorities of the University of Toulouse to his initiative, who agreed to arrange a meeting with a group of 40 seniors and listen to what they have to say about their needs, as well as to benefit from their experience<sup>2</sup>.

The activity of professor Vellas followed several essential goals:

- the use of the intellectual and administrative potential of universities in educating older adults;
- the use of a group of seniors participating in the activities of institution to carry out research in the field of gerontology;
- enabling intergenerational cultural exchange, overcoming prejudices and fostering the development of mutual empathy<sup>3</sup>.

In a short time over 40 universities of the third age were established in France, and similar institutions were founded also in other European countries. The effect of this increased interest in the activities of U3As and the growing need to share experiences resulted in the establishment in 1975 of an international organization gathering universities of the third age from all over the world (AIUTA). Its aim is promoting the education of the elderly, exchanging knowledge and experiences between universities from different countries, as well as conducting research on adult education<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. AIMS AND MODELS OF U3AS

Basically, universities of the third age in the world adopted two operating models- either the French or the British one. The French model continues the tradition of connecting universities of the third age with academic institutions or other centers of adult education. This coexistence allows to maintain a high level of teaching and research (a similar model was implemented in Belgium, Spain, Italy, Sweden). At present, education in France is addressed to people of all ages. The idea of university for people of all ages contributes to the broadly understood intergenerational exchange, which allows the realization of the objectives set by Pierre Vellas<sup>5</sup>. The British model is based on self-education and self-help of seniors, without the sup-

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<sup>1</sup> R. KONIECZNA-WOŹNIAK, *Uniwersytety Trzeciego wieku w Polsce. Profilaktyczne aspekty edukacji seniorów*, Poznań: Eruditus 2001, pp. 39-47.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aiu3a.com/indexen.html> [accessed on : 24.07.2016].

<sup>3</sup> Raport *Uniwersytety trzeciego wieku jako odpowiedź na potrzeby środowiska osób starszych*, pp. 3-4, [http://www.fnpn.pl/pdf/raport\\_uniwersytet\\_trzeciego\\_wieku.pdf](http://www.fnpn.pl/pdf/raport_uniwersytet_trzeciego_wieku.pdf) [accessed on: 24.07.2016].

<sup>4</sup> <http://aiu3a.com/about-en.html> [accessed on: 23.07.2016].

<sup>5</sup> Raport *Uniwersytety trzeciego wieku jako odpowiedź*.

port of universities. In the UK, the idea of universities has developed since 1981. The British model is also called the Cambridge model, as the main operating principles of the centers have been elaborated by enthusiasts from Cambridge. This model is based on mutual help of the students. Seniors organize all the activities by themselves, using their knowledge and education. There is no division into lecturers and students. Great importance is attached to experimental and group education<sup>6</sup>.

In Poland, there are three types of universities of the third age: those operating within the structures and under the auspices of universities, usually managed by a proxy of the rector; those appointed by associations operating in the field of popular science; other, operating at community centers, libraries, day-care homes, social assistance centers, etc.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Polish Association of Universities of the Third Age, 13% of universities work within university structures, 15% within the framework of local government units, and 65% have a legal form of association or foundation. An important feature differentiating these centers is the number of students – the range varies from a few dozen to more than a thousand people. The “medium” size universities, having from one hundred to five hundred students are the most popular. Smaller institutions constitute 26%, while the larger approximately 13% of the total number of U3As. The largest universities, although few in number, cover a huge number of students, as they are attended by as much as 43% of all students<sup>8</sup>.

Following the mission and objectives of Pierre Vellas, the founder of the first university, Polish U3As aim at:

- promotion of educational initiatives,
- intellectual, mental, social and physical activation of the elderly,
- enlarging the knowledge and skills of seniors,
- facilitating contacts with institutions, such as health care, cultural centers, rehabilitation centers, etc.
- engaging students in activities for the benefit of their environment,
- maintaining social ties and interpersonal communication among seniors.

Polish universities of the third age were inspired by the French model, in which the main emphasis is put on teaching. However, due to the specific socio-cultural conditions, Polish universities of the third age are an example of combining the French and English model, where alongside with teaching activities equivalent

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<sup>6</sup> The U3A Story by Francis Beckett\_web.pdf, file: <http://www.u3a.org.uk/the-u3a-story.html> [accessed on: 23.07.2016].

<sup>7</sup> Zoom na UTW. Raport z badania, *Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych „e”*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 24-25, [http://zoomnautw.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Zoom\\_na\\_UTW\\_RAPORT\\_calosciowy\\_www.pdf](http://zoomnautw.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Zoom_na_UTW_RAPORT_calosciowy_www.pdf) [accessed on: 24.07.2016].

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

objectives can be found, which are not associated with science, such as maintaining social ties, creating favorable conditions for seniors to spend actively their leisure time<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. U3A A PLACE OF PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVITY OF OLDER ADULTS

Universities of the third age are usually treated as educational institutions for older adults, however, they satisfy many more needs<sup>10</sup>. Professor H. Szwarc, the founder of the first University of the Third Age (UTW) in Poland, repeatedly emphasized that for life and well-being it is usually not enough to satisfy only the so-called basic (material) needs, because higher needs, such as the need for knowledge, creativity and beauty are equally important. A need is most often understood as the lack of something considered indispensable, or at least desirable as an element of life or self-realization<sup>11</sup>. If so understood needs fail to be satisfied, there comes tension and frustration resulting from the dysfunction of the life conditions, or your own body. The essence of these needs may be things that we want to purchase, or people with whom we want to be friends. This could be interpersonal relationships, companionship, desired by the individual or expected patterns of behavior<sup>12</sup>.

The needs of older people should not be analyzed in isolation from the needs of other people. As aptly noted by Maria Braun-Gałkowska, old age is a period when opportunities change, not needs. External opportunities, such as physical strength and agility of the senses deteriorate, whereas the range of internal possibilities, such

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<sup>9</sup> Raport *Uniwersytety trzeciego wieku jako odpowiedź*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>10</sup> The most widespread theory showing what needs are, is the theory of A.H. Maslow, who in the years 1967-1970 presented a theory of human motivation, founded on the hierarchy of needs. He mentioned five basic groups of needs organized from the lowest, most primitive, compulsory and dominating ones, to the highest ones. The structure is depicted as follows. 1. Physiological needs- sleep, food, water, air, procreation, etc. 2. Safety needs – need of care, security, order, avoiding pain. 3. Belongingness and love needs – including acceptance, affiliating. 4. Esteem needs – understood as self-respect, and respect from others. 5. Self-actualization needs – which means realizing one's personal potential and talents; it is seeking personal growth and self-fulfillment, seeking and fulfilling the sense of life. Additionally, apart from that hierarchy of needs, called volitional, Maslov enriched his theory with cognitive needs, such as the craving for knowledge and the basic aesthetic need. According to Maslov's theory man fulfills their needs within their lifespan from the most basic to the highest ones. C.S. HALL, G. LINDZEY, J.B. CAMPBELL, *Teorie osobowości: Abraham Maslow: Założenia dotyczące ludzkiej natury: Hierarchia potrzeb*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2006, pp. 436-446.

<sup>11</sup> K. OLECHNICKI, P. ZAŁĘCKI, *Słownik socjologiczny*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Graffiti BC 1997, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

as the inner experience, the ability to maintain distance, prudence and depth of judgment increase<sup>13</sup>. While analyzing active aging of older adults at U3As two levels need to be considered. The first one in accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and the second one including the needs related to health, the social situation and psycho-physical condition. In the case of older people, apart from material needs, securing existence, psychosocial needs deserve to be mentioned. An American gerontologist, Clark Tibbitts proposed an accurate classification of this type of needs: „the need to carry out socially useful activities, „the need to be recognized as part of society, a community and group, and playing specific roles in them, „the need to fill an increased amount of free time in a satisfactory manner, „the need of companionship and socializing, „the need to be recognized as a human being, „the need to create opportunities for self-expression and sense of achievement, „the need for adequate psychical and mental stimulation, „the need to protect health and access to health care, „the need for an established daily routine and for maintaining family relationships, „the need for spiritual satisfaction”<sup>14</sup>.

The needs of the elderly are varied, as it is an internally diversified group when considering health, severity level of the aging process, life and work experiences. In case of the needs of older people special attention is attributed to the need for social utility, acceptance and emotional bond, which, in older age, are identified with the meaning of life. They are also related to the so-called need for adapted existence. Social adjustment or social adaptation is a process of adaptation of individuals or social groups to the conditions of a particular social reality, a customization, which allows the individual to achieve a balance between their own needs and expectations and the expectations set by the outside world<sup>15</sup>. Social gerontology frequently mentions the need for adapted existence, which is the resultant of most needs characteristic of an older person. It is being met when there is a balance between man's life environment and psyche, a sense of well-being. A condition of obtaining such a frame of life is accepting late adulthood as a stage of life, but external and inter-

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<sup>13</sup> M. BRAUN-GAŁKOWSKA, *Nie wszystkie kwiaty zakwitają razem*, Lublin: Towarzystwo Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej Oddział w Lublinie 2015, pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> C. TIBBITTS, *Handbook of Social Gerontology. Societal Aspects of Aging*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1960, following A. TARKOWSKI, A. MIERZECKA, J. JASIEWICZ, M. FILICIAK, M. KISIŁOWSKA, A. KLIMCZUK, E. BOJANOWSKA, *Taksonomia funkcjonalnych kompetencji cyfrowych oraz metodologia pomiaru poziomu funkcjonalnych kompetencji cyfrowych osób z pokolenia 50+*, Raport Stowarzyszenia „Miasta w Internecie”, Warszawa 2015, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> K. OLECHNICKI, P. ZAŁĘCKI, *Słownik socjologiczny*, p. 14.

nal self-activity, rewarding contacts with other people, the desire to leave behind good memories, a trace are equally important. Activity plays an essential role as it is a condition for fulfilling most of the needs. Older adults, deprived of activity, become emotionally and socially poor<sup>16</sup>.

Activity conditions the satisfaction of all human needs, whether biological, social or cultural. Many types of activity and numerous divisions can be found in literature. The tripartite model of activity has become very popular, there activity takes the form of: formal activity, understood as participation in various social associations, in politics, in works for the local community, volunteering, etc.; informal activity, based on contacts with family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances; solitary activity, embracing watching TV, reading, pursuing one's interests, hobbies<sup>17</sup>. Aleksander Kaminski, when analyzing the issue of active aging refers to two areas: the first is related to performing appreciated and useful work, the second is associated with meeting one's interests. In the first range of activity Kaminski includes: continuation of professional employment with reduced hours and positions tailored to the specific capabilities of an elderly person; gainful employment not in one's profession, but in a reserve profession previously learned; activity on the border between work and rest, allowing to pursue one's own interests and make money at the same time; social activity associated with playing specific social roles; family activity, including caring and service<sup>18</sup>. In the second field of activity Kaminski includes: reading, listening to the radio and watching television; participation in readings, lectures; sport; touring and tourism; activity clubs, artistic, entertainment and mental activity<sup>19</sup>.

Learning remains one of the basic missions on U3As, it results among others from the fact, that in the period of late adulthood it becomes a constant and necessary process, which crucially influences the quality of life, because it stimulates not only to mental activity but also to physical, social and spiritual ones<sup>20</sup>. Learning allows older adults to understand and interpret the transformation of social reality, its speed and degree<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> W. WNUK, *Postawa wobec własnego życia*, [http://www.utwstrzelin.pl/?page\\_id=60](http://www.utwstrzelin.pl/?page_id=60) [accessed on: 18.01.2017].

<sup>17</sup>B. SZATUR-JAWORSKA, P. BŁĘDOWSKI, M. DZIĘGIELEWSKA, *Podstawy gerontologii społecznej*, Warszawa: Aspra-JR 2006, p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> A. KAMIŃSKI, *Studia i szkice pedagogiczne*, Warszawa: PWN, pp. 259-365.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> A. FABIŚ, *Aktywność w starości*, [in:] A. FABIŚ, J.K. WAWRZYŃIAK, A. CHABIOR (eds.), *Ludzka starość*, Kraków: Impuls 2015, p. 178.

<sup>21</sup> E. SKIBIŃSKA, *Proces kształcenia seniorów*, [in:] A. FABIŚ (ed.), *Aktywność społeczna, kulturalna i oświatowa seniorów*, „Biblioteka Gerontologii Społecznej” (WSA, Bielsko-Biała), 2008, vol. 1, p. 99.

In the context of the changes that have taken place in Poland in the late 1990s, and the changes in civilization and technology which we have been continually subject to as a society, E. Skibińska proposes to adopt three global goals of older adults education. First of all, the generation of contemporary 60-years-old, who underwent the process of political and professional socialization in a totalitarian system, are now facing the need to learn new rules of conduct resulting from the democratic principles of social functioning and representative system of government. This generation is experiencing the changes in information technology in a particular way, as they revolutionize the range and quality of social interaction. Such a state of affairs is for many older people, including U3A students, an experience not only difficult, but almost impossible to accept. According to Skibińska, teaching seniors to understand the world and to afresh its interpretation seems to be a priority<sup>22</sup>. Neglecting education in this area can lead to social exclusion of this social group.

Still another global aim of older adults education, resulting from the modified expectations society has towards the elderly, is older adult education under the assumptions of the competence theory, where competence is defined through the category of responsibility and self-reliance<sup>23</sup>. Demographic changes and the resulting socio-economic consequences arose the interest in the resources of the social and intellectual capital of the elderly, seeing in them productivity opportunities of this age group, previously overlooked<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, seniors themselves started to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p.99.

<sup>23</sup> According to the theory of competence older people are responsible for acquiring skills which allow them to overcome difficulties and cope with life using their own knowledge and experience. This theory also assumes, that older adults are responsible for performing social roles attributed to that period of life. S. STEUDEN, *Psychologia starzenia się i starości*, Warszawa: PWN 2014, p. 89. In the competence model of aging the responsibility of the elderly for themselves is combined with their abilities to cope with life difficulties, which skills are based on their previous life experiences and knowledge acquired. J. HALICKI, *Zastosowanie teorii kompetencyjnej w edukacji osób starszych*, „Edukacja Dorosłych”, 1997, № 2, pp. 35-47.

<sup>24</sup> Social productivity is defined, inter alia, as „any activity that produces foods and services, regardless of whether it is paid or not, including such activities as housework, taking care of children, volunteer work, helping friends and family. P. SZUKALSKI, *Aktywność zawodowa*, [in:] P. BŁĘDOWSKI, M. MOSSAKOWSKA, A. WIĘCEK (eds.), *Aspekty medyczne, psychologiczne, socjologiczne i ekonomiczne starzenia się ludzi w Polsce (PolSenior)*, Poznań: Termedia Wydawnictwa Medyczne 2006, p. 407. Using this definition of social productivity a catalogue of forms of activity can be created, which can include, among others: engagement in the work of public benefit organizations, participation in U3As activities, membership in councils and clubs of seniors, membership in local communities, (including those working with churches and religious associations), professional organizations, undertaking self-help activities, membership in socio-cultural associations. M. ADAMCZYK, *Proces starzenia się populacji szansą na wzmocnienie działalności wolontarystycznej i prywatnych przepływów międzypokoleniowych w społeczeństwie polskim*, „Studia Sociologica”, 2014, № 2, p. 45.

articulate their needs more decisively. The need to be useful<sup>25</sup> not only within the family, but also in one's environment, has become more visible. The global aim of education in this context is undertaking educational activities within this group with the assumption of shaping attitudes of taking responsibility for oneself and one's future<sup>26</sup>.

The third global goal of education is related to the specificity of educating seniors and to practical training. In Polish universities of the third age, as compared to English or German institutions, it can be noted that the practical use of the knowledge acquired is neglected. The formula of English U3A assumes the practical use of the knowledge gained by students in largely developed forms of voluntary activities, whereas the German formula promotes the ability of dealing with everyday life problems. Skibińska postulates „learning to solve everyday life problems through the use of the knowledge acquired and its practical application”<sup>27</sup>.

The above considerations show, that treating U3As only as a place only devoted to educational activities of seniors is much limited. The modern universities of the third age have considerably broadened their range of activity and thus their function. For example, the previously mentioned Lublin University of the Third Age has in its permanent educational offer three general lectures per week, and approximately 50 subject groups, or interest groups. The educational offer of the Lublin U3A embraces 25 general lectures per academic year, a similar number of lectures devoted to science, nature and health. The interest groups are realized in 7 thematic groups and include:

- Educational groups: art education, museum group, history of art, culture education.
- Educational workshop groups: literature, gardening and psychological workshops.
- Physical activity groups: gymnastics, tai chi, yoga.
- Foreign language courses: English, German, French, Italian.
- Dance groups: Movement with Music, „Flow Dancing Ensemble”, Dancing Group.

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<sup>25</sup> In research books there is a thesis, saying that there is some kind of consensus towards the view, that the basic needs of older people are no different from those characteristic of every individual. The crucial thing is, that it is not possible to analyze the needs of older people in isolation from society at large and other groups. M. Susłowska observes, that the needs of this age group do not differ significantly from those present in other phases of life, what is different is the level of needs, which varies in the case of young people. As for the elderly, the need for security, understanding and assistance from others come to the first plan. M. SUSŁOWSKA, *Psychologiczne problemy człowieka starego*, [in:] *Encyklopedia seniora*, Warszawa: WP 1986, p. 329.

<sup>26</sup> E. SKIBIŃSKA, *Proces kształcenia seniorów*, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

- Workshop groups: IT, art.
- Swimming group: swimming, acqua aerobics<sup>28</sup>.

Analyzing U3As as environments fostering active aging we need to refer to the theory of cultural participation and social and educational animation, because, as it can be seen from the educational offer of the Lublin U3A quoted above, they have a much wider social and cultural context. As observed by M. Stanowska „the university of the third age is a meeting place of people for whom the idea of life-long learning is an indicator of the activities undertaken. It is an environment of people, whose experience, life wisdom and education stimulate unique, individual educational needs. The educational activities of the Lublin U3A do not follow the traditional scheme of university dissemination of scientific knowledge, but they certainly belong to the universe of activities attractive for that period of life and they are man friendly. It is a general truth, that it is inspiration that performs a primarily role in man’s life, education and development”<sup>29</sup>.

Taking Joseph Kargul’s definition of dissemination of culture understood as “intentionally organized interaction aiming at shaping an developing cultural needs and interests, as well as at stimulating and supporting individuals and small social groups to develop and sublime their cultural activities (receptive, co-creative and creative, entertainment and recreation)”<sup>30</sup>, it is assumed that universities of the third age are places promoting dissemination of culture. This is quite obvious, yet it points to a very important aspect of social activation, and proves that the activities of universities of the third age go beyond the frames of lifelong learning. It is interesting to refer to the views of J. Żebrowski, who indicates that animation implies three closely interconnected processes:

1. The discovery process – it implies creating conditions which would encourage the group and the entire unit to disclose their problems, doubts, desires (...);
2. The process of forming relationships – which implies contacts between people (...), those relations are based on mutual understanding and agreement as well as conflict and negation;
3. The creativity process- which is expressed by connecting individuals and groups from their environment through expression, initiative, responsibility and creative activity (creation) These processes – discovering, forming rela-

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<sup>28</sup> M. STANOWSKA, *Rola uniwersytetów trzeciego wieku w edukacji osób starszych*, [in:] M.D. ADAMCZYK (ed.), *Starość między tradycją a współczesnością*, Kraków: Impuls, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> J. KARGUL, *Od upowszechniania kultury do animacji kulturalnej*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 1996, p. 7.

tionships, creativity (creation) – are interconnected and characterize the most important features of animation<sup>31</sup>.

By indicating the role of universities of the third age in animating the activity of older adults connects the work of these institutions to the concept of active aging.

#### 4. THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVE AGING

In response to the dictates of the ubiquitous cult of youth and modern technology, the concept of active aging, shaping a new image of an older adult has developed. In the times when the number of older people is growing faster than ever, and society rejects old age and weakness, following blindly the cult of youth and new technologies, the concept seeks to redefine and introduce to the sphere of politics, economy, and social discourse a new approach to the process of aging and to old age. According to the definition proposed by WHO, active aging is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age<sup>32</sup>, which means keeping physically fit and be having the opportunity to work as long as possible, as well as participating actively in the social, economic, cultural and civil life. This approach goes beyond the previously determined two main platforms of active aging, such as: professional work and physical activity. The concept of active aging refers to the concept of activity to all spheres of life: social, cultural, spiritual, civic, economic. Taking the holistic approach proposed by WHO it is assumed, that older adults should participate in the socio-economic life in accordance with their capabilities, which means that they should:

- learn lifelong;
- work longer;
- retire gradually and when older;
- be active retirees, undertake actions to maintain good health and physical shape;
- be active retirees, fulfill family obligations and take care of children;
- be active retirees, get engaged into the life of the local community and voluntary work;
- be active retirees, who rest actively: undertake sport activities, tourism, pursue their own passions<sup>33</sup>. Active aging then is combined with the needs of

<sup>31</sup> J. ŻEBROWSKI, *Zawód i osobowość animatorów kultury*, Gdańsk: Wojewódzki Ośrodek Kultury 1987, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> World Health Organization, *Active ageing: a policy framework*, Geneva 2002, [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO\\_NMH\\_NPH\\_02.8.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf) [accessed on: 5.12.2016].

<sup>33</sup> Ł. JUREK, „Aktywne starzenie się” jako paradygmat w polityce społecznej, „Polityka Społeczna”, 2012, № 3, p. 9.

personal development, self-esteem, belonging, realizing life plans, adjusting to the changing environmental conditions, social expectations, one's abilities. As observed by S. Steuden the type of activity undertaken by older people depends not only on personal preference, state of health or abilities, but it simultaneously reflects the social context and the expectations of the environment in which the elderly person lives<sup>34</sup>. The development of active aging is determined to the same degree by external and internal factors. Internal factors shape mainly the personality of the older adult and their lifestyle. The external factors, determining the environmental conditions in which older people live are, inter alia:

- economic factors (for example the amount of pension benefits, financial incentives to remain professionally active longer),
- social factors (for example the culturally shaped, accepted in society stereotype of the elderly and the aging process, access to education, support networks for the elderly- mostly lonely),
- physical environment (including infrastructure adapted to the needs of the elderly, physically disabled),
- health services (for example the availability of prevention programs, health care for the elderly, including long-term psychological support)<sup>35</sup>.

Education plays an exceptional role in the concept of active aging. It performs four basic functions: proper, substitute social and psychotherapeutic. The proper function of education means constant updating and complementing the knowledge and skills of adults, especially in areas not covered by the school curriculum and essential in the proper fulfillment of their obligations and performance of professional and social roles. The substitute function implies giving adults such information and the development of such skills which they did not acquire during school education. The acquisition of new knowledge and its updating, acquisition and development of new skills have impact on maintaining the attractiveness of the elderly in the labor market, which limits the range of economic and social exclusion of this group. Acquiring education by the elderly also serves an important social function.

Participation in programs and educational activities addressed to older people gives them a sense of inclusion and helps to establish new and maintain existing social ties. Education helps to increase awareness and knowledge about health, gain skills regarding everyday use of modern technology (e.g. the internet, e-banking),

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<sup>34</sup> S. STEUDEN, *Psychologia starzenia się i starości*.

<sup>35</sup> A. RICHERT-KAŻMIERSKA, M. FORKIEWICZ, *Kształcenie osób starszych w koncepcji aktywnego starzenia się*, 2012, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274735751\\_Kształcenie\\_osob\\_starzych\\_w\\_koncepcji\\_aktywnego\\_starzenia\\_sie](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274735751_Kształcenie_osob_starzych_w_koncepcji_aktywnego_starzenia_sie) [accessed on: 11.11.2016].

which affects preserving the autonomy and independence. What is more, educational activity of older people affects the assessment of this group in the environment. It allows to break the stereotypical image of an elderly person: dependent, infirm, socially isolated and isolating themselves. Participation in educational programs and undertakings carries also a psychotherapeutic value for older adults. It allows them to maintain intellectual performance, which in turn affects the delay of the bio-psycho-social processes of aging. In addition, it gives the sense of social inclusion and counteracts depression, which older people often are susceptible to as a result of social alienation<sup>36</sup>.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Successful aging is determined by a number of factors, which are, however, basically related to man's developmental abilities. Those abilities depend on numerous factors, such as genes, health, the socio-economic situation, life experience, and also on whether they can and still want to be active. The active approach to life during middle and late adulthood depends, to a large extent, on lifestyle and taking care about one's health early, and what is more, it is influenced by the habits shaped over the years and the financial resources possessed<sup>37</sup>. The institutions that specifically supports active and successful aging are universities of the third age, which perform a variety of functions, and through its activities redefine the place of an older adult in society. Its basic functions are: the integrating function, allowing older people to establish new, valuable contacts, both on an intra generational, as well as intergenerational level; educative function; compensative and adaptive function, the first one allows to compensate the deficiencies in the area of social life, the second permits older people to adapt in a better way to the new social and family situation; the informative function, allowing older people to gain the necessary, current information concerning social and economic life; health prevention function, realized by a number of theoretical and practical lesson promoting healthy lifestyle; opinion-forming function, participation in the activities and projects of the U3A presents to older people a positive image of late adulthood, breaking the negative stereotypes about this stage of life<sup>38</sup>; in institutions such as U3As, or Seniors Clubs, older adults can

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>37</sup> World Health Organization, *Active ageing: a policy framework*, Geneva 2002, p. 19, [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO\\_NMH\\_NPH\\_02.8.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf) [accessed on: 5.07.2016].

<sup>38</sup> B. SZATUR-JAWORSKA, P. BŁĘDOWSKI, M. DZIĘGIELEWSKA, *Podstawy gerontologii społecznej*, p. 164-165; A. CHABIOR, *Kluby seniora miejscem uczestnictwa kulturalnego i animacji społeczno-kulturalnej*, [in:] Z. SZAROTA (ed.), *Aktywizacja, rozwój, integracja. Ku niezależnej starości*, Kraków: Krakowskie Towarzystwo Edukacyjne – Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM 2011, pp. 82-83.

realize their interests, develop their hobbies and be in the circle of things and people they know and understand, and who profess similar values and have similar needs and priorities<sup>39</sup>. The source analysis of the preliminary surveys for candidates to the Lublin U3A (LUTW) for 2010 shows, that enlarging the knowledge possessed (especially in the field of psychology, medicine, culture, art), is only one of the reasons of applying to the U3A. The remaining important reasons are: contact with other people, developing one's interests and passions, active participation in the current cultural life, the possibility to care about physical fitness, making new friends<sup>40</sup>. This means that U3As exist in the awareness of seniors, that is the group of people to which they address their offer, as a place not only of educational activation, but also social and life activation. These are places, which recognize as their key priorities activating older people, making them simultaneously self-sufficient and self-reliant in life. This institution is an important area of activating seniors and the variety of ongoing activities in the field of education, culture, creative and social activity confirms the fact, that a U3A is a place of active aging.

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<sup>39</sup> A. FABIŚ, *Aktywność w starości*, p. 216.

<sup>40</sup> M. STANOWSKA, *Rola uniwersytetów trzeciego wieku w edukacji osób starszych*, p. 54.

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## UNIwersytet TRZECIEGO WIEKU MIEJSCEM UCZESTNICTWA SPOŁECZNEGO I AKTYWNOŚCI OSÓB STARSZYCH

### Streszczenie

Znaczenie uniwersytetów trzeciego wieku w życiu osób starszych wyznaczone jest przez pola zainteresowań i aktywności, jakie im oferują. UTW są ważnymi i cennymi obszarami aktywizacji i animacji społeczno-kulturowej osób starszych. Różnorodność realizowanych przez UTW działań m.in. z obszaru edukacji, kultury, profilaktyki zdrowotnej doskonale podkreśla fakt, że należą one do placó-

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wek, które obejmują zakresem swych działań nie tylko kształcenie, ale również wsparcie społeczne, uczestnictwo społeczne czy animację społeczno-kulturalną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uniwersytety trzeciego wieku; obszary aktywności osób starszych; aktywne starzenie się.

UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE –  
A PLACE OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVE AGING

S u m m a r y

The importance of universities of the third age in the lives of older people is determined by the fields of interest and activities they are offered there. U3As constitute essential and valuable areas of activation and socio-cultural animation of the elderly. The variety of activities realized by U3As, among others from the area of education, culture, and health prevention, perfectly underlines the fact that they are institutions, which include in the scope of their activities not only education, but also social support, social participation and socio-cultural animation.

**Key words:** universities of the third age; areas of activity of older people; active aging.