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# Activation of the elderly in the local environment through participation in classes in the Inter-Neighbourhood Senior Activity Centres

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## Abstract

The article presents the results of research on the activation of the elderly in the Inter-Community Centers of Senior Activity. The aim of the study was to find out the opinion of seniors regarding their activation by participating in classes organized by Inter-District Senior Activity Centers. The research used the diagnostic survey method using the author's questionnaire. The research shows that seniors participate in educational classes learning computer skills and foreign languages as well as participate in lectures and lectures. Elderly people take an active part in sports activities and also develop their interests by participating in artistic activities. They actively participate in culture and sightseeing trips as well as play party and board games. However, the surveyed people postulate to increase the availability and diversity of the offer and adapt classes to the various needs of people with specific problems that characterize the elderly.

## Introduction

Aging is a natural process that is gradually developing, as a result of which, on the one hand, the vital functions of the body progressively weaken, and on the other hand, new adaptive mechanisms are created. However, when considering aging as a developmental process, it should be noted that it is dynamic and can be considered on both biological, psychological and social levels (Rembowski, 1984, pp. 21–46; Kowalewski & Szukalski, 2006, pp. 152–153).

Old age is a natural and unavoidable stage of life in which there are significant changes in the physical, mental and social sphere of human functioning. Changes that

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indicate the aging process occur at different periods of life. The basic task of an elderly person is to adapt to changing living conditions and modify them to their own needs that change with age. Maintaining high physical, mental and social activity is one of the factors predicting longer life expectancy, enables the elderly to maintain autonomy and independence, and thus contributes to improving their quality of life (Rynkowska, 2016, pp. 91–92; Nowicka, 2006, pp. 20–22; Bień, 2006, pp.42–46).

Activity is important at every stage of human life. In the case of old age, it is particularly important because it significantly affects human satisfaction and condition. Activity is a synonym of life, constant effort adapted to the capabilities of a given person (Dyczewski, 1994, p. 33). It is a condition of proper development, enables creative and harmonious living, is the basis for the treatment of many diseases, delays the aging process.

The activity of the senior includes many different factors. These include psycho-physical elements, as well as social and cultural conditions, changes taking place in the family and social relations, the disappearance of intergenerational ties and the disintegration of local, international or global communities (Rynkowska, 2016, p. 92; Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski, Dzięgielewska, 2006, pp. 160–164).

Various forms of activity accompany people throughout their lives. Much attention is paid to the activity and activation of the elderly by including them in social life to combat social and digital isolation.

Activity is the basic human need and is a prerequisite for proper development, enabling a creative and harmonious lifestyle, and is the basis for the treatment of many diseases and is a factor delaying the aging process. It is such an area of activity that enables a person to express himself in an accessible and very individual form, defined by his predispositions, preferences, and habits (Kozaczuk, 1999, p. 25).

Activities include daily activities that are performed at home, at work, on the street, e.g. cleaning, shopping, preparing a meal. It can also be said that activity is, in other words, meeting biological and social needs. Activity is important at every stage of human life, but in the case of the elderly, it determines uniquely the quality, satisfaction, and condition of the senior life (Błaszczuk, Rynkowska 2016, pp. 12–28).

Activation “is a process which goal is to increase general and selective activity. General activation is generally understood as mobilizing the whole organism, while selective (targeted) activity means increasing the level of physical, mental, creative, sexual, professional, educational, religious activity” (Mielczarek, 2016, pp. 149–150).

The purpose of activating the elderly is:

- maintaining physical and health fitness: gymnastics, walking, exercises, rehabilitation,
- developing interests,
- stimulating the imagination, creative thinking, and action,
- learning to live in a group and in a local environment,

- shaping positive personality traits, everyday culture, ability to make contact with peers, neighbors, etc.,
- maintaining (or stimulating) faith in the meaning of life,
- independence, developing resourcefulness using various activities related to personal hygiene and developing hygienic habits (Leszczyńska-Rejchert 2010, pp. 13–26).

Activating seniors includes various forms of activity, including dissemination of education through Universities of the Third Age, computer and language courses, and by undertaking activities to physically improve seniors, as well as voluntary activities for the benefit of the local environment and promoting senior initiatives as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle (Kaczmarczyk & Trafiałek 2007, pp. 116–118).

## Method

The aim of the research was to learn the opinions of the elderly regarding their activation through participation in activities organized at Inter-Neighbourhood Senior Activity Centres.

The research used the Diagnostic survey method with the author's questionnaire, which included open and closed questions. The leading research questions were: "What classes do you attend for seniors?", "Why do you attend classes for seniors?", "Why do you still study?", "What do you do for you?" "Are the classes organized for seniors?", "Are you satisfied with participating in these classes?". The surveyed seniors had the opportunity to make multiple answers and answer open-ended questions. 107 women aged 59–75 years were examined 90% of women are participants of the Inter-Community Centers of Senior Activity, therefore men did not participate in the study. The research was carried out in Lesser Poland in the urban environment in 2017–2018.

## Results

Activation of the elderly in the local environment takes place through various forms of activity undertaken by the elderly in the environment of their residence. These are usually clubs for seniors or Universities of the Third Age. The conducted research allowed us to learn about the activity of the elderly attending various classes organized by inter-neighborhood senior activity centers. The obtained research results are included in the following table summarizes and presented in a graphic form.

Table 1. Activation of seniors through education

| Answer             | Respondents |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Categories         | N = 107     |
| Computer workshops | L           |
|                    | 19          |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| English                                   | 26 |
| Lectures on health                        | 39 |
| Lectures/Meetings with interesting people | 51 |

Source: Own research

Activation of seniors takes place through their participation in various educational activities. They participate in computer workshops (17.8%), learn English (over 24%) and also participate in various health-related lectures (over 36%) and lectures/meetings with interesting people (47.7%).

Scientific and economic development, as well as modern technologies and modern telecommunications, mean that everyone should continue to supplement their knowledge. Great demand in this area is visible in the elderly, who willingly take part in various classes and thus improve their skills and develop their interests. By taking part in computer classes, they will learn about the possibilities offered to them by the knowledge of how to use the computer, the Internet, messengers that can be used in contact with other people, with children or grandchildren, which is why classes dedicated to Gadu-Gadu and Skype messengers are very popular in computer classes as well as familiarizing with various places virtually (e.g. a museum) through the Internet.

Seniors are eager to learn languages and phrases that can be useful to them in everyday life and when traveling abroad. English phrases also appear in movies and are often translated into their native language. Seniors also willingly participate in lectures and speeches on various topics, often related to health or proper nutrition, etc.

Table 2. Activation of seniors through sporting activities

| Answer                                     | Respondents |
|--|-------------|
| Categories                                 | N = 107     |
|  | L           |
| Fitness                                    | 27          |
| Swimming pool                              | 39          |
| Improvement classes with a psychotherapist | 28          |
| Dancing                                    | 45          |
| Nordic walking                             | 38          |

Source: Own research

Sports activities play an important role in activating the elderly. The multitude of proposed forms of activity encourages seniors to actively participate in them. Over 43% of seniors participate in dance classes, 36.4% of respondents attend the swimming pool and 35.5% participate in Nordic walking, and 25% of respondents also take part in fitness classes and improvement classes with a physiotherapist.

Physical activity has a positive effect on health, reduces the formation of diseases, strengthens the immune system. Also, it helps maintain healthy body weight. During physical activity, the calorie-burning rate increases, which reduces body fat and permanently maintains a healthy weight. Seniors by undertaking physical activity will improve their well-being and physical condition and strengthen muscle work, as well as improve brain work and the ability to remember. Such activity is also a good way to manage the free time of a senior who can spend time actively with the loved ones. Systematic exercises improve the appearance and mobility, which will have a positive effect on the self-confidence and self-esteem of the senior.

Table 3. Activation of seniors through artistic activities

|            |                        |
|------------|------------------------|
| Answer     | Respondents<br>N = 107 |
| Categories | L                      |
| De coupage | 17                     |

Source: Own research

Artistic activities are a good form of activating seniors who take part in them (15.9%). Unfortunately, the costs associated with the preparation of materials limit access to this form of activity.

Artistic activities enable seniors to develop their artistic sensitivity, influence the development of imagination, thinking ability, prediction and also allow them to express themselves and maintain good manual skills.

Seniors also learn about the aesthetic values of art, implement their creativity and have the opportunity to express their emotional states. Artistic activities also help develop the creative abilities of seniors and their fantasies, which allows them to learn new solutions, implement new ideas and build their associations. These activities also provide the right dose of activity and a feeling of spending free time in a good and nice way.

Table 4. Activation of seniors through tourism

| Answer                          | Respondents |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Categories                      | N = 107     |
|                                 | L           |
| Integration trips               | 35          |
| Sightseeing trips               | 49          |
| Campfire/campfire meeting trips | 57          |

Source: Own research

Activation of seniors through their participation in various types of trips and meetings around the campfire is important. Over 32% of respondents on integration trips, and almost 46% on sightseeing trips. Over 53% of respondents participate in bonfire trips or bonfire meetings.

Participation of seniors in tourist trips brings them many benefits related to their well-being because they feel relief and renewal, as well as improvement of physical and emotional health and they also have the opportunity to engage in social interactions. They also broaden the horizons of thinking, build new relationships with participants of trips, develop their independence and break social isolation. The self-confidence of seniors and the ability to change their minds increases, they have the opportunity to move away from everyday routine and the reflection opportunity. These trips also enable learning of new content and exploring new places.

Table 5. Activation of seniors through the board and social games

| Answer     | Respondents |
|------------|-------------|
| Categories | N = 107     |
|            | L           |
| Scrabble   | 32          |
| Chess      | 37          |
| Checkers   | 29          |
| Bridge     | 48          |
| Rummy      | 41          |

Source: Own research

Board and social games are a good opportunity to activate seniors. Almost 45% of respondents play bridge and 38.3% play rummy. While 34.6% play chess, 29.9% play scrabble, and 27.1% of respondents play checkers.

Seniors experience many benefits through active participation in board and social games. Games strongly engage the participants, improve concentration abilities, develop logical thinking and the ability of prediction. They also develop the ability to think quickly and their perceptiveness, which is irreplaceable and necessary for seniors. Thanks to them, the risk of diseases related to memory impairment is reduced. They also have a positive effect on the imagination and creative thinking of the seniors. They teach healthy competition and respect for the game partner, as well as overcoming obstacles and various challenges. Thanks to games, seniors learn how to deal with losing. It will help them in the awareness that each game teaches: a better understanding of the rules of the game, the choice of better tactics of the game or it gives the awareness that the senior has taken the challenge and faced his strength. Thanks to games, seniors learn that winning is not always important, but having fun and spending time together is. The experience and skills acquired during board games will help seniors in other social situations.

Table 6. Activation of seniors through participation in culture

| Answer               | Respondents |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Categories           | N = 107     |
| Going to the cinema  | L           |
| Going to the theatre | 25          |
| Going to the museum  | 13          |
|                      | 12          |

Source: Own research

Participation in culture creates opportunities for activating seniors. Over 23% of respondents go to the cinema, over 12% go to the theatre and over 11% of seniors go to the museum.

Participation in culture is an excellent form of activating the elderly because it allows them to expand their horizons, stimulate the curiosity of the world, stimulate imagination and creativity, and stimulate sensitivity so that seniors can develop in new directions. Participation in culture is an opportunity for unique experiences for seniors. By participating in culture, they can develop their knowledge, enrich their language, expand their interests, as well as improve their mood and have a good time.

Table 7. Learning methods for seniors

| Answer  | Respondents |
|---|-------------|
| Categories                                      | N = 107     |
|   | L           |
| Repetition                                      | 58          |
| Making notes                                    | 54          |
| Through exercises                               | 45          |
| Making attempts                                 | 31          |
| Asking the lecturer questions                   | 11          |
| Asking the lecturer to repeat                   | 9           |
| Highlighting important information using colors | 15          |
| Through trials and mistakes                     | 21          |

Source: Own research

Seniors' statements show that they present different ways of learning. 54.2% repeat new content, 50.5% make notes, 42.1% learn through exercises, 29% learn through trying. Seniors also learn through trials and mistakes (19.6%), asking the lecturer questions (10.25%), highlighting important information using colors (14%) and asking the lecturer to repeat the incomprehensible content.

Seniors learn by different methods, it can be learning through experience, trials, and mistakes, or solving problems or through repetition, consolidation, writing or obtaining information from others. Learning itself is a treasured value for them, that's why they want to learn and often do it systematically and accurately.

Table 8. Motives for attending activation classes for seniors

| Answer  | Respondents |
|---|-------------|
| Categories                                    | N = 107     |
|   | L           |
| To use free time                              | 64          |
| To maintain the physical and mental condition | 37          |
| To learn how to use a computer                | 10          |
| To learn a new language                       | 16          |
| To be with others                             | 38          |
| To develop own skills                         | 47          |
| To meet interesting people                    | 68          |



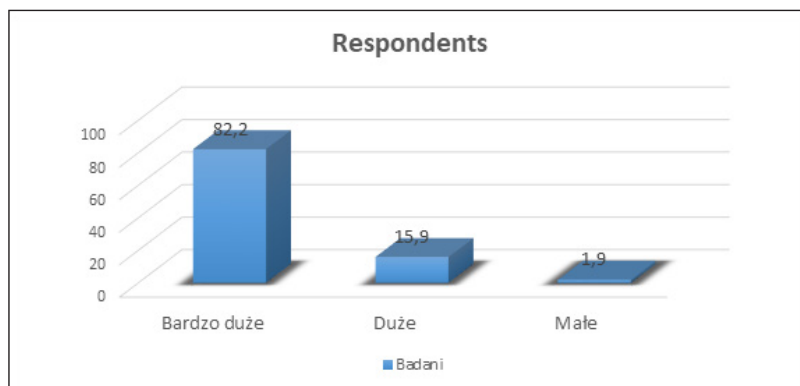
|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| To spend time in an interesting way | 73 |
| Not to feel lonely                  | 47 |

Source: Own research

The motives for seniors attending activating classes are different. Many seniors use classes to spend time in an interesting way (68.2%), to meet interesting people (63.6%), to use their free time (59.8%), to develop own skills and not to be lonely (43.9%) as well as to spend time with other people (35.5%), to maintain physical and mental condition (34.6%), to learn a new language (15%) and to learn how to use a computer (9.3%).

In the elderly, the main role in the educational process is played by internal motivation, which source is their curiosity about the world, interests or different needs. M. Knowles distinguishes four main factors, and the first factor is success – adults want to achieve a success in learning, the next factor is will – seniors want to have a sense that they are learning something valuable, thirdly value – adults want to be convinced that they are learning something valuable, and the last fourth factor is pleasure – seniors expect to learn to be a source of satisfaction for them (Knowles, Holton & Swanson 2009, pp. 23–42).

Chart 1. Importance of activating activities for seniors

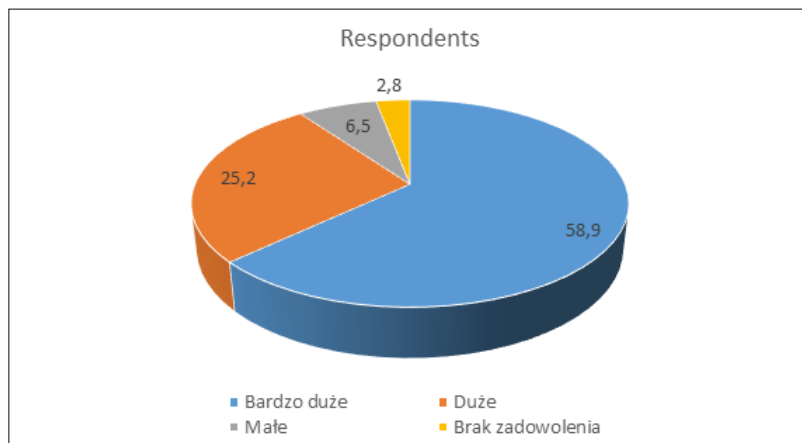


The importance of activation activities for seniors is very large (82.2%), large (15.9%) and small (1.9%).

Activation of seniors is especially important for every community because every senior wants to be independent and active as long as possible and relish and enjoy life to the fullest. Numerous studies show that the longer an elderly person is professionally or socially active and realizes his interests, the more satisfied and happy he is. He feels fulfilled and willingly undertakes and establishes relationships with others, is full

of optimism and faith in a better tomorrow. Seniors feel needed, have something to do and complain less about various health ailments.

Chart 2. Satisfaction of seniors with participation in activation activities



Over half of the seniors (58.9%) show great satisfaction with their participation in activation activities and 25.2% show a good level of satisfaction. Little satisfaction occurred in 6.5% of respondents, and 2.8% were dissatisfied (three people).

## Conclusions

The respondents participated in numerous classes proposed by the Inter-Community Centers of

Senior activity. Seniors most often participate in lectures and meetings with interesting people (47,7%) and last often in computer workshops (17,8%). In sports activities, the elderly most often participate in dance classes (42,7%) and the least willingly in Fitness classes (25,2%). Elderly people participate most often in meetings around the campfire (53,3%) and the least numerous in integration trips (32,7%). Playing bridge is very popular for seniors (44,9%) and checkers are not popular (27,1%). Going to the cinema is the most popular (23,4%) and the least are going to the museum (11,2%). The largest group of seniors learns by repetition (54,2%) while the least numerous group (8,4%) asks the teacher to repeat the material. Elderly people most often participate in activities organized by the Inter-Community Centers of Senior Activity to spend time interestingly (68,2%) and the least numerous to learn computer skills (9,3%).

Active participation in classes is very important for seniors. Older people are very happy with these activities.

Seniors expect an increase in the number of centers, and thus in practice accessibility and to a greater extent adapt the offer of facilities to the diverse needs of older people.

Elderly people who are often not completely healthy or physically fit would be eager to participate in physiotherapy classes.

In the field of education to old age, it would be advisable to bring the issues of older people closer to young people in education and upbringing programs and implement effective intergenerational integration. Elderly people could also provide advice and assistance.

An important postulate for geragogy would be to encourage older people and more widely people of different ages to help each other.

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