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LIFETIME EDUCATION IN AGING SOCIETY

Summary. The text being presented, is devoted to analyzing determinants of the efficiently functioning society - the society, which on the one hand, is characterized by unfavourable demographical changes, and on the other hand by promoting access to knowledge. The argument was based on the thesis that the agreement between demographically aging society and information challenges of the European future is possible due to lifetime education and common access to knowledge and new technologies. It was observed that they are most efficient and appreciated forms of prophylactics in the fields of ageism and exclusion of the third generation. Social politicians are recommended to concentrate on this kind of prophylactics, however, since the process is long-lasting it should be treated as a priority, a determinant of the quality of life and future civilization.

Key words: demographic old age, lifetime education, elderly people's access to new technologies.

1. Introduction

In the European Union education, continuing education and unlimited access to information are the main principles of civil society based on knowledge. Diffusion and implementation of these standards seem to be crucial - having considered latest civilization challenges: simultaneous growth of demographic old age and economic crisis accompanied by greater demand for social benefits. The issues, which are being diagnosed, point at the necessity of setting new priorities in social policy. Considering practical actions of the state, there is a need for taking up multidirectional ventures, including: extension of citizens' social and professional activity, limiting the excessive exodus of so called *young pensioners* from labour market, reduction of legally guaranteed payments from the Budget, creating mechanisms aiming at increasing workers' commitment, activity and professional competence regardless of their age.

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Analyses presented here are based on a thesis that being faced with demographic transformation and unstable market mechanisms, it is obvious that the risk of discriminating different social and age groups is growing. The most efficient way of limiting that risk is education - lifetime education, gerontological education and unrestricted access of all age groups to new information technologies.

2. Education in aging society

In light of accessible statistical analyses and research results, the next decade in all the European Union will bring a significant growth of population over sixty, as well as a distinct decrease in the group of people under 25 [Szweda-Lewandowska, 2006; *Rocznik Demograficzny*, 2008; Trafiałek, 2009]. The expected loss of generations balance will call for the change of the old age security model. The responsibility for the course of this life phase will be moved from the society, the state and local governments to an individual. The importance of education for and about the old age will grow alongside with widely understood interest in social policy issues concerning population of the elderly. Favourable conditions are created by the EU priorities, as well as international standards, which connect continuing education with the appropriate, satisfying functioning in the labour market.

In the light of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report - *Education at a Glance 2008* – the best investment for the future is good education, because international research proves that level of employment increases simultaneously with the level of education and professional creativity [Education, 2008]. Similarly in Poland, the experience of previous decade justifies the opinion that in the free market educated people, who are open to technical innovations, interested in broadening their minds and verifying their knowledge, skills and qualifications have much better lives than their uneducated peers. They find it much easier to move around labour market, they are much eager to invest their money in insurance, health and continual development, they are active both physically and intellectually for a longer time; when retired they remain economically, mentally, organizationally and socially independent. Being mobile, creative and independent these people make a valuable source which is strengthening the importance of generations communication and social cohesion.

Therefore, it can be said that, sooner or later, free market and demographical transformation will naturally add to the significance of individual foresight, independence and gathering capital throughout one's life in case of disability and old age. Education will be very important in the process of spreading and internalizing these relations - education on every level, continuing education, lifetime and gerontological education – education, which in the society based on knowl-

edge, is the main determinant of social status and quality of life. Its unquestionably significant role in the modern world should be widely popularized, since the European Social Fund allocates considerable resources for the purpose.

3. Education of adults and continuing education in the EU

The need for cutting down on social expenses connected with the growth of elderly people's population is more and more often associated with development, reforming and making educational systems accessible. For example, in countries like Japan, Finland, Ireland stability on the labour market is connected with popularizing higher education, because modern economy calls for highly qualified workers [*Education*, 2008]. Longer life expectancy and fitness, regardless of age, together with the mobility of educated people remain equally important, since they facilitate the delay of so called *retirement age*. Education and continuing education in educational policy of the EU are treated as coherent field for supporting social mobility, which by definition belongs to the category of political priorities.

European educational strategies make a pattern – an outline which should be filled with the appropriate content. This process depends on: educational policy of particular countries, respecting the modern management rules, effective actions of all the parties responsible for carrying out national and local social policy. Education, determined by active social policy, is treated as a priority deciding on the appropriate functioning of labour markets. Creating optimal conditions for unrestricted access to education on every stage of life, which means uplifting the quality of human resources is educational systems functioning effectiveness measure appreciated throughout Europe.

Human Capital Operational Program 2007–2013 (PO KL), which is one of ten operational programs approved for implementation within *National Cohesion Strategy (NSS)* and *National Strategy Reference Frames (NSRO)* for 2007–2013 proves that Poland has accepted EU priorities aiming at promoting employment policy, reduction of social exclusion, stimulating territorial cohesion and development of civil society based on knowledge [*Resolution*, 2007].

Continuing education is regarded by the Union as a foundation of the implementation of social and economic cohesion policy. Aspiring for quality, range, access and popularization of this kind of education is often associated with creating efficient employment policy together with putting the EU, national and local development plans into practice [*National Plan*, 2006]. The actual significance of actions aiming at development is described by the following determinants: society level of education, expenditure for education and courses, the quality of education system, the range and the efficiency of continuing education as well as the level of providing access to education for all age groups.

4. Educational activity of the elderly

In the catalogue of standards recognized by international organizations as priority determinants of successful aging and old age, education is the most important item. According to World Health Organization (WHO), autonomy, independence, ability to adapt and activity marking out the quality of life in the old age, are directly associated with the level of education and lifetime educational activity including self-education. To a large degree, education determines one's place in labour market, their income, quality of life, access to commercialized services (medical, diagnostic, cultural, educational, tourist), lifestyle, gerontological prophylactics awareness, and resulting from all the above mentioned education determines: state of health, fitness, social mobility, interest in maintaining and optimization of the status of fully active person.

Contemporary requirement of spreading and raising the rank of continuing education seems to be caused by several determinants. They are the challenges resulting from demographical transformation and the development of European society – growing rate of average lifespan, decreasing birth rate, childlessness, resulting in domination of grown-ups and the elderly in modern societies. The potential of dominating human resources, its adaptive capability, interest in being independent and remaining in labour market, will soon determine social and economic condition of most EU countries.

According to a report called *Courses* (“*Szkolenia*”) recapitulating the research, which was customized by the Foundation of Management and Modern Company Observatory between 2000–2006 – in Poland the interest in all kinds of courses among 50-year-olds and older is steadily growing. In the last six years in the group of people between 50–59 there are twice as many citizens interested in continuing education and among the people over 60 seven times as many citizens [Ćwiek, 2006]. It is generated by the concern for remaining employed and upgrading qualifications and the need for being well prepared for the retirement too. For budgetary unit workers the main determinant of taking up different courses and training is broadening their knowledge and competence. However, for other workers it is the development of social interests and hobbies. The only group which for years remains uninterested in any form of education are farmers. The situation results from the specific character of their job (they are self-employed) and from a popular belief that higher qualifications do not mean better standards of living. Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that generally more and more people in Poland are occupied with competent preparation to the final period of their lives – the old age. It should be considered as a good beginning of popularizing continuing education among all age groups.

Widespread training for the old age and in the old age, which has been put into practice in France, Sweden, Denmark, Japan, The USA and Canada for

years, brings about great results like, for example, independence, competence in using new technologies, revitalization through activity and a decline in morbidity of the third generation citizens.

Educational activity of the elderly is widely regarded as one of the determinants of adaptability. However, in many regions of the EU (including Poland) – it is associated with elite – mostly for institutional reasons and rather low demand for education from elderly citizens [Pakuła, 2007; Halicka, 2008, Chabior, 2008]. Universities of the third age are attempting to fill in the existing educational gap. They are constantly modifying their educational offers and using EU funds more and more often.

The Council of Europe and European Committee report *Education and Training 2010* [Edukacja, 2004] confirms that every educational activity is highly valued in the EU. In the document there is an entry which proves that investing in education and training is treated equally to capital and businesslike investment stimulating economic growth. It was stated that education is the most effective way of counteraction to social exclusion [Bocianowski, 2009]. It facilitates reintegration, inclusion, and above all, it effectively prevents social marginalization typical of the citizens with a very low educational level, who are helpless and incapable of independent existence in new reality.

5. Access to education and new information technologies

The motives for education activity among the elderly mainly result from natural aspiration for upgrading the standard of living, strengthening human relations, using necessary mechanisms for conveying knowledge and information, for social communication (mobile phones, the Internet, satellite). Education in the old age influences health awareness, creativity, maintaining independence, social relations and, widely understood, satisfaction with life in that period of life.

Modern information and communication technologies enable regular contact with relatives, unrestrained access to source of information and diverse forms of education and training. They are attractive, because of the new lifestyle, fashion, the need for upgrading quality of life and due to its informal and not obligatory character. They are an excellent way of filling one's free time, especially for professionally inactive people. Unfortunately, the access to these technologies is still not possible for everybody.

In 2006 one in three Polish adults used the Internet, whereas in the group of 55-year-olds it was one in every fourteen people. In 2007 the rate raised from 34% to 37%. Although the number of the elderly and uneducated people using the Internet was still unimpressive, the registered rates of the Internet activity of citizens above 55 in 2007 were much better than in 2006 [Wenzel, 2007].

In the following years the situation improved. In 2009 over a half of Polish people were using the Internet – 53% of men, 45% of women and 32% of people over 55. The average age of a Polish net surfer is 35, whereas in the group 50-year-olds and older every third person was surfing the Net without any problems. It is worth mentioning that almost 100% of the people with a university degree and only 30 % of those with vocational education are using the Internet nowadays [Jaskólska, 2009; Uhlig, 2009]. Regardless of the registered positive changes, the threat of cybernetic exclusion among the elderly and the remaining age groups continuously depends on the region of Poland they live in. The highest rates of exclusion might be noted in the regions with the highest unemployment and poverty.

According to cyclic CBOS (Public Opinion Research Centre) questionnaires and the latest Government Report *Poland 2030. Developmental Challenges*, Polish people in their late adulthood and old age tend to be more flexible about using new technologies understanding unquestionable connection between the quality of life, social communication and being open to changes [Boni (red.), 2009].

Active participation of adults and the elderly in the process of communication via electronic media as well as the interest in the Internet is steadily growing. Raising number of modern equipment in Polish households could be an excellent example for the tendency. Statistically, every second questionnaire respondent uses new technologies. The group is dominated by young people and those working in large companies (division into age categories is irrelevant in the research), but if elderly people make up only 5% of this population the tendency can be regarded as promising. Although for young people electronic media can be considered as a threat (addiction to the Internet and e-mails, loosening family bonds, negative influence on social interaction), when we think about the elderly it should be identified as a set of advantages: maintaining intellectual activity and upgrading one's self-esteem through taking part in different types of discussions, remaining socially active without the necessity of leaving one's house, filling one's spare time with meaningful and satisfying content, self-education, activity, being satisfied with day to day participation in social and community events.

The social project *The Academy of the e-Senior UPC* arranged by UPC Poland in cooperation with the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland, helps elderly people use modern technologies more fully. Within the project lots of conferences, meetings of generations, computer and the Internet courses are organized [Seniorzy, 2008]. It is worth mentioning that until 2013 in the *Human Capital Operational Program* 360 million euro for the EU budget have been allocated for fighting social exclusion. Appropriate distribution of funds should, not only, limit the cyber exclusion of the future pensioners, but it could strengthen their position in the labour market, the family, local community, in the media and all the other spheres of social life.

6. Conclusion

There is no modern civilization without citizens' equal rights. That is why, facing economic and demographical transformation, it seems necessary to popularize the idea of promoting social capital – based on communication and permanent development, instead of previously supported adaptation capital – adaptation to system changes and transformation [Boni (red.), 2009].

General internalization of these aims depends on continuing and professional education, which equips individuals with the knowledge about the old age, prepares them to independent everyday functioning among elderly people and makes it possible for them to benefit from longer lives.

In accordance with modern social policy and economy guidelines, including social economy, investing in continuing education means the same as investing in human capital. The interdependence being pointed out, appears to be even more significant in the attempt for building joint and several society based on knowledge. The development of every society requires transferring cultural, axiological and competence mechanisms [Szukalski, 2008]. Creating optimal model of aging society which is based on knowledge, is therefore connected with approving the significance of, at least, three facts:

- in a society based on knowledge, lifetime education is a form of preventing different groups from social exclusion;
- the sign of the times is the need for fighting the symptoms of ageism, since citizens' rights for different life activity cannot be limited;
- to achieve upgrading of the old age, which is being called for in civilization development strategies, we have to popularize the knowledge about the old age and promote lifetime education.

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