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MARGINALISATION AND STEREOTYPES RELATING TO THE ELDERLY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL CHANGES AND FAMILY PROBLEMS. GENERATION GAP AND METHODS OF PREVENTION IN POLAND

Abstract

The phenomenon of marginalization occurs in all societies, however in various countries it takes on different forms. It may be a consequence of deficit of such subsystems as: politics, economic system, social system or the family and communities system. It's also, very often, the effect of social changes and determined by social changes communication problems in family environment (*generation gap*). The general aim of the present study is the sociological conceptualization of the problem of social marginalization and stereotypes relating to old people by the analysis of the above mentioned *generation gap*, its factors and indicators as well as presentation of methods which may help counteract the exclusion and perception of such people under false, widely-held opinions. Present social change in Poland was analyzed based on the European Social Survey 10 (ESS 10) data (created, selected subset containing style of life variables, health variables, satisfaction of life variables, economic and *everyday life variables* – certain kind of subjective well being index). The study also brings up the issues relating to offers of Universities of the Third Age (UTA) an the other institutions (case studies) as the ways to counteract the marginalization of old people.

Keywords: *marginalization, family, social change, generation gap, old people, stereotypes, prevention*

Introduction

Old people are perceived by other members of society (selected groups, not the society as a whole) through the prism of stereotypes and they are particularly exposed to social marginalization. The range of stereotypes is of course related to the social awareness of the members of selected social group (Cybulska, Stanisławska et. al., 2020, pp. 249-253). Undoubtedly social marginalisation is enhanced by quicker and quicker pace of life which often obscures the human being as makes it difficult to understand his/her mission (see for example data that indicates that a significant number of seniors requiring support would like someone to keep them company, e.g. at home, on a walk, in church, CBOS, 2019, p. 4). The social change (multidimensional) effects on the range of the lack of intergenerational understanding and family problems in the field of everyday communication. The majority of old people grapples with ill-health, economic, emotional and adaptive problems. They also have problems with satisfying their existential needs as well as they are not able to adapt to so

quickly changing reality. Such phenomena result in their loneliness, a feeling of being lost and rejection. Moreover, some old people are not able to utilize powers and welfare benefits vested to them. Additionally they are not aware of their rights or they have no strength to struggle with the welfare system which in many situations turns out defective and unadjusted to their needs. This unfavourable state in which they find themselves is intensified by the fact that in many cases old people lack care and commitment from their family as well as from the social institutions (46% of Poles personally know someone older who has problems with performing some everyday activities on their own, such as dealing with matters at offices, shopping, cleaning, preparing meals, dressing, personal hygiene. 55% of older respondents declaring that they need financial support do not receive such assistance, CBOS, 2019, pp. 3-8). All these factors contribute to their isolation, and as a result – to their total resignation from social life. On the other hand, excluding the existential experience of the old people from the process of perception of young generations may be the reason of their reduced awareness in the whole scope of social life.

The experience of other countries, also including many positive examples from Poland (regional, local community cases), shows that marginalization of old people may be effectively counteracted through assuring them full participation in social life and education and which, consequently, will raise the society awareness about the problems which old people must face (in this context see for example data from *Case Studies on Leaving No One Behind. A companion volume to the Development Co-operation Report*, OECD, 2018, about effective social inclusion of elderly based on the strategy of ageing mainstreaming as one of the sustainable development goals see Barbabella, Checcucci, 2022, pp. 21-72). Therefore the present study focuses on the sociological conceptualization of the elderly's problem of social marginalization and false stereotypes relating to them by the analysis of the *generation gap*, its factors and indicators as well as presentation of methods by means of which we can counteract their social exclusion and their perception in the light of wrong and widely-held opinions (also developed by the young generations).

The phenomenon of social marginalization and its aspects related to the elderly

The notion of marginalization for the first time emerged in the 20th century in France. This term started successively to appear in the European dictionaries of social science. This concept is often interchangeably used as the social exclusion. The phenomenon of marginalization develops in all societies and in various countries it assumes different forms. This phenomenon may result from the lack of such subsystems as: politics, economic system, social system or the system of the family and communities (Anczewska, 2010, p. 119).

The Encyclopedia of Sociology describes the term of marginalization as *the limited participation in definite social order and the limited access to its basic institutions such as the labour market, the consumption market, the system of institutions of the justice administration, the system of education, the system of social guarantees, etc.* (Frieske, 1999, p. 186). Whereas the General Encyclopedia of PWN [*the Polish State Publishing House*] defines it as: *the decrease of the significance of a given social group in the society due to, among others, the decrease of its volume, impairing their function and position in the social hierarchy, presentation of extreme opinions, behavior not accepted by the majority of society* (The New Popular Encyclopedia PWN, 1996, p. 89). Most often the subject literature defines marginalization as the state in which a given individual or a human group does not participate in social life or this participation is very limited. This process causes that individuals or social groups cannot fully participate in social life and thus to exercise their rights and duties towards a given community. The radical and long-lasting social marginalization becomes apparent in the loss of sense of life and the lack of any hope for improvement of situation. According to E. Trafiałek it is a multifaceted exclusion from the society which is permanent, omnipresent and strongly rooted in the social mentality (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2006, p. 239). Marginalization can also be perceived as the decrease of importance of a given social group, limitation of social integration, also as some abnormality of relations between an individual, a group or the whole society. According to J. Grotowska-Leder, by using the notion of social exclusion we can present situations going beyond the acknowledged and predominant course of social life.

Such scholar approach transfers the notion of social exclusion from areas close to social work to social sciences (for example poverty, unemployment, etc).

E. Goffman presents old age and the aging process by means of so called stigma stencils. Stigma being the departure from the norm places a man burdened with such stigma off the main course of life, separates such stigmatized people from 'normal' ones, simultaneously lining expectations with regard to the former ones with numerous stereotypes. The stigma in the form of old age attributes so classified persons to the group of old people, it depreciates their appropriateness and it shapes our anticipations towards this social group (Goffman, 2005, p. 31-52).

In Szarfenberg's view the phenomenon of social exclusion should be placed in the following contexts (Pakuła, 2011, p. 205):

1. problems with participation (lack, inability, impossibility) in the social or collective life;
2. problems with access (limited, impediment) to resources, public goods, institutions and social systems;
3. problems with social rights (refusal, exercising them in small degree or no exercising at all);
4. poverty and deprivation.
5. According to F. Mahler in old people's life one can point out universal features independently of the marginalization reasons (Szarfenberg, 2007, p. 112):
6. deprivation of authority and access to decision making,
7. fewer rights and more duties,
8. fewer possibilities of choice and more limitations,
9. fewer economic opportunities and worse economic position,
10. fewer educational and professional opportunities, less rest, etc.,
11. larger exposure to results of social pressure and economic crises,
12. legal discrimination,
13. social importance and discriminating practices.

Social marginalization means also the individual's social exclusion. Yet the exclusion is the phenomenon leading to disabling of some individuals and/or social groups in participation in social life (Dzięgielewska, 2007, p. 67).

People who, due to bad housing conditions, low level of education or limited means of transport, are socially excluded have much fewer chances to improve their life than the majority of society (Giddens, 2005, p. 364).

For exclusion is connected with the deficit in the sphere relating to participation (lack, inability), access and social right. When individuals and social groups do not take part or participate to small degree in moulding of the national wealth, then they utilize in low degree the effects of development, moreover they are not able to get themselves out of ensuing situation on their own.

In K.W. Frieske's view there are two important dimensions of marginalization, i.e.: labour and consumption.

Some authors consider the social exclusion in the following dimensions (Giddens, 2005, p. 364):

1. Economic exclusion relating to production as well as consumption. Production is about employment, whereas consumption is about the possibility to purchase goods and to use services;
2. Political exclusion is about the lack of active participation in political life, no access to information, impossibility of voicing one's opinion in his/her self-interest which result in the lack of debate and decision in one's self-interest;
3. Social exclusion may concern social life and community. The excluded people do not take part in public life, in active leisure, they do not spend free time in the open. The social exclusion also means poorly developed network of social relations which leads to isolation and limitation of contacts with other people.

The EU Committee of Social Protection (CSP) has presented a set of coefficients to demonstrate the spheres of marginalization and exclusion in areas in which such phenomena appear. On the basis of these indexes we are able to show four areas (Szatur-Jaworska, 2004, p. 161):

- income which takes into account the issues of poverty and inequality of earning a living;
- activity in the job market, considering the issues of employment and unemployment;

- level of education, i.e. the problem connected with the issue of poor education of some groups of people;
- health condition which is evaluated subjectively or objectively.

Of course it should be stated that there are also the subjective factors of marginalization and social exclusion related to the stereotypes in the inter-generational perspective which is strictly connected with barriers in communication in the family environment (Mead, 1970, p. 72).

THE REASONS OF SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION OF OLD PEOPLE AND STEREOTYPES CONNECTED WITH THE AGING PROCESS

According to W. Pędlich the reason of the elderly's marginalization is the possible poverty of this social group and inappropriate self-organization (Pędlich, 1996, p. 15). Whereas E. Trafiałek thinks that the essential problems connected with marginalization are of economic nature, i.e. low pensions and/or disability pensions as well as disintegration of global, national, regional or family communities, technical and IT development which the old people are not able to follow. Their condition is also worsened by the lack of their activity in the area of their rights and privileges protection as well as old people's pride. These features in much degree expose their life ineptitude (Trafiałek, 2002, p. 188). According to B. Szatur-Jaworska the phenomenon of marginalization is caused by the lack of family or lack of contacts with the family as well as bad health condition (Szatur-Jaworska, 2000, p. 31). Other reasons enumerated by this author include bad identification of old people with ensuing changes resulting from criticism of the former Polish People's Republic – as well as lack of adequate preparation to survive the period of old age (Synak, 2000, p. 14). It is thought that the process of social marginalization takes place gradually. This course of marginalization consists, among others, in renouncing important roles in society or the loss of the employee's status; lack of contacts with other people; limited access to cultural, social, political and educational institutions. Among people of advanced age the feeling

of isolation, helplessness and indifference grows more and more – apathy creeps into their life. Additionally the elderly many times expect help from various institutions or people which is the consequence of resignation from social life (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2006, p. 241). It should also be noticed that considerable part of old people battles against the pejorative stereotype of old age which is connected with their impoverishment and pushing them into the background of social life. Their needs undergo minimization. They feel lost, they are hardly visible, devoid of possibility of pursuing their rights who are hardly able to seek recognition, love, respect and their rights – who are ruled out from social life with their helplessness, who cannot keep up with the challenges of the changing world (Trafiałek, 2003, p. 109).

In terms of interactions with the social environment it should be stated that old people are influenced by multidimensional stereotyping that cannot be counteracted due to the relational loneliness and living alone – so-called singularization (CBOS, 2019, p. 3-4). Stereotypes are also the source of social exclusion. They are responsible for various prejudices which can be manifested both in discrimination as well as in exclusion. Stereotypes are cognitive elements of prejudice and usually contain false, untrue as well as groundless convictions and/or attitudes relating to a range of phenomena and social groups. The process of aging is a different process from other kinds of prejudice because young people will some day also become old and helpless (Postek, 2010, pp. 96-97). However in spite of possession of such knowledge both the Polish society (Zięba-Kołodziej, 2010, p. 63) as well as societies from other European countries and from the United States negatively evaluate the very process of aging and old people. On the basis of conducted studies and research it turns out that although there are stereotypes relating to old people but also positive results were noticed since stereotypes about young people are much more common.

R. Butler distinguished two types of prejudice relating to the elderly – gentle and malicious. Gentle prejudices arise as a consequence of conscious and subconscious anxiety and fears of the period of old age. Whereas the malicious kinds of prejudice result from the process of stereotyping which aims at the conviction that old people are worthless, not attractive, useless social creatures. American researchers found that their society interprets old age as the

process unceasingly aiming at the loss of both physical and psychical fitness. Stereotypes relating to old people suggest that they are weak, slow, lonely, that they are often ill and have no sufficient knowledge about the environment in which they live. Additionally the media propagate the stereotype of an old man who is antisocial, poor, combative, abrasive and lonely. This approach mainly results from the cult of youth, physical and mental fitness as well as wealth. The Americans are bewitched by youth and this is why they distorted the picture of the old generation presented in the media. In fact old people became eliminated from the media (Zięba-Kołodziej, 2010, p. 65). The process of aging is perceived as something greatly undesirable before which one should protect him/herself and to mask its symptoms. We can find indicators of partially similar point of view in Polish society (see Cybulska, Stanisławska et. al., 2020, pp. 249-253) but also the symptoms of growing awareness based on the reflection that positive aging brings a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction and has a positive impact on health (Jursa, Kolbuch et. al., 2018, pp. 123-128).

According to J. Bell's research conducted in 1992 it was, however, affirmed that in the USA the image about old people significantly changed for the better by means of creating their image in the media. Before that old people were presented as obstinate, eccentric, stupid and funny. Nowadays this picture has diametrically changed but after almost 50 years or so. At present the elderly's image changes into being active, strong, admired, influential and sexy people. Bell noticed that the slow reversal of stereotypes took place (especially at the local community level, see for example Sen, Prybutok, 2019, pp. 14-26).

E. Plamore, another academic, took the view that positive stereotypes are indexes of positive age prejudice. Namely they make up prejudices and discrimination for the better of old people. These positive biases connected with the old age result from the assumption that the elderly need special care, attention and specific treatment as well as economic assistance. All allowances, discounts or privileges vested in old people are equivalent with the age discrimination. The author stresses that using positive stereotypes with good intentions contributes to disrespectful behaviour and treatment of old people in a patronizing way which results in their lowered self-appraisal.

Additionally Palmore distinguished eight positive stereotypes which are socially recognized and relate to old people, namely: cheerfulness, politeness,

wisdom, confidence, being influential, political power as well as considerably larger sense of freedom than attributed to the youth (Zięba-Kołodziej, 2010, p. 65).

A very harmful stereotype connected with old people is the stereotype of infantilism. It is based on the opinion that old people's behaviour indicates that they still have features similar to children and they have reduced physical and intellectual fitness. This is why one should address them similarly as children, that is speaking to them clearly, slowly, in a simple way, not to treat their statements too seriously and to help them in various life situations. The whole society is overcome by stereotypes and this also concerns professional groups such as, for example, therapists. It was revealed that a large number of psychotherapists has a negative attitude to provide professional help to old people. Those psychotherapists explain their behaviour in such a way that the elderly are too talkative. Thus one can think that therapists take the view that the effects of therapy with old people will not bring any benefits, and additionally those effects will not be satisfying and successful. The way of old clients' treatment who expect specialist help may also result from the assumption that the elderly are generally in worse intellectual and psychophysical condition. Therefore in this case we can talk about prejudices and stereotypes relating to health.

According to J. Bunzel a factor which considerably contributes to formation of stereotypes relating to people in advanced age is the phenomenon of gerontophobia. This is defined as fear at variance with reason of old people, fear of old age, hostility or even hatred to aged people. This is a problem of young people. It manifests itself in discrimination of old people and denial of the aging process. This problem has been fought with and adequate counteracting actions are taken against such incidents. Such behaviour is caused by panic and fear of sb's own old age. The elderly are associated with the uncontrollable process of aging, with senile age diseases and dying and this causes the transfer of one's own fear before the end of life onto old people.

The analysis of old age showed that long time ago the relation to old people was dependent on other customs. In prehistorically old and agricultural societies old people were held in high esteem and respect. Old age was associated with old persons' wisdom, knowledge and political power (Zięba-Kołodziej, 2010, p. 63). In old times the elderly held teachers' functions, they taught

young people all kinds of social values, i.e.: social norms, cultural customs, they maintained traditions, values and religious beliefs. Thanks to Christianity an old man was God's gift. It was generally believed that old people who lived to a ripe old age experienced some mercy to fulfill God's intentions in this way. The radical change in relation to old people took place at the turn of 18th and 19th centuries, during the period of medicine quick development which so much contributed to prolongation of life while at the same time numerous wars caused the death of thousands of young people. As a result of that medical progress the number of the elderly significantly grew up which *de* fac*to* constituted the ballast for the young population. Moreover the industrial revolution contributed to firing of old people who lost their vocational and economic status and in consequence they became socially useless. The society institutionalized those changes by means of establishment of retirement pensions. The general access to social security benefits took place as late as in the 19th century when so called workers' relief funds which guaranteed their members small financial benefits in case of disease or disability or in case of old age. Still, however, those who did not take care about their future had to rely on their children's help and help of charitable organizations.

The breakthrough took place in 1880 and was of political origin. The German chancellor Otto von Bismarck who wanted to win workers' support passed the law guarantying the retirement pension to all insured workers who were over 70 years old. Funding of this system came from fees deducted from the workers' wages. The conducted studies prove that human consciousness, our plans for the future as well as expectations are dependent on going into retirement (Zięba-Kołodziej, 2010, p. 66).

Negative stereotypes relating to old age are very unfavourable. Old people, to a considerable degree, identify themselves with existing stereotypes. They perceive themselves in the same way as society assesses them. It causes difficulties with overcoming psychical barriers, not only of the elderly but also of people who experience the process of aging. According to A. Tabaszkiewicz the pejorative image of old people was directly connected with reducing their psychophysical fitness and the loss of fulfilling of social roles which results in so called self-fulfilling prophecy which can be followed by psychical or social break down (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2006, p. 85). The elderly are in a mood,

their activity is reduced which generally results in deterioration of their life quality. Convictions about old people led to monotonous, lonely existence and resignation from participation in social and/or family life, shortening of their life and consequently even bringing about death (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2006, p. 86)

Materials and methods

The research base is focused on the:
- statistical meta-analysis related to the data from European Social Survey 10 (present, actual data for Poland; the selected subset was created and used, N=1948).
- In the analytical structure there were used statistical mechanisms such as (Lindley, 1990, pp. 237-243):
- correlation sets (r-Pearson)
- r-squared sets (r^2)

The whole quantitative analysis is consistent with the principle of statistical significance ($α=0,05$). The qualitative part of the analysis used case study logic (Padgett, 2017, pp. 35-38).

Research results in the context of generation gap and the risk of marginalisation

According to the goals of the article it should be stated that communication barriers (factors of *generation gap*) are visible mainly in the differencies in frequency of an Internet use and in the axiological sphere. Young generations use Internet two times often than the other generations and Internet use is negatively correlated (statistically significant) with the age of individual – combination of this variables is presented in the table below.

Table 1. *Frequency of Internet use and age (correlation)*

X	Y	R	P
(Independent variable)	**(Dependent variable)**	**(rPearson value)**	**(P-value, α=0,05)**
Age	Internet use (how often)	-0,546	<0,01

Source of data: European Social Survey 10 (ESS 10, 2020-2022), https://www.europe-ansocialsurvey.org

The second table contains correlations (statistically significant) between three selected, important elements of existential process and the variable of age.

Table 2. *State of health, satisfaction of life, opinions about relationships and age (correlations)*

X	Y	R	P
(Independent variable)	**(Dependent variable)**	**(rPearson value)**	**(P-value, α=0,05)**
Age	Subjective general state of health	0,266	<0,01
Age	Satisfaction of life	0,069	0,02
Age	Attitude towards the traditional marriage/relationship/family	-0,319	<0,01

Source of data: European Social Survey 10 (ESS 10, 2020-2022), https://www.europe-ansocialsurvey.org

It's well visible that with age, subjective general state of health deteriorates by 26,6% (from the youngest respondents to the oldest age group). Paradoxically, also with age, the satisfaction of life increases by 6,9%. Next, it should be stated that the perception of emotional, interpersonal relationships as the stable relationships, not flexible, based also on the traditional values and traditional way of defining the family, is negatively correlated with the age of individual (r=-0,319). It may be one of the most important variables in the light of creating the stereotypes and potential marginalization of the old generation. The way of the perception of the social world foundations influences of course on the range of the social ties in relations between the selected sociodemographic categories. It means (according to data) that the gap between young and

old generations is clearly noticeable and young age of individual influences on the contestation of the role of stable, emotional relationships and family in more than 10 percent (r^2=0,101).

The need of creation and development of the intergenerational activities and institutionalized programs with one general aim – *to make a generational bridge* – is obvious according to the above mentioned data. On the other hand, the lack of activities in opposition to the *generational gap* will determine the wider scale of the deconstruction of family and broader social ties.

Table 3. *Feeling of safety alone in the dark, employment relation and age (correlations)*

X (Independent variable)	Y (Dependent variable)	R (rPearson value)	P (P-value, α=0,05)
Age	Feeling of safety alone in the dark	-0,051	0,02
Employment relation	Feeling of safety alone in the dark	-0,06	0,01

Source of data: European Social Survey 10 (ESS 10, 2020-2022), https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org

Of course, apart from the health, style of life and axiologic variables, there are also the everyday life and economic variables which are also the important factors of broadly understood subjective well being. Feeling of safety alone in the dark (common variable as the measure of personal safety) is negatively correlated with age (r=-0,051). It means that older generations are more afraid of the participation in outside space (outside of the house) than the other generations. It is of course related to the state of health but also to the employment relation and potential loss of the money, savings and personal belongings. Pensioners are afraid of it in 6% more than the other generations (r=-0,06). It should be also stated that according to ESS 10 data people after 60 years old are 32% of all of the members of society feeling unsafe alone in the dark (source: author's metaanalysis, European Social Survey 10, ESS 10, 2020-2022, https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org).

Marginalization and stereotypes prevention of the elderly (selected case studies)

The prevention of the phenomenon of social exclusion and marginalization should be considered in various spheres and levels of social life. Especially the social and economic basis have essential meaning, which guarantee the elderly appropriate existence by means of social policy. This is why certain areas of social aid are distinguished which are to function for the group of the oldest people (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2006, p. 241):

1. The aim of activities preventing the social exclusion should be integration or re-integration of old people. It is also important to assure the elderly suitable social services and to take care of their self-reliance and activity in various aspects of life as well as to counteract their isolation in society. Therefore the welfare system should include activities preparing for the aging process and help in maintaining contacts of old people with other people. It is worth underlining the meaning of preventive activities consisting in, for example, carrying out environmental research, in conducting preparatory activities which are to prepare old people for the old age, to inform them about the available forms of the welfare system, to offer them cultural or educational services which will be used by the elderly.

2. The welfare system for old people cannot exclusively consist in financial benefits because they pay much attention to „benefits in kind" and services. The help should be provided as part of the environmental assistance which is more effective than the institutional help. It is very important because in such a case old people need not wander off from their place of residence, ties of friendship are maintained and thus the state does not have to bear significant costs (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2006, p. 242).

3. The quality and life conditions provided in stationary old people's homes taking care especially of the oldest people should be similar to conditions taking place in their home environment. That is why such old people's homes should be established in such a way as to provide care for the small quantity of old people of both sexes. The employees of such homes should respect and take into account the needs and rights of people in their care.

4. The institutional help should be executed by both the state and private facilities which would improve the quality of services. But simultaneously one should not attribute the institutional aid exclusively to private welfare premises because majority of old people are poor.

5. Old people should be provided with various forms of residence forms, such as independent flats adapted to their needs or living together with his/her family for his/her best possible comfort.

6. We should also take into consideration the increasing number of people aged 80 and more who usually are handicapped, who require health, nursing or rehabilitation care. Such old people should be able to use social, medical or rehabilitation services in their places of residence.

7. Favourable conditions should be created to establish new types of help for the oldest people, both through development of various aid programs exclusively for this group of people.

8. Moreover the staff of such premises or volunteers working such people in their care should possess enough knowledge in the field of gerontology and old age pedagogy (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2006, p. 243).

THE OFFER OF THE THIRD AGE UNIVERSITIES AS THE WAY TO COUNTERACT MARGINALIZATION OF OLD PEOPLE

The aging process of societies in developed countries happens all the time and therefore the percentage of old people in the population structure constantly increases. Continuous growth of old people number is a consequence of falling birth rate and prolongation of the average life duration, especially of people older than 60. Such factors as continuous, progressive changes in demographic sphere of contemporary societies as well as larger and larger numbers of people going into retirement and longer period of life lived on retirement contributed to gigantic changes in economic, social and cultural life (Synak, 2002, p. 12). Also UTAs established across Europe constitute the basis of social changes. The educational activity plays a significant role in prevention and overcoming of old people's marginalization (Pakuła, 2011, p. 205).

According to E. Trafiałek's research the importance of education in the process old people's integration may be analyzed in the following aspects:

- popularization of gerontology knowledge among young people,
- preparations for the old age,
- inter-generation integration,
- educational activity of old people implemented by UTAs.

In Poland these aspects constitute the only forms of organized education which are directed to old people (Trafiałek, 2003, p. 263).

UTAs began to be established in the 80's of the 20th century. Quick demographic changes as well as growing number of old people in developing countries significantly contributed to their popularity and numerical strength (Pakuła, 2011, p. 206). The first UTA was established in France and its initiator was professor Pierre Vellas from the University of Toulouse. The next Universities came into being in Western Europe which, in M. Marczuk's view, used to become significant educational premises of continual education for the adults, which became organizers of active social life of old people and partners in discussions about the ongoing changes resulting from demographic processes (Marczuk, 2006, p. 331). According to the International Association of Universities the main assumptions of their functioning are: popularization of education in many disciplines which has to be common and available for everybody regardless of the age and acquired education as well as activities improving the general physical and psychical fitness of old people.

The founder of the first UTA in Poland was prof. Halina Szwarc in 1975. It the coming years the premises of this kind were opened in Opole, Wroclaw, Szczecin, Łódź and Kraków. At present there are over 200 UTAs in Poland.

In 1985 the Lublin University of the Third Age was established which in the beginning was to operate in the form of a series of lectures plus three special-interest groups: fine arts group, medical – psychological group and recreational group (Marczuk, 2006, pp. 336-337). From the moment of its foundation the University is constantly developing because since 1997 it has been the member of the International Association UTW AIUTA. Thanks to the agreement signed in 1991 between the Association of the Polish Free University [Towarzystwo Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej] and five

chancellors of universities in Lublin the joint management and running of Lublin UTA was possible. Moreover, this facility, thanks to the mentioned agreement, gets financial aid and can also rent lecture rooms. The lectures are usually given for free by the universities' academics.

The objective of Lublin UTA is (Articles of Association of Lublin UTA, amended with the resolution of Lublin branch of the Association of Polish Free University of June 12, 2007):

1. organization of education and continual self-education of old people (mainly pensioners and disability pensioners),
2. organization of active participation of old people in cultural life,
3. formation, deepening and assimilation of the national culture value as well as their protection and popularization,
4. enabling old people to spend free time in a cultural way, mutual integration and loneliness prevention.

The research relating to UTAs activities shows that these institutions enjoy great recognition and interest. Moreover, old people have the possibility of physical and intellectual activity, of acquiring and deepening their knowledge, their psycho-physical fitness improves and their role in society becomes more important. These institutions also contribute to improvement of their hitherto existence through satisfying such higher needs as knowledge, beauty or creativity. Institutions of this type help the elderly in acquiring larger self-reliance (Pakuła, 2011, p. 209).

Therefore it is worth noting that the tasks which UTAs execute, i.e. struggling with marginalization and its results are not at all easy because according to E. Trafiałek the process of social marginalization is more difficult to identify than in case of young people because it is distinguished by smaller tiresomeness, it is less visible, less aggressive. Unfortunately the operations of UTAs are not able to include the whole social group of the elderly but only their small part, i.e. those living in cities who usually have higher education (Trafiałek, 2003, p. 33).

The activity of Warsaw aid centres and their social marginalization prevention

The Żoliborz District Centre of Social Aid is a modern unit of the community self-government operating in Warsaw which was appointed to fulfill tasks in the area of social aid. The mission of this centre is to serve the city dwellers of Żoliborz with professional help which respects human dignity and efficiently helps in everyday life problems. In 2007 this facility was awarded the certificate of quality ISO 9001:2001 as well as Euro Certificate in the category *Certificate of the Company's Credibility*. The Centre offers openness in establishing of any forms of cooperation with people who perceive the possibility to help old people in social marginalization prevention or isolation of social groups for so called the idea of Żoliborz social integration. This Centre pays special attention to cooperation with any social partners as: civil organizations, churches, businessmen and/or physical persons acting for the better of other people.

The staff of the Centre present specialist knowledge. Its employees provide effective help by means of consultancy. The Centre provides a wide range of aid: consultancy, consultations, psychological and pedagogical assistance to family or a child, organization of meetings in the group of families support, support in looking for job, nursing services for old people with mental disorders, organization of activities in the Daytime Home of Social Aid or participation in old people's clubs (Wiśniewska-Mucha, 2010, pp. 55-56).

The Żoliborz centre of Integration and Old People's Mobilization

This is an institution dealing with providing complex aid for the elderly. It assures social services for almost 100 old people. This social facility provides:

- basic services consisting of two meals a day,
- special services which are adapted to specific needs of old people, including, among others: physical condition improvement services, massages, hairdresser, nursing, medical, theatrical, musical, therapeutic (occupational therapy) services, computer handling, legal and/or psychological

assistance, English learning, art classes, gardening, cultural activities, reading papers and books, poetry, films watching, Nordic walking, therapy by music or prophylactic classes.

The clients of the Żoliborz centre have manifold possibilities to use this social facility. First of all they have the possibility to participate in trips, joint visits to cultural sites as cinemas or theatres (Wiśniewska-Mucha, 2010, pp. 56-57).

Old people's home "Beautiful Shore"

This institution enjoys long-lasting tradition in offering support for over 50 old residents. This institution provides extra services depending on old people's needs who reside there. The following services are offered in this home: prophylactic, psychological, educational, labour-saving, nursing, medical, occupational therapy, therapy by music, art classes, relaxing activities, computer classes, trips, internet café serviced by old people – volunteers.

Operations of institutions of this kind are conducted for the local community by means of holding of occasional meetings, counseling, medical aid and integration meetings. These social homes in large measure are assisted by housing cooperatives, NGOs, kindergartens, community centres as well as the local communities (Wiśniewska-Mucha, 2010, pp. 57).

The issue of social exclusion is undoubtedly one of the most important problems of the contemporary world. This is the activities relating to marginalization prevention of old people which are so vital in the face of societies' aging process. In my study I tried to present this phenomenon and the ways of social activities which would allow to minimize them. It is hard to assume its complete elimination when the universally reigning cult of youth often pushes old people aside in social oblivion. However one thing is certain – social exclusion prevention of old people is a guarantee of further stable development of our society. Thus the role of all subjects which in this field may offer and guarantee the most assistance is therefore incredibly important. Therefore many challenges face social institutions which can, by means of appropriate attitude, effectively engage the whole society in this process.

The analysis of available materials proves that there are many ways to counteract social marginalization of old people, but also proves that the problem of exclusion is still, in spite of many remedial activities, universally present. Openness to other people and strong faith in the fact that together we may achieve a lot and that stereotypes, even these most strongly rooted, can be changed – all these make up the basis of each activity aiming at restoration of old people to society. Therefore the activities and operations of such social institutions are so vital for the old people. Such institutions can be called pioneers because in many situations they initiate behaviour and attitude aiming at decrease of social exclusion. And this is why especially such activities should be strongly supported.

Conclusions

It should be mentioned also that – generally – the present strategies of counteracting the social exclusions of elderly are effective strictly among them but are not effective in the context of the need of wider reconstruction of the social ties in the intergenerational perspective. Thus, the structure of institutional system, including the First Sector, Third Sector and selected CSR and ESG activities of the Second Sector should be grounded in the value of social capital understood as the synthesis of trust, cooperation and common activities (Putnam, 2000, p. 66). This type of policy (evidence based of course; Pawson, 2006, pp. 4-16) may lead to the *synergy effect*. It's on of the crucial points in the context of social development in the Polish society (and the other European societies) affected by the demographic crisis related to the population aging.

These dependencies were also noticeable during the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe. It should be remembered that multidimensional development of society is based not only on the economic factors but also on the social cohesion. Despite the number of deaths caused by Covid-19 in the southern Europe also in the old generations (mostly in Italy and Spain) societies were integrated and the mechanisms of multidimensional social support were present. Today these countries do not experience the breakdown of social bonds and the epidemic of alienation to an extent similar to Poland (feeling of alienation leads to the suicide attempts and suicides, see Eurostat 2024).

So, in conclusion – social cohesion is crucial for well-being of society (Durkheim, 2018, pp. 112-118, 139-153, 320-334) and the attitude towards elderly will be one of the conditions of social development in Poland in the coming years.

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