

# University of the Third Age in Poland: Course structure<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The demographic changes alter the European societies. The population of the European Union is aging. This is connected with decreased mortality and the ensuing increase in life expectancy. Since 1960, the average life expectancy lengthened by eight years. Today Europeans are living longer and healthier than ever before.

A larger number of healthy and active elderly people is not only the fact that we should treat as a social achievement, but is also important when it comes to social resources. Older adults have significant care needs, but also they have extensive knowledge and experience, the time and energy and their own financial resources so that they can make a significant contribution to contemporary society as citizens, volunteers, employees, family members and consumers. Active aging not only improves the quality of individuals' life, but also offers many benefits for the whole society.

## University of the Third Age in Poland: organization

Since the year 2000 we have observed a dynamic growth of Third Age Universities number in Poland. The development of these institutions on an unprecedented scale in Poland introduced a new quality of their functioning and created a situation in which UTA are perceived by other organizations as important partners in their efforts to the local community. These Universities represent the needs of seniors and enable the exchange of experiences.

Taking into account the organizational and legal forms in Poland we distinguish three basic types of UTA:

- operating within the association or foundation
- operating within the structures of higher education
- operating within the local government units.

Analyzing the financial situation of Universities of the Third Age in Poland, it should be noticed that their activity uses largely the membership fees. This applies to all UTA, irrespective of their legal form. This means that even in the case of UTA structures operating at the university or in the framework of the local government units, the contributions paid by students are important part of their activities financing.

Most of Universities of the Third Age in Poland use non-financial forms of support, such as sharing meeting rooms or offices, which significantly reduce their operating costs.

In addition to membership fees, significant for the functioning of UTA are also:

- subsidies of institutions
- donations
- the public generosity.

UTA is unlikely to benefit from full-time employees, sometimes it's only one person employed (sometimes even part-time). Some institutions employ the staff on the basis of civil law contracts. However, generally the basis for the functioning most of the UTA is volunteers work.

UTA is extremely valuable for development of civil society institutions. On the other hand, the limited financial resources hinder the development of their activities, and the lack of full-time employees - to raise funds through projects that require professional preparation and settlement

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## **University of the Third Age Czestochowa**

Almost 20 years ago a group of people experiencing the satisfaction of making social and cultural activities met. These people were looking for an idea for the third stage of life. That was the beginning of the University of the Third Age at the Faculty of Pedagogy Jan Dlugosz University in Czestochowa. At the moment, it counts 783 people, including 653 women and 130 men, average age is 70 years, 255 people among the participants have higher education level, 444 secondary, 60 technical and , 24 elementary.

Structure:

The University of the Third Age in Czestochowa structure is:

- Head of the UTA
- Secretariat of the UTA
- Student government

There are lectures and activities like:

- Languages courses (German, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian)
- Computer Classes
- General development gymnastics
- Yoga
- Swimming
- Gym
- Table Tennis
- Movement and dance classes
- Step-aerobics
- Vocal team
- Section bridge – Chess
- Astronomy Section
- Photo Team
- Crafts
- Nutrition

## **Activities**

Activities conducted at UTA in Czestochowa deepen seniors' knowledge, give them the opportunity to meet new people, and above all, care for their physical and mental health. The activities also allow seniors to achieve some independence. UTA students eagerly participate in lectures, in particular: on literature, history, geography, law, medicine, philosophy, and psychology.

For example, recently some seniors, influenced by the lectures, have taken science courses in Philosophy at A.J.D. Seniors appreciate the commitment of the lecturers, their time and energy which they devote for them. Foreign language lessons such as: English, German, French, Russian, Italian and more recently Spanish are extremely popular at UTA. Language classes are conducted at several levels depending on advancement level of the audience.

Activities in small groups are also very popular at the UTA in Czestochowa. There are workshops, sections or units dealing with specific topics. In particular they are: bridge team, the team 'nutritionists', needlework section, the photo team. During these meetings seniors develop their hobby, which until now they didn't pursue due to lack of time. This allows them not only develop in a specific area, but also feel the satisfaction with shared passion and joy resulting with common work. Seniors attending UTA are very interested in computer and Internet courses.

The activities prevent digital exclusion of seniors, provide access to information, expand opportunities to express themselves, to show their own opinion on the thematic forum, what is also associated with an increase of self-esteem. Computer courses make it possible to feel

themselves as a part of the information society. Different forms of physical activities of seniors are also very important kind of courses at UTA in Czestochowa.

Exercises are conducted as a recreational activity - general development gymnastics, swimming, wrestling, yoga, rhythmic and dance activities. It is a recipe for long youth, it slows down the process of aging, it is a chance to the maintenance of their independence and capacity to make decisions about their life. We shouldn't forget about the forms of exercises such as walking outside, nordic walking, trips to nature. The activities take place at any time of the year - the time of rain, frost and heat. Especially nordic walking is a safe and recently very appreciated by seniors form of physical activity. We should also mention about integrative activities, which seniors assign high priority. These meetings give the opportunity to spend time together, common experience of everyday joys and sorrows, share concerns and seek solutions to difficult problems for them. Knowledge contained in such meetings often turn into long-term friendships, fulfilling life outside. These are meetings such as Christmas, Easter, having a festive setting. Representatives of younger generation, such as seniors grandchildren are invited at some meetings. Such meetings develop intergenerational relationships.

The problem in recent years is the lack of a large number of volunteers and people who want to attend University. Seniors can join the UTA only when a place becomes available. There is a limit of the places for the seniors.

## **Recommendations**

According to UTA seniors active aging with UTA is make the most of many opportunities arising from longer life, in the field of physical, social, and professional activity. They emphasize, that it helps improve not only the quality of their lives, but also brings many benefits to the whole of society. UTA therefore performs an important range of social policy. Universities of the Third Age, in order to meet the challenges facing them should become equal partners of the central and local governments in creating and implementing long-term policy concerning seniors. UTA in Czestochowa largely performs the demands issued by the organizing committee of the celebration of the year 2012 as the year of UTA in Poland.

*Inter alia* supports all forms of seniors' self-help such as, for example, volunteering and cooperation with younger generation; developing and promoting all forms of legal advice, consumer, psychological and vocational senior-friendly social activity as long as possible. Building a positive image of older people as a self-contained, fully-fledged and active citizens, affecting the social, political and cultural State; developing advocacy and promotion of the rights of senior citizens to the environment of public administration, health services, social policy institutions. Undoubtedly, it should work on strengthening further cooperation with local institutions and local self-government authorities.

This text is part of the book “Education and quality of life of senior citizens”. See the full book in <http://www.edusenior.eu>

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