

THE MARKET OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR SENIORS ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE OFFER OF UNIVERSITIES OF THE THIRD AGE

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Purpose: Problems related to the aging of the population have not only social but also economic consequences. It is therefore important to draw the attention of governments and social organizations to undertaking initiatives aimed at activating elderly people and, if possible, keeping them on the labor market.

The idea of U3A is rich, widespread and firmly rooted in the educational system of many countries. Universities of the Third Age (UTW), established in the world since 1973, and in Poland since 1975, play a special role in solving social problems related to counteracting social exclusion and activation of the elderly.

Methodology: A trend model for the increase in the number of seniors was determined. In order to assess the phenomenon of the development of universities of the third age, dynamic indicators were used and the average rate of change of the phenomenon was determined.

Findings: The aim of the article was to present the development of UTAs in Poland in dynamic and spatial terms. The conducted analysis shows that U3A enjoy great interest in Poland. The offer of universities was regionally diversified both in terms of the number of operating universities, organizational and legal form and the number of people interested in classes offered by the U3A.

Keywords: Universities of the Third Age, activation of seniors.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Today's world is struggling with many problems, including issues such as growing social inequalities, rising unemployment, an aging society, social exclusion, climate change or growing environmental pollution and its impact on the health of society. Therefore, in recent years, activities aimed at activating the elderly have been included not only in the subject of scientific research, but also in the initiatives and programs of the European Union. The aim of

the article is to present the activities of Universities of the Third Age and to present their special role in solving social problems related to counteracting social exclusion of the elderly.

Universities of the third age can be broadly defined as “socio-cultural centers where older people gain new knowledge on various topics or test (update) existing knowledge” (Formosa, 2012).

The problem of aging populations is one of the most important challenges facing European countries, as it has not only social but also economic consequences. It is therefore reasonable to draw the attention of European societies to a change in the direction of activity of the elderly towards their activation and, if possible, keeping them on the labor market.

One of the forms of activation of the elderly, which is part of the idea of social innovation, are Universities of the Third Age, which give the opportunity to develop one's own interests, broaden knowledge, but also improve the physical condition of students.

2. Demographic processes taking place in Poland

Changes in the demographic structure of the population related to the increase in the share of elderly people that have been taking place for years are a challenge for the economy and society.

Mering believes that already in 2030, more than half of the inhabitants of Western Europe will be over 50 years old, and their life expectancy will be close to 90 years (2011).

The concept of old age cannot be included in the framework of rigid statistics, but it is conventionally assumed that old age comes after the age of 60. Elderly people do not constitute a homogeneous group, because they are distinguished by their health, level of mental and physical fitness, life, social and economic situation. Undoubtedly, the increase in the population of the elderly caused that issues related to the aging process and old age itself as a phase of life became the subject of research in many fields of science, including demography, economics, social policy and sociology (Pulturzycki, 1991).

The decreasing scope of social roles made available to the retired population causes the younger part of society to fear old age and retirement. This process works in contemporary reality according to the principle of feedback: reluctance to retirees, as a passive part of society, results in alienating them from the spheres of active participation in social and professional life, which is a growing problem, also economic. In addition, the end of professional work results in withdrawal from social contacts and causes a sense of isolation from the rest of society. Although a large part of the population of today's seniors enjoys good health, is active, fit and ready for intergenerational activities, the social image of the elderly is largely based on the stereotype that describes seniors as a group of infirm, ailing, passive, reluctant or even unnecessary and useless people (Kamiński, 1986, p. 37).

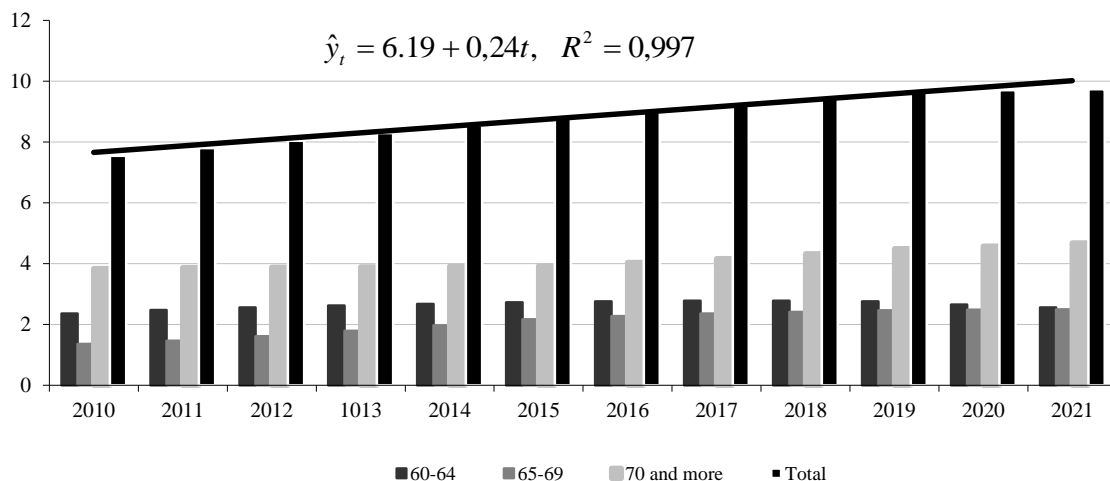


Figure 1. Number of senior citizens in Poland in 2010-2021 by age group [million] with a matched trend line.

Source: own calculation base on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

At the end of 2021, the population of Poland amounted to 38,433.0 thousand people and was 96.9 thousand lower than in 2010. In 2021, the median age for the entire population of Poland was 40.2 years, while in 2010 it was lower by almost 5 years. The number of Polish residents aged over 60 is also growing (Senior economy..., 2022) (figure 1). From year to year, the number of middle-aged people increased by 2.34%. In the last 10 years, the most important number of people aged 65-69 was 1,1 million persons. At that time, the number of people over 60 at risk by 2,2 million persons.

The broadly understood progress of civilization brought the development of medicine and pharmacology, resulting in the improvement of the health conditions of modern seniors and the extension of the average life expectancy of people. Therefore, the number of elderly people is growing - in the 70-74 age group, in 2021, compared to 2010, an increase of 10.66% was recorded. In the case of the oldest people, an increase of 2% was recorded compared to 2010 (Gospodarka senioralna..., 2022). This group will require special care in the future, as in their case the deterioration of general health is observed, communication problems appear, which are associated with the reduction of social ties and the loss of previously performed functions in professional and family life (Drożdż, 2013, p. 25).

Compared to 2010, in 2021 the number of people aged 65 and more increased by 61.89% (figure 2). In many cases, this group includes people who want to stay active. They are looking for an offer on the market that will enable them to develop their own interests or give them the opportunity to meet other seniors.

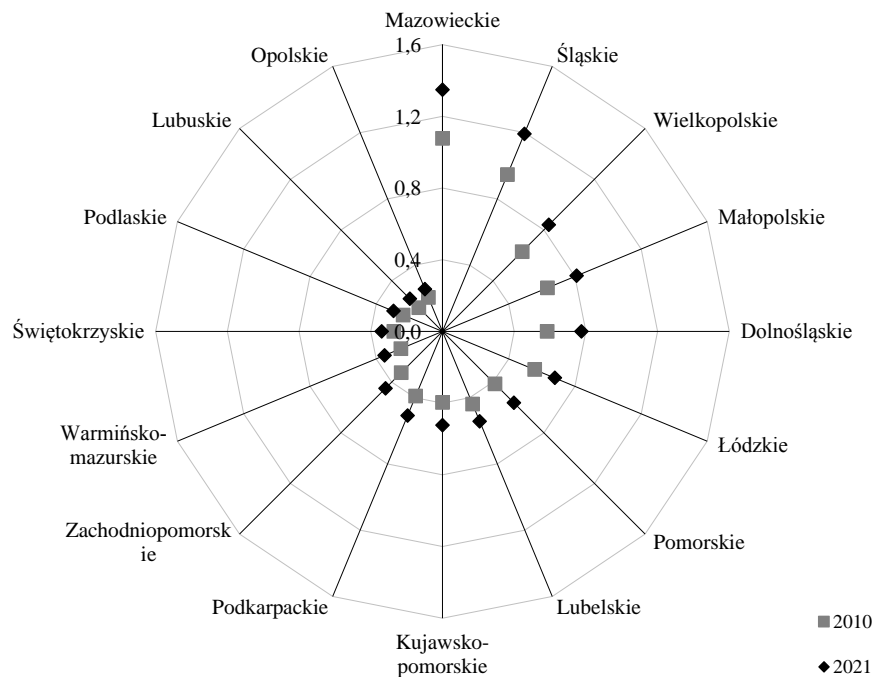


Figure 2. Number of people aged 60 and more [million] in Polish voivodeships in 2010 and 2021 [million].

Source: own calculation base on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

Technological progress and demographic processes, among which the extending life span of people plays an important role, as well as the desire to maintain psychophysical activity as long as possible after retirement, have resulted in an increase in the number of educational programs addressed to the elderly.

In the global information society, a citizen is expected to know the necessary ICT tools and to have the ability to communicate electronically with other people or various institutions. These skills are taught in a professional manner at Universities of the Third Age (UTW), which enable older people to meet such needs as: self-education, staying and working in a group, acceptance, expanding knowledge and skills, filling free time, mental and physical stimulation, learning new technologies and methods of communication, and also create opportunities to pursue interests (Pólturzycki, 1991). When preparing education programs for seniors, every andragogue is aware that they tend to focus more on practical thinking than on theoretical considerations. Hence, the offer of U3A includes many practical courses in the field of computer use or learning foreign languages (Borczyk, Załon, 2014).

The problem of an aging society and the related dynamic development of the environment of senior organizations in Poland and Europe made the subject of education and activation of the elderly very important and noticed by state authorities, EU institutions and many international organizations. Both in the documents of the Council of Europe and in many reports prepared by other European institutions, it is emphasized that along with the development of

a knowledge-based society, the importance of lifelong learning increases. The principle of knowledge for all, lifelong learning is also an important foundation of the Lisbon Strategy.

With reference to the above documents, many various initiatives have been undertaken in Poland, the aim of which is, among others, development of lifelong learning and social activation of the elderly, counteracting their social exclusion and age discrimination (Pędziwiatr, 2015). Many of these activities constitute an innovative approach to the problem and contribute to the increase of social well-being.

Issues related to the elderly are mainly addressed in reports and programs aimed at preventing the exclusion of seniors. It has also become the subject of interest of the scientific community. Psychological aspects of the aging process were presented in their works by e.g. Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski, Dzięgielewska (2006), Szarota (2010) and Stuart Hamilton (2006). Skrzypczak (2010), in turn, studied the importance of older people in the development of the local community, and Semków (2008), together with Kaczmarczyk and Trafiałek (2007) and Połusznia (2012), in their works drew attention to the importance of activating older people.

In Poland, studies on life satisfaction of the elderly were conducted by Braun-Gałkowska (2006) and Dzięgielewska (2006). Halicka (2004), examining this problem, emphasized that it depends on many factors. Among them, she attributed the greatest importance to health, family and economic situation and activity, she also added that social contacts are also important.

Trafiałek (2007) noticed that a new lifestyle in retirement appeared throughout the civilized world, with particular emphasis on sport, social life, and expanding interests.

3. Origin and specificity of operation of Universities of the Third Age

Universities of the Third Age, created in the world since 1973, serve to improve the quality of life of the elderly and to expand their knowledge of modern technologies. The first of them was founded in France by Pierre Vellas, a professor of social sciences at the University of Toulouse. In the second half of the 20th century, similar universities were also established in other countries, e.g. Spain, Belgium, Brazil, Canada and Italy (Ziębińska, 2007, p. 48).

The definition of what the University of the Third Age is is very broad. What mainly connects these institutions is precisely the name and goals as well as a specific group of listeners. Most universities of the third age include among the main tasks in particular: taking care of preserving and increasing the intellectual, mental and physical fitness of the elderly, social activation of the elderly, conducting lectures in various fields of science (in particular medicine, biology, sociology, law, economics, history and art), promoting physical culture under the guidance of professional instructors, organizing interest groups in various fields and scopes run by the participants themselves or individual specialists. The U3A may also carry out information and programming activities through the mass media, as well as scientific and research activities and organize training activities.

In the classic division, the following types of Universities of the Third Age are distinguished:

- French - U3A closely related to the university, where great emphasis is placed on educational activities.
- British - based on the self-organization of the elderly, operating mainly in the form of an association, most often not associated with a university, rather of a recreational nature.
- Canadian - combining the activities of the association and the university, i.e. science and recreation.
- South American - created thanks to the bottom-up initiative of older people who work with difficult youth, socially engaged (it can be compared to social rehabilitation activities).
- Chinese - undertaking creative and artistic activities, promoting the arts, from arranging bouquets to handicrafts (Wnuk, 2012).

In Poland, the idea of creating a U3A appeared as early as 1975, when the first institution of this type was established in Warsaw. In the 1980s and 1990s, the U3A movement developed rather slowly. The largest number of U3As was established in 2007, when more U3As were established in one year than in the first 25 years of the movement's development (figure 3).

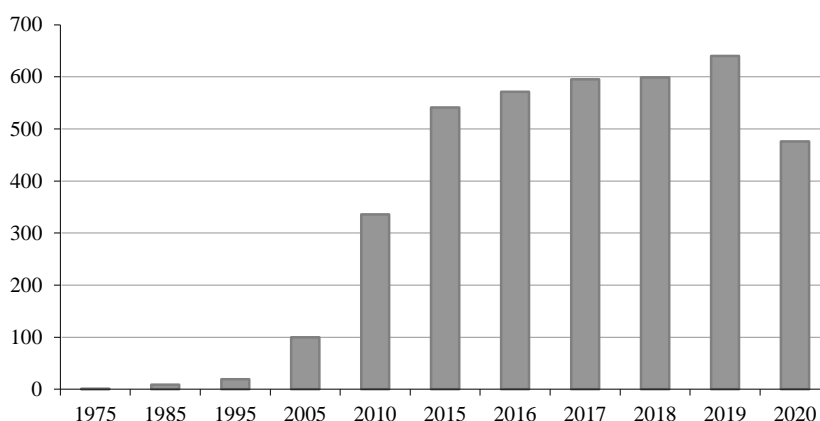


Figure 3. Number of Third Age Universities according to the year in which they started operating in Poland between 1975 and 2020.

Źródło: Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku w roku akademickim 2017/2018, 2019, 2021, GUS.

The coronavirus pandemic reorganized the activities of universities of the third age, and thus significantly affected the functioning of U3A students. The number of operating universities in 2020 decreased compared to 2019 (fig. 3). Nascimento de Maio (2020) in the study of the first wave of the epidemic listed the following negative effects of closing universities of the third age for their students: social isolation, reduced quality of life, emotional problems (stress, uncertainty, depression), boredom, lack of motivation, family and marital problems, deteriorating health and physical well-being (level of strength, general mobility,

functionality), resulting from the forced abandonment of participation in gymnastic, sports and rehabilitation classes carried out so far at the U3A; loss of appetite, change in eating habits, loss of muscle mass. Similar negative effects of the pandemic on the functioning of seniors are also indicated by Grech (2020), Cheung, Fong, Bressington (2020) Duan, Zhu (2020) and Vostanis, Bell (2020). Currently, UTAs in Poland operate in two forms: traditional - French and new - British. The French form assumes that a U3A student can be a person with higher education, and lectures are conducted by representatives of the staff of the university at which the U3A operates. However, according to the British form, any senior can become a student, and education is not supported by a university (universities are run by non-governmental institutions) (Zgliczyński, 2012).

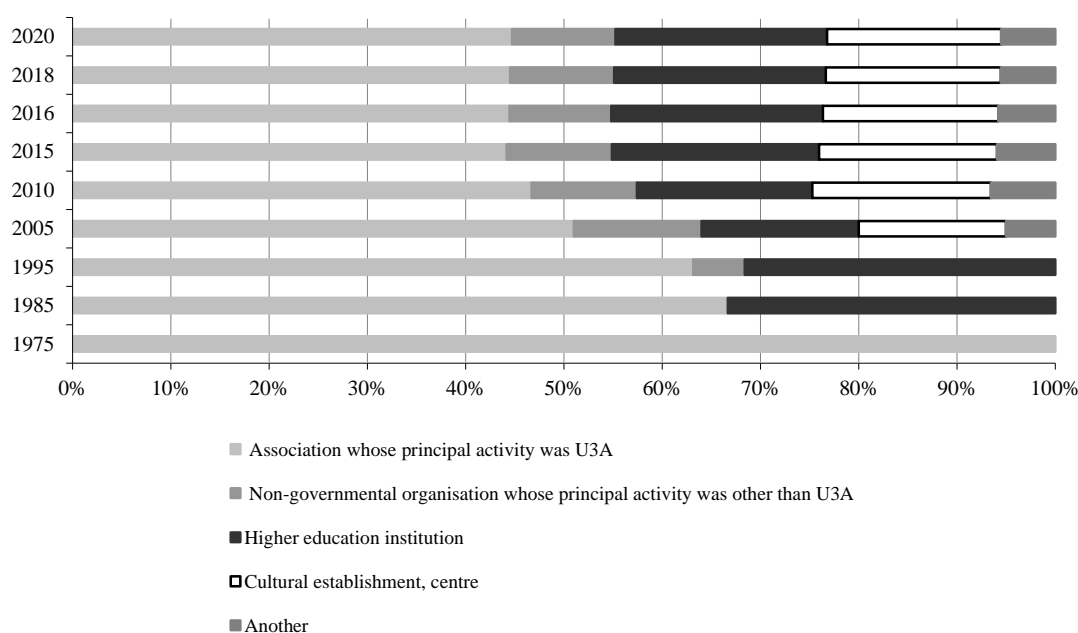


Figure 4. Structure of the Third Age Universities in Poland according to the year of their establishment and organizational and legal form from 1975 to 2020.

Źródło: Obliczenia własne na podstawie: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

In Poland, there are three organizational types of UTAs. Most U3As operate as associations whose main form of activity was the U3A. The institutions established by the associations base their work on the activity of volunteers. Such a structure is most numerous in Poland. A large group is characterized by links with higher education institutions. The third type is activity at community centres, libraries and social assistance centres.

Table 2.

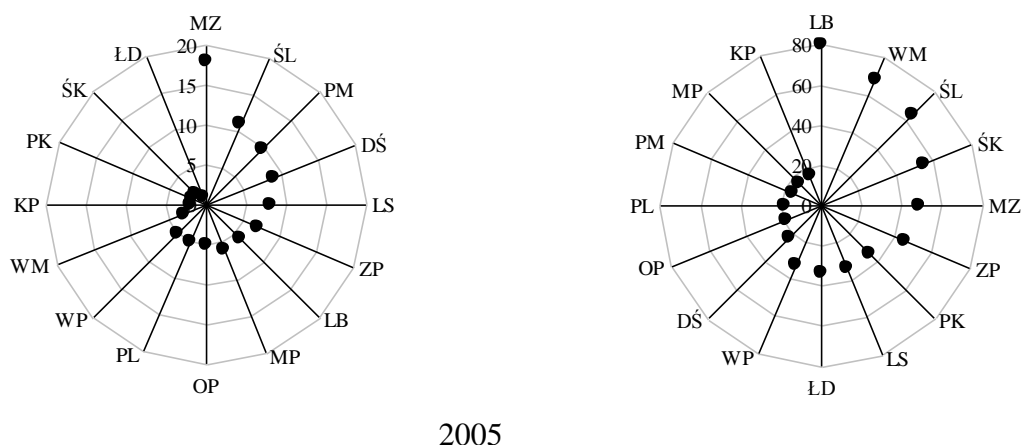
Structure of Third Age Universities according to the organizational and legal form in Polish voivodships in 2020

Specification	(a)/ Associations	(b) non-governmental organisations	Higher education institutions	Cultural establishment, centres	Other
Dolnośląskie	0,31	0,06	0,27	0,25	0,10
Kujawsko-pomorskie	0,14	0,11	0,63	0,09	0,03
Lubelskie	0,44	0,31	0,13	0,13	0,00
Lubuskie	0,50	0,14	0,00	0,36	0,00
Łódzkie	0,39	0,03	0,12	0,30	0,15
Małopolskie	0,38	0,18	0,20	0,24	0,00
Mazowieckie	0,39	0,13	0,05	0,38	0,06
Opolskie	0,75	0,06	0,06	0,06	0,06
Podkarpackie	0,58	0,11	0,21	0,05	0,05
Podlaskie	0,61	0,22	0,06	0,11	0,00
Pomorskie	0,41	0,09	0,19	0,13	0,19
Śląskie	0,32	0,04	0,44	0,13	0,06
Świętokrzyskie	0,63	0,19	0,06	0,13	0,00
Warmińsko-mazurskie	0,68	0,12	0,15	0,03	0,03
Wielkopolskie	0,73	0,02	0,13	0,07	0,05
Zachodniopomorskie	0,70	0,15	0,06	0,09	0,00

a: principal activity was U3A, b: principal activity was other than U3A.

Source: own study on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

When analyzing the organizational and legal form of U3A activities in individual voivodships, one should emphasize the great interest in running U3As by associations. In the Opolskie, Wielkopolskie and Zachodniopomorskie voivodships, it is the most frequently chosen form of functioning of the U3A, over 70% of the operating organizations operate as an association. Against this background, the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodship stands out, where most of the institutions, as much as 63%, operate at a university.



DŚ: dolnośląskie; KP: kujawsko-pomorskie; LB: lubelskie; LS: lubuskie; ŁD: łódzkie; MP: małopolskie; MZ: mazowieckie; OP: opolskie; PK: podkarpackie; PL: podlaskie; PM: pomorskie; ŚL: śląskie; ŚK: świętokrzyskie; WM: warmińsko-mazurskie; WP: wielkopolskie; ZP: zachodnio-pomorskie.

Figure 5. Number of Third Age Universities that started their activities in 2005 and 2021 in Polish provinces.

Source: own study on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

Comparing the development of these institutions over time, in 2020 many more institutions started their activities compared to 2005. Most institutions in 2020 started their activities in Lubelskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Śląskie Voivodships, while this still new idea in 2005 enjoyed great popularity. interest in the Mazowieckie, Śląskie and Pomorskie voivodeships (fig. 3).

Not in all of Poland in the analyzed period did the U3A movement develop so dynamically. So far, most universities have been established in the Mazowieckie, Śląskie, Dolnośląskie and Wielkopolskie voivodeships. However, if we take into account the number of inhabitants over 50, which in the voivodship falls on one U3A, it turns out that the idea of the U3A was also very well received in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Lubuskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Opolskie voivodeships.

The Świętokrzyskie, Podlaskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships are definitely the worst. Seniors there find it most difficult to take advantage of the university's offer. This is a direct result of the fact that in these voivodeships there are much fewer analyzed facilities than in other units (6, 13 and 15, respectively). Świętokrzyskie is one of the voivodeships with the fewest registered NGOs. This may partly explain the small number of UTAs in these areas, as Universities of the Third Age most often operate as non-governmental organizations. Most often they are independent associations, very rarely foundations. Every fifth U3A is subordinated to a local government institution. Usually it is a community center, but it also happens that the U3A operates as part of a library or other unit appointed by the commune/city office. Contrary to their name, U3As are the least likely to operate at universities.

Regardless of the legal form, a clear majority of U3As are associated with a university. If the U3A does not operate within the framework of the university, it signs a cooperation and patronage agreement with the university.

Table 3.

Structure of the Third Age Universities according to the message of the main activity in Polish voivodeships and in Poland in 2020

Specification	Education of the elderly	Integration of the elderly	Activation of the elderly	Self-help	Regionality
Dolnośląskie	0,46	0,50	0,04	0,00	0,00
Kujawsko-pomorskie	0,67	0,19	0,13	0,00	0,02
Lubelskie	0,38	0,56	0,00	0,06	0,00
Lubuskie	0,27	0,55	0,14	0,00	0,05
Łódzkie	0,42	0,36	0,18	0,03	0,00
Małopolskie	0,60	0,31	0,09	0,00	0,00
Mazowieckie	0,59	0,21	0,18	0,01	0,01
Opolskie	0,50	0,44	0,06	0,00	0,00
Podkarpackie	0,68	0,32	0,00	0,00	0,00
Podlaskie	0,11	0,56	0,17	0,11	0,06
Pomorskie	0,50	0,31	0,16	0,00	0,03
Śląskie	0,62	0,28	0,09	0,00	0,01
Świętokrzyskie	0,50	0,31	0,13	0,06	0,00
Warmińsko-mazurskie	0,41	0,53	0,06	0,00	0,00
Wielkopolskie	0,47	0,38	0,13	0,02	0,00
Zachodniopomorskie	0,36	0,48	0,15	0,00	0,00
Poland	0,51	0,35	0,11	0,01	0,01

Source: own study on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

Most institutions cite the education of older people as the main objective of their activities. This type of activity is most often indicated in the Podkarpackie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Śląskie and Małopolskie voivodeships. Universities associating seniors in the Lubelskie, Lubuskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeships set the integration of the elderly as their main objective.

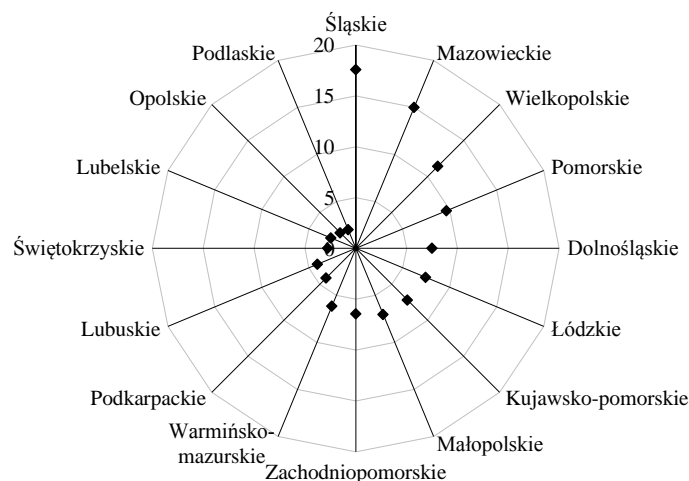


Figure 6. Number of students of Third Age Universities [thousands] in Polish provinces in 2020.

Source: own study on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

The idea of Universities of the Third Age enjoys the greatest popularity in the Śląskie and Mazowieckie voivodeships, here over 15,000 participate in various types of hares. students and Wielkopolskie, where over 10,000 students are registered.

Table 4.

Structure of students of Third Age Universities in Polish voivodeships and in Poland in 2020 by age and gender

Specification	Age			Gender	
	up to 60	61-75	76 and more	w	m
Dolnośląskie	0,16	0,70	0,14	0,87	0,13
Kujawsko-pomorskie	0,13	0,71	0,09	0,85	0,15
Lubelskie	0,03	0,73	0,16	0,85	0,15
Lubuskie	0,07	0,77	0,16	0,85	0,15
Łódzkie	0,10	0,73	0,16	0,85	0,15
Małopolskie	0,09	0,75	0,15	0,84	0,16
Mazowieckie	0,07	0,68	0,21	0,87	0,13
Opolskie	0,07	0,70	0,19	0,87	0,13
Podkarpackie	0,16	0,71	0,13	0,83	0,17
Podlaskie	0,05	0,80	0,15	0,85	0,15
Pomorskie	0,07	0,72	0,20	0,82	0,18
Śląskie	0,15	0,71	0,12	0,80	0,20
Świętokrzyskie	0,14	0,58	0,13	0,87	0,13
Warmińsko-mazurskie	0,11	0,63	0,25	0,87	0,13
Wielkopolskie	0,18	0,66	0,13	0,84	0,16
Zachodniopomorskie	0,09	0,73	0,17	0,84	0,16
Poland	0,11	0,70	0,16	0,84	0,16

w: woman; m: man.

Source: own study on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

In most voivodeships, over 85% of students are women. Most of the students are aged 61 to 75. The percentage of this age group is over 70% of all participants. Persons up to 60 years of age constitute the largest percentage among students in the Wielkopolskie voivodships, ie 18%, Dolnośląskie Podkarpackie 16% and Śląskie 15%.

Table 5.

Structure of students of the Third Age Universities in Polish voivodships and in Poland in 2020 according to education and labour market attitude

Specification	Education				Labour market status			
	primary	basic vocational	secondary	tertiary	retirees	pensioners	employed	unemployed
Dolnośląskie	0,04	0,12	0,51	0,33	0,94	0,04	0,02	0,00
Kujawsko-pomorskie	0,06	0,16	0,55	0,23	0,85	0,11	0,03	0,02
Lubelskie	0,03	0,04	0,51	0,42	0,95	0,05	0,00	0,00
Lubuskie	0,02	0,10	0,51	0,37	0,80	0,19	0,01	0,00
Łódzkie	0,03	0,07	0,50	0,41	0,88	0,07	0,04	0,01
Małopolskie	0,03	0,09	0,47	0,41	0,86	0,06	0,06	0,01
Mazowieckie	0,02	0,08	0,47	0,43	0,92	0,04	0,04	0,00
Opolskie	0,02	0,08	0,65	0,25	0,90	0,08	0,02	0,00
Podkarpackie	0,01	0,06	0,50	0,43	0,86	0,05	0,09	0,00
Podlaskie	0,02	0,11	0,41	0,47	0,95	0,02	0,02	0,00
Pomorskie	0,04	0,08	0,47	0,41	0,90	0,06	0,04	0,00
Śląskie	0,02	0,09	0,54	0,35	0,87	0,08	0,05	0,01
Świętokrzyskie	0,02	0,06	0,57	0,35	0,95	0,04	0,01	0,00
Warmińsko-mazurskie	0,02	0,09	0,51	0,38	0,81	0,17	0,02	0,00
Wielkopolskie	0,03	0,11	0,50	0,36	0,80	0,08	0,10	0,01
Zachodniopomorskie	0,03	0,09	0,53	0,35	0,91	0,05	0,03	0,00
Poland	0,03	0,09	0,50	0,38	0,88	0,07	0,04	0,01

Source: own study on: <https://stat.gov.pl>, 20.02.2023.

Among the listeners, over 88% are retirees and people with secondary education who in their free time broaden their knowledge and acquire new skills. Quite a large group are also people with higher education, especially in the Podlaskie Voivodship, where almost 47% are people who have completed higher education. Over 40% of students with higher education also study in the Mazowieckie, Podkarpackie, Lubelskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Łódzkie, Małopolskie, Łódzkie and Pomorskie voivodeships.

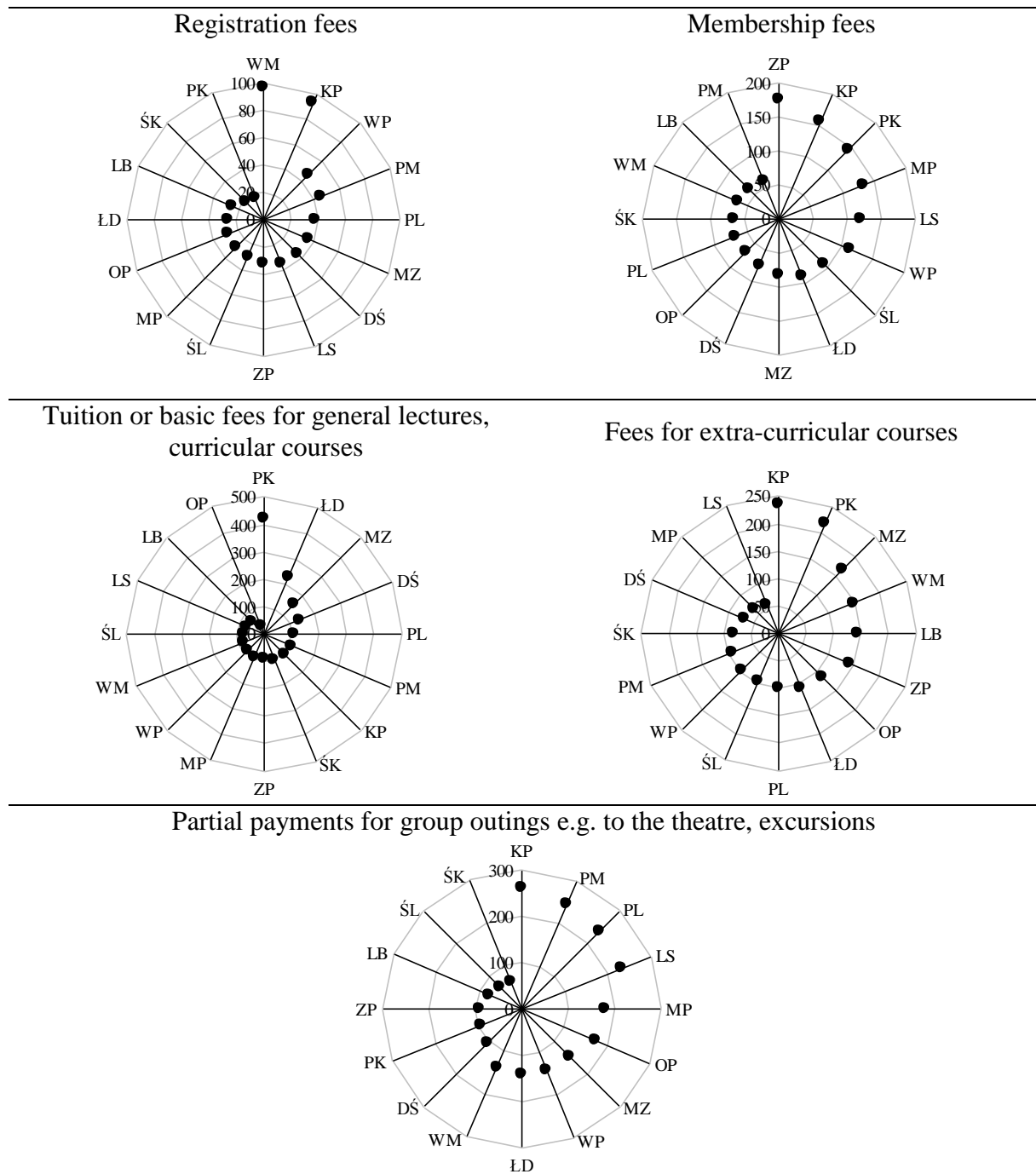
All universities have regular classes. Classes are understood as meetings of groups, sections, workshops, courses, clubs and interest circles - so all types of classes that take place regularly (e.g. weekly) or cyclically (e.g. 10 meetings on a given topic) are intended for relatively small group of participants and require active participation. The largest number of regular classes per number of U3As is organized in the Podkarpackie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Wielkopolskie voivodships.

Lectures are a typical university form of knowledge transfer. Lectures are understood here as didactic meetings attended by the majority of U3A students at the same time. During lectures, students usually do not perform practical tasks or exercises. In this sense, lectures can also include some lectures, seminars, seminars, etc. Almost all U3As offer lectures understood in this way, but by far the largest number of hours of lectures is offered in the Pomeranian Voivodeship, whose offer is more than twice as high as that of the Małopolskie Voivodeship, which is ranked second.

Almost all U3As, apart from lectures and regular classes, organize various types of activities parties, cultural events and social gatherings. The purpose of such meetings is most often to give seniors the opportunity to participate in social and cultural life. Most events of this type are offered in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. This value is significantly higher than the second in the order of the Dolnośląskie voivodeship.

A particularly important issue, especially for retirees and pensioners, are matters related to the need to pay fees. The highest entry fees are charged in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeships, the fee is about PLN 100, while the lowest in the eastern provinces of Lubelskie, Podkarpackie and Świętokrzyskie, where fees for classes range from PLN 20. In the case of associations, members are required to pay a membership fee. The highest rates apply in the Zachodniopomorskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Podkarpackie provinces, where they exceed PLN 150. The highest fees for program classes are charged in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, where they exceed PLN 400. Much lower fees are charged in the Łódzkie Mazowieckie and Dolnośląskie voivodeships. Universities often offer courses in small groups, in addition to program classes organized for the whole year. These are mainly computer and language courses as well as sports activities. The cost of such classes is the highest in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Podkarpackie Voivodeships, where it may exceed PLN 200. The lowest costs for additional activities are in the Lubuskie, Małopolskie and Dolnośląskie voivodeships.

Joint trips to the theater or sightseeing tours are very popular among listeners. Gathering a certain number of people, depending on the attraction, gives you the opportunity to negotiate a lower price, which is very beneficial for U3A students.



DŚ: dolnośląskie; KP: kujawsko-pomorskie; LB: lubelskie; LS: lubuskie; ŁD: łódzkie; MP: małopolskie; MZ: mazowieckie; OP: opolskie; PK: podkarpackie; PL: podlaskie; PM: pomorskie; ŚL: śląskie; ŚK: świętokrzyskie; WM: warmińsko-mazurskie; WP: wielkopolskie; ZP: zachodnio-pomorskie.

Figure 6. Average amount of fees charged by Third Age Universities in Polish voivodeships in 2021 by destination [per student in PLN].

4. Conclusions

The topic of activation of seniors plays an important role in many countries and has both social and economic consequences. Activation of seniors is easier thanks to financial support obtained from various social programs, both national and offered by e.g. the European Union.

A special type of activities that favor the activation of the elderly are the Universities of the Third Age, which have been created in the world since 1973 in order to improve the quality of life of the elderly.

The idea of Universities of the Third Age is most popular in the Śląskie and Mazowieckie voivodeships, where over 15,000 students participate in various types of hares, and the Wielkopolskie voivodeship, where over 10,000 students are registered.

All universities conduct regular classes such as lectures, workshops, courses, the main purpose of which is to activate older people and develop their interests. The largest number of regular classes per number of U3As is organized in the Podkarpackie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Wielkopolskie voivodeships.

Almost all U3As, apart from lectures and regular classes, organize various types of activities parties, cultural events and social gatherings. The purpose of such meetings is most often to give seniors the opportunity to participate in social and cultural life. Most events of this type are offered in the Mazowieckie voivodeship.

The need to pay the registration fee should be assessed unfavourably, which prevents many seniors from participating in the classes. The highest fees are charged in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeships and certainly constitute a significant expense for many people. The willingness to participate in various types of language or computer courses or sports activities is also associated with incurring additional costs, which is an additional burden on the seniors' budget. The activities undertaken by the U3A are undoubtedly a good example of social innovation, the task of which is to activate the elderly, but in the future they should be co-financed to a large extent so that the price does not limit access to the U3A's offer.

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