(Un)Obvious Education, or Complexities of the Polish Education Aimed at Older People

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Abstract: The contemporary combination of information infrastructure with the commonly experienced transformation of knowledge created, in relation to education especially for older adults, an entirely new area of activeness. In accordance with the social awareness, education became an accessible good regardless of age. In this context, the maximal extending of the potential group of education receivers means, on the one hand, meeting the real social expectations towards so-called educational services. On the other hand, it is another challenge which the contemporary education faces. Unfortunately, the system of permanent education was not created in Poland since what is missing is both the strategy and some practical resolutions enabling old people the access to education with regards to their educational. Presently, the University of the Third Age is the only solution in the educational offer. In order to change the present *status quo,* what is needed is the re-definition of education and the modern perception of education and then perhaps, there will appear, the expected, by the senior citizens, module educational solutions providing them not only with the competencies but also the acknowledged certificate confirming their knowledge.

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Introduction

Contemporary processes of modernization and digitalization redefined all the elements of social space. As a result of these transformations, it is the technological challenges that create the new social reality. These transitions are associated with a slow disappearance of, on the one hand, the linear thinking in which writing had an enormous importance. On the other hand, this process is related to the traditional manners of gathering and storing the knowledge. The interactiveness of the contemporary world (both online and offline) causes to appear some newer and newer generation of systems of mass communication. Along with the development of information infrastructure, there are also drawn the new directions of education aiming at the creation of an entirely new model in terms of quality. The new technologies, however, transform not only our environment but also, they re-value our present vocational qualifications by damaging their until-now (universal) *status quo.* The competencies and qualifications being acquired during the period of academic education do become of little assistance with the passing of time not only in the professional career but also in day-to-day life.

It is more and more frequent that people—regardless of their age and their position in the job market—experience the need of "broader perspective of the world" so that they can comprehend the reality and the phenomena happening there in relation to their profound interpretation. Not only are the youngsters against the traditional manner of accumulating of the knowledge (identified with the defined level of education) even though it is the younger generation that points out to the necessity of changes in this area, which, in the long run, will enable them to create a modern working place but also these people who enter so-called the age of "late maturity." At the same time, these social expectations create quite specific educational behaviors being the reflection of the commonly experienced globalization of consumption and culture patterns (Bednarek, 2012, p. 77). In this context, the information society—new recipients of the educational services—definitely

expect the new model of education which would meet the challenges of further life regardless of their calendar age.

What should change, however, is not only the role of education and the perception of it—as a common and available good for everybody despite their age—but also as a widely understood educational offer itself. Owing to this, education in the twenty-first century must exceed (beyond) the model of education formed at the end of the previous century since the digital technologies "invaded not only in our lives but also in ourselves" (Franus, 1998, pp. 204-206). In this situation, it is necessary to re-define the key concept, that is "education." Contemporary broad definition spectrum the reflection of which is the ever-multiplying terminological apparatus does make us each time to its re-definition (due to the blurred categorization criteria in relation to the "display" accepted in the particular academic discipline). The ambiguity of the term "education" (e.g., identified as a phenomenon, a process or an action) and the multiplicity of its shapes in action (including the type, form, and range) not only hinders any attempts of its unambiguous definition but it provokes to the permanent extension of its semantic field. The multi-dimension of education is reflected in the further attempts of the re-definition of the concept and is becoming a specific structure modeling, enabling the reshuffling of the theoretical construct into the defined practical solutions.

In the case of senior citizens, the element initiating the change in the current model of education of adults is the increasing year-by-year educational activeness of older citizens. The implication of such change is more and more intense searching by the senior citizens of some new paths of their own education. Related to older adults, the education within the frames of *lifelong learning* is, most importantly, the creation of such educational solutions. On the one hand, meet the expectations of this group. On the other hand, cater for its internal diversity.

Lifelong Education
Defining the outline of the education of the future, Delors indicated the necessity of the rereading of the concept of education and the institutional dimension of science by the removal of the

defined temporal and spatial frames (Delors et al., 1996). According to Delors, education is the primary factor regardless of one's age. In this context, education of older citizens acquires a new meaning. The education whose final phase meant receiving some particular certificate is already the past. However, the future of the education is, most of all, facing the real social needs arising from the ever-changing conditions in which the contemporary society must find itself (a society which perceives the knowledge as the source of innovation and information as even non-material "product"). The education openness to change and the flexibility in creating the defined educational models which are expected by a society should consider the needs of an individual in the desire to discover oneself in the process of one's own identity but also co-create the construct of social dimension through the extension of the area of the secondary socializing (out-of-family). This specific type of integration existed in education for ages, but it was somehow restricted only for the young entering the adult life.

The abandoning of the stereotypical perception of education suggested by Delors, including the rejection of the process of scholarship the age limitations and reducing the institutional role of education does not mean separating knowledge from the roots but re-defines its new frames. Lifelong learning is the popularization of science in which the accent is to be transferred from the obligatory education and its supervision onto the variety of the educational offer depending on the expectations of the recipient.

Regardless of its shape which is adopted and the organization form (formal, informal, or incidental), lifelong learning integrates with this concept. Enriching the knowledge and improving one's own competencies throughout adult life—far from the traditional school bench but somehow with the simultaneous application of all technological possibilities which the contemporary knowledge offers to us—it is at the same time the mission and vision of the adult future education, including people entering so-called the old age. The changes to which the education of the senior citizens should be subordinated must happen collaterally with the newest civilizational achievements.

Old Age and the Attempts of Its Re-reading

The afterthought on the old age in the contemporary academic discourse is attempted to be drawn by the new direction of narration which through the changes happening in culture will, in an accurate manner, reunite the image of the old age with its reality. It is the new narration which rooted in the individual experiencing the old age—either by themselves or close relatives—that can give the assumption to the reinterpretation not only of the concept but also the extracting of the old age as a social phenomenon. This change is somehow a consequence of a slow "disappearance" and old paradigm in the description of an old age resulting from the defined linguistic correctness accepted in some analyses. It was reflected in the specific blurring of the traditional terminological grid. The new theoretical construct built in the academic discourse causes that the old age undergoes a particular metamorphosis in the next, even-newer attempts of its re-reading. This change is accompanied by the development of the "intellectual" analytical tools applied in the (re-)defining the concept of the old age. Having reached a certain age, many people do not approve the stereotypical image of a senior citizen (sick, weak, and inefficient) and thus demanding care and, therefore, undertake some actions modifying their image in the social awareness as well as the protective ones with the aim of preserving one's subjectivity.

The appearance of some new terms in the terminological grid creating the terminological frames of the old age, e.g., ageism, slowly changes its narration. Butler, who introduced this term indicated the existence of a set of beliefs, predictions or stereotypes which determine the image of (older) person depending on their calendar age (Butler, 1975, p. 35). Ageism, however, focuses the attention on both the attitudes and the stereotypes affecting the biological differentiating the people owing to their age concentrating on the competencies possessed by the senior citizens (Szukalski, 2004). However, the competence model of the old age includes two basic elements: the responsibility of old people for themselves and the ability to deal with the difficulties. A crucial part of this model is education itself. Education, however, facilitates the acquisition of the

distance to reality, constitutes a particular "foundation to create the conditions and possibilities of lifelong learning, learning until the old age, learning through the old age, and learning at the old age" (Malec, 2011, p. 25).

The old age is a natural stage of completion of the adult life, which, unlike childhood and the youth, is a period definitely prolonged with time. Experiencing the old age in the process of an active ageing which is accompanied with the pro-educational attitude, not only improves the quality of life but also teaches the conscious control over it. The way we experience the old age depends on many factors. These factors mark some specific border points of an older adult's functioning. The old age is this phase of life which characterizes many variables providing the individual image of an old person. Similarly, the process of getting old can be passing in various forms depending on the individual mental features and the conditions of the social-cultural environment. Moreover, the retirement is not always associated with the beginning of the old age. Also, the attitude of old people considering their own ageing can take various shapes. It results from the defining some strategy of actions related to one's own. "In the opinions of senior citizens, the concept of successful ageing is perceived through the attitude and the strategy of dealing with, whereas the life satisfaction is identified with the satisfaction over the present life along with the satisfaction over the past experiences" (Halicka, 2004. p. 30).

The concept of active ageing appeared in the 1960s and it "means keeping the physical fitness and the ability to work professionally (…) as long as possible" (Richert-Kaźmierska, Forkiewicz, 2013, p. 128). The widely understood concept of active ageing is also some kind of working strategy; it means the active part in the social-cultural and economic life (nationally or locally). Among many of the conditions determining the quality of life of older citizens, we can distinguish not only their rights but also their duties, including the right to lifelong learning as well as the obligation to undertake the educational chances (Jurek, 2012a, p. 11). In this way, the concept of active ageing is integrated with the educational activeness of older adults. It allows the old citizens to enrich their knowledge of the world, to widen their former

interests or to discover new passions as well as to re-interpret the former experiences from their life.

The concept of active ageing does not only display the new image of an old person but also it constitutes the counter-balance for the traditional presentation of the old age since it positions old people within the society in a different way (WHO, 2015). However, the continuing revalorization of the old age in the social meaning along with the increasing year-by-year number of people who are turning the border between maturity and older age has caused the increase in the seniors" awareness of their rightful (due to their age) social rights, which has led to the constituting of some new rights, including the right to education.

In this context, the theory of active, successful ageing by Maddox (1964) points out that the senior citizens still want to be active despite their life situations which are conditioned in terms of health and occupation. In the theory of personality in the process of ageing and old age by Neugarten (1964) and the cognitive theory of personality and ageing by Thomae (1992), it is old people that build the image of their old age. In the assumption accepted by Neugarten, the type of adaptation to old age draws the direction of the old person's activeness. However, according to Thomae, the most important factor in experiencing the old age is the self-perception as the person getting old. Therefore, accumulating of experiences throughout one's own life can also be "successful" in the self-creation at the old age and depending on one's own engagement, one can have the influence over the re-organization of the surrounding reality. According to Bromley (1966, pp. 105-110), the constructive attitude which is characteristic of life optimists and the people interested in the future does not change with the age. Following this way of thinking, the personality formed throughout the years is presented in the accepted attitude towards the old age and its displays, whereas the knowledge of one's own predispositions and possibilities is a unique guide to the type of activeness undertaken by old people.

Linguistic Rehabilitation of the Old Age

As a rule, the identification of the old age takes place generally by the application of the criteria of the age being reached, therefore, to describe it, the following terms are used: older age, the late age or more metaphorically "the autumn of life" (sometimes the criterion related to retirement is used, e.g., the retirement age.) It is not always that the verbal terms can be treated as synonyms (e.g., a pensioner does have to stand for a person at an old age). The lack of precision not only in the common application of the terms related to old people but also in the academic terminology causes some terminological simplification and specific verbal creations to spread, such as the term of "late maturity" (Czekanowski, 2014, p. 58).

The aspect of placing the knowledge on the old age in the linguistic context also has its own connotations in the perception of old people. The manner in which we talk about them is the indicator what we think about them. The imagination of the old age and the way we talk about the aged (especially in the colloquial speech) also has its social consequences. Language, however, is a social phenomenon but we also learn it through our participation in the social practice. This co-operation is distinctly heard in many commonly used expressions (often not objective), which are applied to same old people. We sometimes more or less consciously use one of the terms or another to display what we think of the old age. The verbal picture of the world reflects "diverse verbalized interpretation of reality grasped in the form of opinions (…) [implied] by some verbal forms preserved on the level of social knowledge, beliefs, myths" (Bartmiński, 2006, p.12). The verbal awareness is continually modified and transformed under the influence of new experiences and events. Therefore, the verbal constructs, created and used by the speaker allow to learn their mentality and the manners of the perception and contextualization of the world (Bartmiński, 2006, p. 15). At the same time, the language (leaving the individual aspect) constructs and constitutes the social life going into all spheres of life and becoming a particular foundation of the changes happening in the commonly understood reality. However, the defined categories and their organization are the basis to mapping

the meaning of the words, while the surrounding speech places the precise mapping performed for particular words (Bokus, Shugar, 2007, p. 153). Therefore, the specific limitations of a language at the same time become the borders of thinking about the old age. The expressions which we use to talk about old people and the old age results from the image of reality defined by us. Its outline arises not only through the influence of experiences, knowledge, or emotions but also pretty frequently from the reference to the stereotype which often determines the vocabulary applied in the verbal contacts.

Expressing usually the positive attitude towards the senior citizens, we use the terms: grandfather, senior, the grand old man—mainly related to a family member. Presenting the negative emotions, we use the other words: gaffer, wrinkly, old-timer, old geezer, old boy, or old fossil. In this polarization, some asymmetry can be perceived. The predominance of the pejorative words (as a grandfather and an old man can be valorized negatively depending on the context of the utterance,) indicates rather negative social perception of the old age by the majority of the population. This far-fetching simplification results from the conscience-stricken depreciation of the old age which presently "has become *in gremio* deprived of its eternal social function which is the cross-cultural transfer of cultural contents" (Kamińska, 2016, p. 135) for the sake of the specific cult of youth which comfortably has settled in our culture. The verbal perception of the old age presents how the concept of the old age has been determined and "filtered" by language. This (double) verbal determination has the influence on shaping the social reception of the old age. At the same time, the new sphere for new narration is being created. The narration in the form of a structured modeling, rejecting the polarization for the sake of accumulations created as a result of specific neologisms, e.g., late maturity or by acceptance and the application of new terms (e.g., ageism). It is perhaps then that the (enriched) language which we shall use to describe the act of getting old will cause the transfer of some of the terms in the praxis side and will not be out of social, positive experience (Zdziarski, 2014, p. 83).

Learning to Be

"Learning to be"—the title of the report by Edgar Faure in 1972 considering, among others, the future of education—is one of the four then-presented essential pillars of its further development. The remaining pillars were: "learning to do," "learning to know," and "learning to live." They jointly provided the directions of changes in relation to lifelong learning (Faure et al., 1972). The reference to them after many years indicate that they have not lost anything of their importance in relation to the education of old people. As a theory, the authors of the report assumed, however, the universal access to education regardless of age. The undertaken by old people the educational activity not only counter-acted the social reclusion but most importantly, it strengthens the independence and one's autonomy as well as constitutes a particular remedy to be happy. Whereas "participation in educational programs and enterprises has some therapeutic value for the aged. It allows them to preserve the intellectual ability which in turn influences hindering the biophysical processes of getting old" (Richert-Kaźmierska, Forkiewicz, 2013, p. 130).

In this perspective, education directed at seniors should have taken its place in the offer of lifelong learning (dedicated to people who are no longer subjected to scholastic processes). However, the contemporary connotations of this access to education are completely different than initially assumed. For years, old people were not perceived as the recipient of widely understood educational services. Moreover, the rapid development of the concept from the 1970s of establishing the Universities of the Third Age as the basic (and at the same time only) place of the comprehensive education for the seniors did minimize completely any other forms of education in the offer of permanent education. "Learning to live" in the context of "lifelong learning" does not impose any rigid functional forms of the education of old people, including its institutionalization. On the contrary, it is to fulfill the role of the seniors' further integration with the society.

The University of the Third Age (U3A) exerted an important role in separating the specific educational path devoted to old people in many countries, e.g., in France, in Belgium, in

Spain, in Canada and the further phases. However, in Poland, the University of the Third Age (regardless of the leading organ) preserved some stereotypical way of perception of the education of old people being far from the initial pattern. The first U3A was founded in Toulouse owing to the initiative of Pierre Vellas within the then-present university (Vellas, 1977). U3A was an academic center whose actions were dedicated to old people. "The characteristic features of the French model are a high level of didactics, academic research activities with the simultaneous diversity of organizational forms" (Ziębińska 2007, p. 160). The idea of U3A conception was closely associated with the informal education at the academic level. The reference to university in the name U3A increased the importance of the undertaken educational initiative. In Toulouse, the running of U3A within University allowed implementing a certain standard of educational services whose guarantee was the staff comprising mainly of the academic lecturers. Moreover, running and the administrative-legal supervision of the university provided U3A with a proper status. Soon, in France there appeared similar centers, e.g., at University in Nice and University in Caen. With time, this education solution a la France whose recipients were the seniors were transferred to Belgium and Switzerland. This dynamically developing movement for the sake of old people education in 1975 led to establishing the International Association of Universities of the Third Age (Steuden, 2011, p. 93).

This solution was also transferred to Poland. The first University of the Third Age in Poland was founded in 1975 owing to the initiative of Halina Szwarc within the Postgraduate Centre of Medical Education in Warsaw (Szwarc, 1995). However, with time the Polish adaptation of the French model underwent further transformations and lost many of Vellas' idea. Most importantly, what was changed was the primary administration-legal attribution. U3A can be founded and run by universities and activate the senior citizens, but they also can operate under the patronage of associations and foundations offering the activities of popular science as well as within the statutory operations of various institutions of cultural character, e.g., libraries or local culture centers, and even at care facilities, including day-care

centers, social care centers and similar (Jachimowicz, Nalepa, 2012, p. 10). This caused that the concept of U3A being treated as superficial and in many cases the decrease in the quality of educational services (Borczyk, Nalepa, Knapik, Knapik, 2012). The quality differences are visible already at comparing the Polish educational offer and its factual level with the proposals related to educating older people in other countries, e.g., in Italy (Czerniawska, 2004, pp. 169-182) or in Switzerland (Kamiński 2016). The analysis of the contents of various offers of Polish centers—being named the University of the Third Age—when compared to the assumptions of the French model (of enabling the informal lifelong learning of old people at the academic level, preparing the proper staff to work efficiently with the senior citizens or running the research considering the medical, legal or mental-social problems) displays that the present proposals related to activating the seniors are relatively close to the British model in which the stress is placed on the self-education and the actions supporting old people. The British model (also named Cambridge model) refers to so-called self-help in which education has more practical character (that is taking advantage of life experiences of the people with similar problems rather than intellectually challenging and broadening the horizons of possessed knowledge). Even though this model is more democratic, it is not favored by all senior citizens (Rivard-Lacroix, 2009). Comparing the Polish educational offers for old people with similar proposals in other countries in which the Universities of Third Age also run, we can notice a great difference, e.g., in Switzerland. There "the most popular forms of education for old people are Universities of the Third Age. (…) Academic professors give the lectures, and the subject matter is mainly academic and highly diverse, e.g., psychology, economy, theology, medicine" (Kamiński, 2016, p. 259).

Polish U3A, perhaps not to be blamed itself, concentrating mainly on the group of older people, preserve the age-related social segregation, separating the education of the seniors from the traditional educating of the adults not only in the administration legal or spatial sense but also in relation to the program. The lectures offered to the seniors are predominantly referring to the

problems which can only interest older people, similarly to the subject matter of the common classes (e.g., U3A proposals in March 2017: seniors' meeting the manager of Social Insurance Institution, first-aid course "Active Senior"—meeting the firefighters, meeting related to International Women's Day—fee 10 PLN, practicing Nordic Walking, a lecture: "Senior's Modern and Safe Finances," a workshop: "Senior's Modern and Safe Finances"—working in 10-person group; a lecture and a workshop run by the National Federation of Associations of Universities of the Third Age). This artificial division from the rest of the society and also placing the U3A in local cultural centers and day-care centers only deepens the further social degradation of the senior citizens (Klimczuk, 2012). The uneven treating regarding education instead of supporting the feeling of their own value with the seniors only preserves the mechanisms of their depreciation. Lack of everyday contact with these people in the process of education with the rest of society and the constant contact with the same group as well as the subject matters (limited to the issues related to the processes of ageing) only increases the alienation. "It is frequent that U3A are set up and managed by older people who are the leaders in the seniors' local environment" (Borczyk, Zacłona, 2014, p. 17). However, not all of them can keep (despite their willingness) the pace of the happening changes and not all of them are properly, theoretically prepared in terms of andragogy or gerontology or practically, e.g., animator of culture or resulting from the prior own educational experiences in teaching others.

Against the appearances, introducing the segregation (understood as positive discrimination) through the creation of Polish network of U3A and creating the small local educational centers for older people (out of institutionalized system of lifelong learning: professional advancement centers, extra-mural education at the primary, secondary and higher level, postgraduate studies, and similar) additionally favored the preservation of the negative stereotype of old persons in society. Therefore, it is necessary to build the awareness of the Polish society the new image of the old age. In Poland, all displays of discrimination towards the aged could be, and at the same time should be leveled with the use of education. Education on the one hand dedicated to the society, and

on the other hand to the senior citizens as crossing the borders dividing both worlds is necessary so that "the old age-friendly culture" becomes a reality (Szukalski, 2016, pp. 50-51).

For many years, the education of the adults realized within the lifelong learning was significantly associated with the administration legal solutions allowing for the completion of knowledge. It was related to the development of educational solutions aiming at the advancement of the education level of the evening education (at the secondary level) or extra-mural studies and also the professional advancement in forms of courses, workshop, or post-gradual studies. However, it is not the education the senior citizens expect. Lifelong learning directed at this group of recipients should, on the one hand, consider their former educational experiences and the present needs in terms of acquiring new competencies (knowledge and abilities) and on the other hand exclude any barriers limiting the access to education. It was long ago that changed the traditional recipient of widely understood education of adults in the educational sphere. Thus, the concept of lifelong learning itself should transform.

In Search of the New Model of Education for Senior Citizens

The paradigm of information technology whose key matter constitute the social processes exceeding the economy and disavowing the former role of natural resources as the developmental factor. Presently, the primary "source" which makes the economic development dynamic is the information which simultaneously provides us with the frames of the society being created (Castells, 1996). In this combination, it is not the product (information) that it is important—it is its contents and the transfer within the borders of the current scene. These elements of contemporary economy create a specific network "of completely different, non-linear spatial logic."

In the digital era, the traditional model of university studies dating back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as well the present state for the recent two centuries is slowly abandoned. The specific microcosms of a university (in which there were a master and the knowledge included in the world of books) have ceased to meet the needs of a contemporary university. Simultaneously, the

system of education is no longer associated with "proper" professional training. The transformation of knowledge in the information society takes the various shapes, and at the same time, it influences the education. This state causes that both society and an individual have some different expectations when it comes to education. "The process of learning always has the individual and biographical character (…) however, in the society which is learning the individual has got freedom considering what they want to learn and how they want to learn, which is becoming the key factor of the contemporary education of adults" (Solarczyk-Ambrozik, 2014, p. 275). Thus, old people have an absolute right to such education.

Open University
Creating the concept of the Open University is most importantly the answer to still demanded from the society the need of institutionalized education, allowing for lifelong learning. Simultaneously, it is an attempt to combine the formal with informal education, that is reaching beyond the traditional frames of education "divided" into subsequent levels and phases. Open Universities are open as a part of technical universities (e.g., the University of Science and Technology in Krakow (AGH), Poland), humanities (e.g., the University of Warsaw, Poland) or environmental university (e.g., the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland). By attributing it to higher education, the Open University keeps the values of academic education in its educational offer. Additionally, eliminating the recruitment limitations and the choice of any area of education and its range enables its listeners (regardless of age and prior level of education) both the realization of one's own educational aspirations and getting some solid competencies.

Simultaneously, its defined organization-legal form enables educating less formally and allows for creating the solutions of diverse forms. Education takes place not only intramural but also extra-mural, the latter even taking the possibility of the distance learning. The operational standards of the Open University functioning (including the defined legal regulations confirming the acquired knowledge and competencies) will allow for the creation

of educational services directed at various recipients and meeting their expectations. The participation in lectures is beneficial when it comes to the updating the knowledge as well as enriching it. At the Open University, apart from the broadening of theoretical knowledge, one can acquire new practical abilities, thus multiplying one's own competencies.

The Open University is perceived as an educational solution oriented at the future and the future education (apart from the period of obligatory schooling). The idea of lifelong education and the individual building of one's own education path is integrated with its vision and mission. However, the educational offer supported with author programs of academic lecturers is the guarantee of the education quality. The openness is not only the possibility of meeting the expectations of some particular recipients and organization of special lectures but the constant readiness to change. The Open University really is an "open" place not only for new educational initiatives but also the meeting place for the world of science, culture, and art. It organizes some debates with the representatives of the academic, artistic environments or various political parties.

It seems that it is the very Open University that is the (educational) response to the educational needs of old people. Especially the ones who would wish to begin their academic education in the form of regular meetings. Moreover, the ones who favor the interpersonal contacts. For one group of people, this type of education will be the possibility of completion of the former educational plans and the development of interests, for the other one the inspiration to further activeness, e.g., of social type. Yet, some other will treat the participation in as some encouragement to make an advancement of one's own particular qualifications (the Open University with regards to its courses and training provides its listeners with some certificates confirming the participation and stating the knowledge and abilities as well as qualifications, providing the persons have passed the necessary examinations, e.g., knowledge of foreign languages). The professional skills achieved at the Open University can be of some assistance to the seniors wishing to return to the job market if they feel such a necessity.

Asynchronous Education (Also Known As Asynchronous Teaching)

The model of learning within the frames of asynchronous education is the changed context of education functioning. It allows for the education at any place and time. Simultaneously, the extended, often virtual educational sphere—applying the modern information technologies in the process of teaching and learning—it is always a chance of education for older adults (who are not always able to take part personally in the lectures, e.g., due to their health issues). In the asynchronous education, the computer-related support of the educational process was based on the contact *online* and can be of an internal character, within so-called networks as well as external, by the application of electronic mail, participation in the internet discussion forum or audio-visual conference (Juszczyk, 2003, pp. 862-866).

Asynchronous education becomes the future of the education aimed at the seniors, especially the ones who have got the positive attitude towards the modern technologies in relation to the prior experiences with their application. It ensures, so necessary in the older people's education, the flexibility with reference to the educational contents and the place in which the educational process is to be realized. Simultaneously, in the asynchronous education one can use some positive features of old people, e.g., self-discipline, ability to manage one's time as well as acceptance to realize some particular exercises following the instructions.

The application of the interactive possibilities of education in asynchronous education along with the increase in readability of the new contents through pictures facilitates the transformation of the accumulated information. Active building of the knowledge, an individual verifying of the sources of information as well as the possibility of rapid exchange of information, on one hand, strengthens the feeling of self-realization and on the other, one's functioning in the network increases the number of contacts with people of diverse ages which with time can move from the virtual life to the real life.

Creating the modern form of distance learning aimed at not only older people is associated with an individual and also

collective co-participation in the educational network. However, it has to be accompanied on one hand with a strong internal motivation of each person as they learn for themselves, and on the other the proper set of tools, e.g., as e-books or materials to be applied at e-learning and constituting the completion of the traditional model of education. E-learning is perceived as a type of distance education, supported in the process of education by the modern information technologies. (This type of education has made a long way from education thanks to radio in some inaccessible areas in Australia through diverse educational solutions using television to the subject matter online presentations at selected platforms and interactive contact with the lecturer). Using *e-learning* a person learning by oneself decides on the time and pace of work and the range of the knowledge being acquired.

Year-by-year, *e-learning* is more and more popular (not only at the higher level of education) thus becoming the most modern tool of contemporary education. The process of education supported with modern technologies does facilitate the communication of persons while learning (including e-mail). Getting the information from the network, including the participation in discussion groups or writing a blog increases not only the availability of many sources but also it facilitates their ultimate selection. In the educational practice, also the so-called mixed mode is applied. Then, the direct contact with the contents sender is extended by the lectures in form of (audio-video) conference, or sharing the materials *online* (at universities there are created so-called environmental systems of information where through the graphical interfaces various information is transferred to particular users: from registration to selected lectures through the information on time and place of particular lectures, to sharing the necessary materials).

The additional advantage of e-learning in undoubtedly the possibility of the immediate access to the educational material and the possibility of the multiple uses of its selected fragments. In the education of older people, *e-learning* can prove a miraculous tool. It allows for pausing the text at any place or going back to some former fragments as well as the individual enriching of the

elaboration or its modification. Therefore, *e-learning* properly composed in the whole model of lifelong learning allows for the participation in the educational process in which the age limitation will (finally) cease to have any importance.

Conclusion

"Educational actions among the old citizens are one of the most important elements of their life quality improvement" (Halicki, 2009, p. 208). In his considerations on the strategies of actions concerning the problem of the population's getting old, Steuden refers to the "Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing" (2002)*,* the document in which the program of actions towards old people was proposed by providing the directions of support. The first one considered the widely understood old age and the preparation and promotion of the programs of optimal ageing, including the definition of potential possibilities and abilities of learning. The second one referred to the quality of life during the period of ageing perceived through the standpoint of health and well-being. What it indicated was the meaning of the lifelong learning and the necessity of "grasping" the knowledge for the sake of up-keeping the cognitive abilities which indirectly influence one's fitness. However, the third direction was oriented at the creation of the friendly and supportive environment in which old people could feel safe (Steuden, 2011. pp. 28-29).

Active ageing which is experienced by many seniors not only worldwide but also in Poland proves that the former futuristic visions of their education regardless of their calendar age are becoming more and more real. Old people themselves ceased to refrain from education. Moreover, the research results underline that the more educated they are, the more willing they are to learn further (Pakuła, 2010, p. 180). While the educational activity undertaken by them strengthens their internal motivation stimulating both to new educational challenges and to entering the new social roles as well.

Lifelong learning in the context of old people is of significant meaning nowadays. The demographic changes clearly indicate that the generation of the post-war population boomers will soon begin to retire, and for many of its representatives it will

not mean retreating from the active life (Pakuła, 2010, pp. 38-39). Many of them will be characterized with so-called competence model of old age defined by the pro-active adaptation to the old life providing them with the greater feeling of autonomy, the feeling of perpetration and the sense of an individual representation in various areas of their own functioning. Old age citizens are better and better at understanding the necessity of lifelong education as some of them have already been convinced of its effectiveness (Pakuła, 2010, p. 184).

Due to the mentioned above, behind the frames of a stereotypical image of the old age appears a new portrait of a person at the old age. The person who will have some other—not necessarily new—social expectations but they will announce them with reference to their modified needs. One of them can be the possibility of education. The lifestyle which they will wish to live is, however, is inextricably with the lifelong learning. The completion of the educational need will be felt regardless of one's age, the present level of education or professional experience. Such matter of fact will, on the one hand, impose a change in social perception of the old age, and on the other hand, will initiate the process of changes in the present model of education which was once created for old people. No matter if we are going to name education the recipient of which will be old people the lifelong learning, permanent education, or the education for the adults, what is the most important is the re-define the frames of their quality model.

This new area of the considerations on the education of the senior citizens in which both the Open University and asynchronous education (including e-learning) play a vital role yet has not become significantly popular in Poland with regards to the existing national educational solutions dedicated to old people. However, the concept of the Open University is beginning to operate at some academic centers in Poland. Perhaps, their achievements in this field, as well as the great number of attendance, will encourage other universities to follow. Nevertheless, lifelong learning in the context of education of old people remains closed to so-called asynchronous education and wider application of e-learning. Implementation of these solutions

will not be possible unless there is a change in the way of thinking about the cognitive potential and possibilities of the senior citizens by people who are directly engaged in creating the educational offer and multiplying the solutions in the educational area for the aged. Undoubtedly, the changes are inevitable, and they should happen in relatively short time. Should that not happen, old people's meeting the contemporary education needs will remain difficult, as the educational offer prepared for them remains in the "era of chalk." Due to this, the educational transfer of old people in the twenty-first century so that they would be able to take advantage of all the possibilities of the dynamic technological development is still the distant future. Learning how to use a computer is just the first step to asynchronous education and not the final contact with new technologies. What should be done at the moment is to create some applications for the senior citizens in the form of so-called educational agents which will allow old people (with reliant mobility but still intellectually active) to learn thanks to the distance learning. The implementation of a virtual educational (pedagogical) help will enable them the individual use of the newest solution within the asynchronous learning and will make them feel safer during the educational process itself. The pedagogical agent would also introduce the social context into the educational process increasing not only the engagement of old people in terms of educational activities but also the beneficial effects of education by giving them the feeling of safety while learning with the support of a computer, e.g., as better-learnt knowledge (Landowska, 2008, p. 86).

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