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LIBRARIES' ACTIONS TO SUPPORT AND ACTIVATE SENIORS



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ABSTRACT: **Thesis/goal** – The aim of the article is to attempt to identify and formally and thematically organize the forms of cultural animation used in work with the oldest library users, and to indicate examples showing good practices in this area. **Method** – the method of literature analysis was used combined with the analysis of sources in the form of statistical summaries and library websites. **Conclusions** – Demographic forecasts for developed countries predict a gradual increase in the percentage of people over 60 in the general population. This is due to the gradual improvement of living standards and advances in medicine. Library statistics confirm the higher percentage of seniors among library users observed in recent years. Therefore, there is a justified need to take greater account of services and activities addressed to seniors when developing library work programs.

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of its operation, the American Center for the Future of Libraries (CFL), established by the American Library Association (ALA) in 2014, has pointed out the growing importance of older people in the group of library users. The CFL website indicates trends and phenomena important for today's world that may influence the activities of libraries and which libraries should take into account when designing their offer. Currently this website, called "Libraries of the Future", discusses over 40 trends, but even at the very beginning of its development when there were half as many, one of the most important trends identified was 'Aging Advances', which can be understood as progress in aging, but generally meaning increasing life expectancy. It is therefore an indication that the progressive aging of Western societies is a serious challenge for all institutions organizing social life, including libraries. This means that the profile of the average library user will change, and this description will increasingly include older people, especially those already in retirement. This, in turn, indicates the need for appropriate profiling of library collections so that older people can find items that interest them. Moreover, it is not only about the thematic criterion – it does not only mean collecting specific genres of fiction and non-fiction books especially preferred by seniors (as shown by reading research) – but increasingly it means that taking into account the needs of older people should also have an impact on collection policy from a formal perspective, when it comes to so-called large print books or audiobooks and devices that make reading easier for seniors. Moreover, as CFL specialists point out, when planning library programs and organizing various meetings, training courses, workshops, etc., libraries will increasingly be indicating older people as the addressees of this offer and potential participants. Finally, it is no less important to recognize seniors as potential volunteers who, while maintaining good health during retirement, can serve libraries with their time and skills (*Aging Advances*, 2024, May 10).

SENIORS IN DEMOGRAPHIC FORECASTS

Authors of publications about older people, their life situation, various problems, needs, activities, interests, etc. very often try to establish an age limit for this category of people from the start. On the one hand the determination seems simple, because the senior group does not generally include people under 60 years of age, hence the emblematic entry "60+" that appears quite often in various statements to briefly introduce this topic. Also, various institutions, organizations and research centers dealing with social issues, demography, health situations, etc. mostly agree on adopting 60 years of age as the senior age limit. For example, on the World Health

Organization WHO website containing a list of the main health topics (a kind of thematic glossary: see <https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageing>), under the entry aging, older people are referred to as those who are 60 years old and over.

On the other hand, however, there is a problem that in some studies and statistical compilations the conventional age limit for seniors is 65, which makes the comparison of some statistical data methodologically difficult. This difference in approach to senior age clearly results from differently defined retirement ages. In EU countries, the regulations regarding the statutory retirement age most often include the age of 65, sometimes without any difference resulting from the division into women and men. Such countries include, for example, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg and Slovenia. There are countries where this limit is slightly lower and is set at the age of 62-64 (e.g. Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia). However, there are more EU countries where the retirement age is higher and set at 66 (e.g. Denmark, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands) or even at 67 (e.g. Greece, Italy) (*Ageing Europe...*, 2023, Nov 15). Moreover, some economists and demographers indicate the need to further increase the statutory retirement age, even to 68. These are not just postulates, such a solution has already been adopted by the Danish Parliament, setting the retirement age at 68 years from 2030 and at 69 years from 2035 (*Pensions at a glance...*, 2024, march 22). It can also be added that some forecasts go even further in this respect. For example, experts quoted by the British daily "The Guardian" state that in the 2040s there will be a need to raise the retirement age to 71 (Hill, 2024).

The growing share of older people in the general population and the resulting growing interest in the problems of this group have meant that since 2018, the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw has also published, among various statistical summaries, an annual under the general title "The situation of older people in Poland". So far five annuals have been published in which the category "people aged 60 and over" was adopted for the purposes of analysis. The first year also included a forecast for 2050, stating that the population over 60 years of age could then amount to approximately 13.7 million people, which would constitute approximately 40% of the total population (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 13)!

Later forecasts by the Central Statistical Office are not so worrying, but according to these in three decades the percentage of Polish seniors in the general population will clearly exceed 30%. According to the 2022 annual of the Central Statistical Office¹, at the end of 2021 there were already 9.7

¹ Unfortunately, in the Statistical Annual for 2023, the Central Statistical Office refrained from providing data on the total population in individual age categories, including those 60-64, 65-84 and 85 and over.

million (9,730,000) people aged 60 and over in Poland, which constituted 26% of the total population of Poland of 37.9 million (37,908,000) people. Five years earlier, at the end of 2016, the population of Poland aged 60 and over was 9.1 million people, which constituted 24% of the total number of 38.4 million (38,433,000) people. However, 10 years earlier, at the end of 2011, there were “only” 7.8 million (7,796,000) people aged 60 and over, which in percentages amounted to 20% of the total number of 38.5 million (38,538,000). Therefore, both in absolute numbers and in percentages, the number of seniors in Poland is constantly increasing, and this trend is expected to continue in the coming decades. With the overall population of people living in Poland decreasing, the percentage of people over 60 will increase. According to the demographic forecasts of the Central Statistical Office, the number of people in post-working age² in 2035 will amount to 9.6 million people, which would constitute 26.7% of the total population of 36 million. In 2045, there will be 10.7 million people of post-working age, which would mean that the percentage of these people would increase to 31.5% of the total number of 34 million inhabitants of the country. However, in 2055 the number of people of post-working age will increase to 11.3 million, so the corresponding percentage would be 35% of such people in the then expected total population of 32 million³. These numbers are both fascinating and disturbing. Fascinating, because if the forecasts come true, it will mean that thanks to advances in medicine, greater efficiency of the health care system and a healthier lifestyle, the average life expectancy in developed countries will significantly increase. However, this is accompanied by obvious concerns, particularly regarding the efficiency of the pension system. There is also no shortage of statements in which the aging process of Western societies is described as a “demographic time bomb”⁴.

Data from Poland fits in with the pan-European data in this respect, as the constantly growing number of senior citizens is also shown by Eurostat data⁵. The pace of this growth is illustrated by a comparison of the latest data on the presence of older people in individual EU countries with data from a decade ago. Just a decade ago (2013) the percentage of people aged 65+⁶ in EU countries, exceeding 20% of the total population, was re-

² For the category of people of post-working age, the Central Statistical Office adopts a division according to the retirement age, which means men aged 65 and over and women aged 60 and over.

³ According to the same forecasts, in 2060 the number of people of post-working age would decrease to just below 11 million, but since the total population would also decrease, the percentage of older people would still exceed 35%. *Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2023*. GUS 2024, p. 226.

⁴ See for ex. Cunningham S. (2010). “Demograficzna bomba zegarowa” czy “Apokaliptyczna demografia”? Wielka debata o przyszłości emerytur. In: *Polityka społeczna. Teorie, pojęcia, problem*. Difin, pp. 275-304.

⁵ Eurostat – European Statistical Office – <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

⁶ Unlike the Polish Central Statistical Office data discussed above, in summary demographic analyses, Eurostat advances the senior age limit and uses a simplified division into three age groups: 0-14 years, 15-64 years and 65 years and more.

corded only in three countries – Germany, Greece and Italy. In 2023, it was already in 18 countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden. As you can see, Poland is not included in this ranking, because in 2023 this indicator was slightly lower for Poland and amounted to 19.9% of people 65+ in the total number of inhabitants (*Population structure and ageing, 2024, march 28*). However, it can be taken for granted that in the Eurostat data summarizing the year 2024, Poland will be among the EU countries in which people 65+ constitute at least one fifth⁷ of the general public. It is worth adding that although Poland is not among the European leaders in terms of the share of seniors in the population of individual countries, it is still a leader in one category. That is, in the decade of 2013-2023, among the 27 countries making up the EU, Poland was the country with the fastest growth rate in the percentage of people over 65 years of age, amounting to 5.5 percentage points in Poland during this period (*Population structure and ageing, 2024, march 28*). In short, Poland is not yet the “oldest” in the EU⁸, but it ages the fastest (*Population structure indicators..., 2024, march 28*).

CONDITIONS FOR THE WELL-BEING OF SENIORS

In the literature on the elderly, the term “people of an advanced age” is also used, but it often has the connotation of people who are chronically ill, infirm, and have somatic and mental problems. Therefore, using this term to describe a broad category of people aged 60+ or even 65+ would be unjustified, because in this category there are people who are completely fit and without any serious health problems.

Despite the widespread belief in the permanent shortcomings of the health care system, it should be admitted that the progressive increase in the percentage of 60+ people in the general population of developed countries is the result of the longer-lasting good condition of seniors, which in turn is the result of greater availability of effective drugs and medical treatments and greater awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. But elderly people, in order to maintain good physical and mental shape, in addition to basic conditions such as a calm lifestyle, balanced nutrition, appropriate medical care and support from their loved ones, also need a certain dose of activity. It is therefore important that older peo-

⁷ Long-term forecasts also show that from the current one-fifth (21% to be precise) as the average share of people 65+ in the European population, this indicator will increase further to 30-32% in the second half of the 21st century and only at this level will it stabilize until the end of the century.

⁸ In the category of average age in the EU, Italy is in the lead, with the median age for the average Italian approaching 50 years (in 2023 it was 48 years), and Poland is still in the middle zone of the EU countries with a median of 42 years.

ple, who may naturally have general problems with fitness, concentration and memory, have an opportunity to develop their interests, demonstrate commitment and maintain their mobility. Such people have a greater chance of postponing the most difficult period in the lives of seniors, when vital forces weaken, fatigue increases, activity decreases, motivation to act weakens, and apathy and resignation appear.

Some seniors decide to extend their professional activity beyond the statutory age if they have the opportunity and their health allows. Those who wish to or have to retire can, on the one hand, devote more time to their family (e.g. grandchildren), but they can also use more time for themselves and spend it, for example, on traveling and establishing new contacts. They can also use the time gained for their further development by taking part in various educational activities, developing current and new interests, taking advantage of a wide cultural offer, presenting their own artistic achievements, engaging in volunteering, reading, etc.

When it comes to educational, artistic, and sometimes physical activity, libraries – especially public libraries – can offer seniors a wide range of activities apart from just reading. For those older people who, after retirement, intend to take advantage of various forms of cultural activity more often, but also for those who sometimes feel lost after this significant change in their current lives, the public library, being an institution that is rather close (especially in larger or medium-sized towns) and above all free of charge, is a perfect place to engage in the life of the local community and provides seniors with many educational, information and entertainment needs.

SENIORS IN LIBRARY STATISTICS

The projections resulting from an analysis of demographic data stating that libraries will, in a sense, be the beneficiaries of the process of increasing life expectancy and longer activity of older people are already being confirmed. Library statistics show that the number of people just before retirement or already of retirement age is gradually increasing. According to nationwide data published by the Central Statistical Office, in 2022 the percentage of people over 60 years of age using public libraries was 17.5% (*Biblioteki publiczne w 2022 roku, 2024, march 22*), while 5 years earlier it was 14.4% (*Stan bibliotek w Polsce 2018, 2024, march 24*), and in 2007 it was only 5.6% (*Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach 2007, p. 41*). This allows us to conclude that the percentage of people from the highest age category in the total number of public library users has tripled over the last 15 years. Data published by individual provincial libraries, without exception, show a constant increase in the percentage of people over 60 in the total number

of people using libraries, and it is a reason for increased optimism that voivodeships that usually present the lowest indicators of library activity of seniors can also boast significant improvement in these indicators. One example is the Subcarpathian Voivodeship (Podkarpackie). The 2007 Central Statistical Office report showed that Subcarpathia was the region with the lowest percentage of older people using public libraries. At that time, people aged 60+ in Subcarpathia constituted only 4.1% of all public library users (*Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach 2007*, p. 91). However, in the following years successive increases were recorded. The annual report published by the Provincial and Municipal Public Library in Rzeszów shows that in 2013 people from the 60+ category already constituted 7.4% of all users of public libraries in Subcarpathia. Five years later this indicator increased to 11.1%, and in 2022 the percentage of people over 60 years of age using libraries in Subcarpathia was 14.2% (*Biblioteki publiczne województwa podkarpackiego...*, 2022, p. 12). This means also that in Subcarpathia the presence of people over 60 in public libraries has tripled in percentage over the last 15 years. Although it is worth noting that in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, which comes first in this ranking, this percentage has already exceeded 20% and in 2022 it was even 21.5% (*Informacja o sytuacji osób starszych...*, 2023, p. 25).

Gradually improving indicators of library activity of older people, although they are a reason for some satisfaction, cannot hide the fact that this activity, compared to the number of older people in the entire population, is quite low. In 2018, there were 855,000 active readers aged 60+ registered in public libraries, but this represented only 9% of the total number of people in this age group (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 14). In 2022, public libraries already had a total number of 889,000 active readers of senior age, but due to the increase in the total number of older people, the indicator of active library users in this age group did not change and remained at the same quite low level of 9% (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2022 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 12). The lack of general satisfaction in this area is further deepened by data showing the decreasing activity of seniors in projects known as Universities of the Third Age (Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku – UTW). It is true that libraries are not mentioned among the institutions that offer such forms of activity to seniors. Most often, they are organized by various associations, universities, cultural centers and non-governmental organizations. But the Central Statistical Office in the list of institutions conducting such classes (*Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku...*, 2024 march 12, p. 12) takes into account also libraries⁹. However, interest in this form of activity among

⁹ An example is the UTW organized by the Municipal Public Library in Bytów (Pomeranian Voivodeship). It is worth emphasizing that the organizers report an increase in reading rates among

older people is unfortunately slowly decreasing. According to data from 2018, there were 640 such courses in Poland, and the number of students was 113,000 (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 14). In 2022, the number of UTWs decreased to 552, and the number of their attendees decreased to 87,000 (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2022 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 12).

The question arises what to do to not only maintain the satisfactory statistical growth of the presence of older people in libraries, and thus to maintain a specific bond with people who already use the libraries' collections and participate in the events organized by them, but also to attract many of these still absent seniors who know nothing about the libraries' offers for the elderly or are not convinced of their attractiveness. The fact that there are relatively speaking many such people is proven by the results of research conducted by Renata Aleksandrowicz among students of the University of the Third Age run by the University of Wrocław. The results showed that as many as 82% of respondents stated that they did not participate in events for seniors organized by public libraries, explaining this by among other things the lack of appropriate information or lack of interest in this form of activity (Aleksandrowicz, 2020, pp. 64-65, 162-163). However, Aleksandrowicz's research was conducted in the years 2008-2010, and, as previously stated, since then the percentage of people over 60 in the activities of public libraries has tripled. Therefore, it should be assumed that at the same time the percentage of seniors who are uninformed about or reluctant to use the animation offer of libraries has decreased accordingly.

The demographic phenomena described earlier, included under the heading "aging advances", are of course the primary cause of and explanation for the growing presence of older people in libraries (presence understood in two ways – both through the use of lending facilities and through participation in library events)¹⁰. But there is also a secondary reason, which is the appropriate response of libraries – especially public ones – to these phenomena. Noticing the gradual increase in the activity of seniors, libraries began to structure their offer and plan programs of library events in such a way that their main addressees were older people. So while it was not so obvious two decades ago, today when you visit the website of a random public library you can expect with great certainty that somewhere, either on the home page or in the submenu, there will be information with the title "Offer for seniors" or something similar.

UTW "library" students. See. Prądyński J. (2020) Nietypowy Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku przy Bibliotece Miejskiej w Bytowie. *Poraadnik Bibliotekarza*, p. 36.

¹⁰ Although the word "event" often appears in a colloquial and ludic context, this term is also used in the National Library's reports on the condition of libraries in Poland to describe various forms of animation found in libraries. Therefore, in this article this word is also used in the appropriate context.

This applies not only to provincial and district libraries, but also to smaller city-municipal and commune libraries. A review of "good practices" presenting the diverse, interesting and original program offer of public libraries addressed to seniors will be included on the following pages of this article.

The slogan "beyond the library walls", often perceived as a metaphorical description of library activities using electronic channels, does not have to refer to activities using the Internet. This slogan can also be interpreted quite literally as extending the library offer beyond the physical library building. So, of course, you should wait with open doors for older people who want to visit the library, but you can also reverse the direction and visit older people who, for some reason, cannot go to the library but who would be happy to participate in various forms of library animation and bibliotherapeutic activities. Some libraries therefore cooperate with social welfare homes that do not run their own libraries and cannot afford to employ a person with bibliotherapeutic competencies (Pytlos, 2017, p. 32).

When organizing library meetings attended by seniors, it is advisable to establish cooperation with local centers supporting older people in advance, which will be beneficial for both parties because both institutions have a common goal in this respect – intellectual and physical activation of seniors. Establishing cooperation with a local senior support center increases the chance of significant participation of these people in projects implemented by libraries. This is confirmed by the originators of the project entitled "Now e-reading, or how to become a smart senior" organized by the Municipal Public Library in Opole. The organizers admit that cooperation with the Information and Educational Center "Senior in Opole", and especially their assistance in recruiting participants, made the Library's event particularly successful in terms of attendance: Nearly 220 seniors took part in 19 meetings organized as part of this campaign by MPL in Opole (Baranowski & Pawluk, 2020, p. 21). Similarly, it may be beneficial for libraries to establish cooperation with local institutions organizing Universities of the Third Age and adult day care centers.

A process unfavorable for the cultural activity of older people is the gradual decline in the number of libraries, including public ones, which has been observed in Poland for over 30 years. This affects not only seniors living in rural areas, but also city residents. Older people obviously become less mobile with age and are less willing to travel longer distances. As M. Niezabitowski wrote, among the factors deepening the social exclusion of older people are "traffic difficulties" and "limitations in social contacts of seniors outside the housing estate" (Niezabitowski, 2018, p. 302). Therefore, the liquidation of a local branch of the local public library may cause seniors' contacts with this institution to weaken.

GOOD PRACTICES

The library offer addressed to older people can be divided most simply into two areas: On the one hand, there are forms that are directly related to the promotion of reading books and magazines. On the other, there are forms that are sometimes referred to as reading-related which are not directly tied to reading, but which may result in people becoming interested in books on topics related to the various workshops, exercises, meetings, training courses, clubs and other library events in which they participate.

FORMS OF ACTIVITIES AND LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE AREA OF READING

Research by the National Library in Warsaw (BN) shows that the reading activity of people over 60 years of age is increasing. In the analysis of the data obtained during the research this category of respondents was further subdivided into people aged 60-70 and people over 70. Research results published in 2024 show that, compared to results from five years ago, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of active readers in both of these subcategories. In the 60-70 age category, 34% of respondents declared in 2019 that they were reading books, and in 2023 it was already 40%. In turn, in the category over 70 years of age, 21% of respondents in 2019 declared they were reading books, and in 2023 the number was 32%. The authors of the study explained these significant increases by stating that among others things “generations that are relatively well-educated, and therefore familiar with reading, are starting to age” (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, p. 11). At the same time, it should be noted that older people are still not very willing to use books in electronic form. The BN study from 2023 showed that in the group of people aged 60 and over, only 2% of surveyed women declared they were using electronic books and only 1% of surveyed men (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, p. 20). This leads to the conclusion that the traditional public library – with its predominant offer of books in printed form – remains an attractive source of free reading for seniors who are active in reading. This is certainly not the primary source, because respondents more often indicate their own purchases, borrowing from family and friends, or receiving a book as a gift as a source of reading material. But 13% of surveyed people aged 60 and over indicate the public library as a source of reading, which is a similar indicator to the result recorded for the entire group of respondents without division by age (14%) (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, p. 26).

The BN study also shows that the types of books most often chosen by people over 60 years of age are historical and social novels, contemporary high-art literature and documentary literature (biographies, memoirs, ar-

ticles, essays, journalism, historical monographs and reports) as well as books on religious themes (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, pp. 76-79).

However, the currently low interest in e-books among people aged 60+ in Poland, shown in the above-mentioned study, should not cause libraries to give up trying to profile the e-book offer in terms of the preferences of older people. It is true that sometimes generalizing statements are made, saying that older people are largely digitally excluded because even if their financial status does not result in the lack of access to a smartphone, laptop, and home Wi-Fi, they do not have sufficient IT skills to function efficiently in the digital environment – for example, to service a bank account online, fill out an official form, make an online purchase, check a timetable available online, order an e-prescription, or simply to contact someone via the Internet not only by e-mail but also by videophone using some Internet messenger. Refraining from profiling a library's e-book offer according to the interests of seniors would, however, be an unjustified confirmation of the opinion that seniors are digitally excluded and have no interest in using information technologies. It should rather be assumed that the currently low rates of using e-books by Polish seniors will gradually improve, approaching the 2-digit rates recorded in more developed countries¹¹.

In this regard, the approach of the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw is puzzling: in annual reports published since 2012 under the general title "Information society in Poland", the division for individual age categories has been 16-24, 25-54 and 55-74¹². In other words, there is no 75+ category, as if the use of the Internet by the oldest people for contacts with public administration, banking operations or online shopping were statistically negligible¹³. Let us note that 30 years ago, i.e. in the early 1990s, when the first websites appeared and PC devices became standard household equipment, people who are 75 years old today were just over 40 years old. Therefore they were professionally active and often had the opportunity to develop their IT competencies at work or at home. So even if people from the 75+ group are not enthusiastic about TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media tools today, people from this age category should absolutely not be classified as electronically illiterate and omitted from statistical compilations.

¹¹ For example, a 2021 study by the American Pew Research Center showed that as many as 18% of American respondents over the age of 65 reported using e-books.

See: *Three-in-ten Americans now read e-books* (2024, may 27). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/06/three-in-ten-americans-now-read-e-books/>

¹² See for ex. *Spółeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce w 2023 roku*. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5497/2/13/1/spoleczenstwo_informacyjne_w_polsce_w_2023_r..pdf

¹³ The Central Statistical Office is not alone in this respect, because the European Statistical Office Eurostat, in its tables presenting the popularity of the Internet in EU countries, also limits the highest age category to people aged 65 to 74.

BOOK DISCUSSION CLUBS

The most common form of cultural animation in the libraries' offer related to the promotion of reading are Book Discussion Clubs (*Dyskusyjne Kluby Książki* or DKK). In a sense, this idea is an extension of a format that libraries have long used, which involves organizing author meetings. The difference, however, is that a well-known and widely read author might not participate in the DKK meeting. A library moderator is needed to organize the meeting and to encourage participants to talk about interesting reading material. Since 2007, the main promoter of book discussion clubs has been the Book Institute (*Instytut Książki*) in Krakow, a national cultural institution established in 2004. The Book Institute also provides financial support in this area, allocating funds for this purpose from a grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The total amount to be distributed included in the ministry's budget is 2 million PLN. The direct beneficiaries of the DKK program are provincial libraries, which use the funds obtained to purchase books for clubs operating in a given voivodeship and to organize club meetings. The Book Institute also runs an information service for DKK organizers and arranges training for meeting moderators¹⁴. Although generally people of all ages can participate in DKK meetings, some public libraries organize club meetings especially for seniors. An example is the Public Library in the Żoliborz District in Warsaw, which established its first DKK in 2017, and in 2022 created a second club called the Senior Book Discussion Club¹⁵.

BOOKS BY PHONE

This service makes it possible to order books home for those who, for various reasons, cannot go to the library themselves: It is aimed at older people among others, although it should be clarified that not only older people can use it but also people with disabilities or bedridden illnesses. The service is, of course, free of charge and is most often offered under the conventional name "books by phone", although it should be clarified that according to library regulations, in addition to telephone contact e-mail is also accepted as a method of placing an order for books. It is worth noting and appreciating that some library regulations for the "book by phone" service specify a fairly large number of volumes that can be borrowed at one time. For example, the Municipal and District Public Library in Racibórz (Silesian Voivodeship) allows one to borrow eight books as part of

¹⁴ *Program dotacyjny dla DKK* (2024 may 23). Instytut Książki. <https://instytutksiazki.pl/kluby-ksiazki,6,program-dotacyjny-dla-bibliotek-wojewodzkich,11.html>

¹⁵ *DKK Dyskusyjny Klub Książki* (2024 may 27) Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Żoliborz. <https://bpzoliborz.pl/bpzoliborz/index.php/dyskusyjny-klub-ksiazki-dkk/>

this service¹⁶, and the Municipal Public Library in Ełk (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship) allows up to ten volumes at a time¹⁷.

Libraries also offer the same service under other similar names, such as “books for the home” (see e.g. Oleśnicka Biblioteka Publiczna, Lower Silesia Voivodeship)¹⁸, “book delivery” (see e.g. Public Library of the Grodzisk Mazowiecki County, Masovian Voivodeship)¹⁹, “mobile book” (see e.g. Cultural Center and Library in Przytyk, Masovian Voivodeship)²⁰ and others.

Library regulations sometimes specify the age of people who are entitled to use this form of borrowing, but they are not consistent in this respect. For example, the Public Library in Sianów (West Pomeranian Voivodeship) states in the regulations of the “mobile book” offer that it can be used by people over 60 years of age²¹. By contrast, the Public Library in the Bemowo District of the Capital City of Warsaw has determined that the service is addressed to people over 70 years of age²², while the Public Library in Rembertów states in its regulations that the service is only available to people over 75 years of age²³. Apart from a possible discussion about which of the adopted age criteria is the most accurate, it is enough to suggest that sometimes it is worth being flexible in certain situations and adapting the service to individual cases.

LARGE PRINT BOOKS AND AUDIOBOOKS

A solution that can make older people use library collections more often and willingly is to use various devices to support people who have problems reading texts with small fonts. Among others, the Provincial Public Library in Łódź decided to purchase devices that make it easier for seniors and people with visual impairments to communicate with text.

¹⁶ *Książka na telefon* (2024 may 13). Miejska i Powiatowa Biblioteka Publiczna w Raciborzu. <https://www.biblrac.pl/pl/site/index/2-abc-czytelnika/101-regulaminy-cenniki/117-ksiazka-na-telefon.html>

¹⁷ *Książka na telefon* (2024 may 13). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Ełku. <https://biblioteka.elk.pl/oferta/ksiazka-na-telefon/>

¹⁸ *Książka do domu* (2024 may 13). Oleśnicka Biblioteka Publiczna. <https://biblioteka.olesnica.pl/dla-czytelnika/ksiazka-do-domu>

¹⁹ *Książka z dostawą* (2024 may 13). Biblioteka Publiczna Gminy Grodzisk Mazowiecki. <https://biblioteka.grodzisk.pl/nasze-uslugi/ksiazka-z-dostawa/>

²⁰ *Mobilna książka* (2024 may 13). Centrum Kultury i Biblioteka w Przytyku. https://przytyk.pl/artukul-1718-mobilna_ksiazka.html

²¹ *Zamów książki, a my je dowieziemy!* (2024 may 13). Sianowskie Centrum Kultury – Biblioteka. <https://scw.com.pl/zamow-ksiazki-a-my-je-dowieziemy/>

²² *W BB można zamówić książki z dostawą do domu* (2024 may 13). Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Bemowo m.st. Warszawy. <https://bibliotekabemowo.pl/w-bibliotece-na-bemowie-mozna-zamowic-ksiazki-z-dostawa-do-domu/>

²³ *Regulamin usługi książka na telefon* (2024 may 13). Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Rembertów m.st. Warszawy. https://www.bprembertow.waw.pl/images/Regulamin/regulamin_ksiazka_na_telefon.pdf

These are, for example, special scanners that, after copying a book page with the optical character recognition (OCR) function enabled, send the scan to a hands-free module. In turn, in the reading room of this library, older people can rent an electronic magnifying glass, which simultaneously enlarges and highlights the text being read (Markiewicz & Zwierzyńska, 2021, p. 26).

Taking into account the needs of older people resulting from the deterioration of visual acuity, some libraries try to profile their collections with seniors in mind, collecting books with larger print. An example is the Public Library in Radomice, which has prepared a “Shelf for Seniors” for this purpose, where readers will find books printed in large fonts²⁴.

Older readers who, due to impaired eyesight, will be more interested in books on tape will also find something suitable in the library offer. Despite the ongoing evolution in access to audiobooks, which involves moving from physical media to online access, library collections still include many audiobooks on CDs and even cassettes. Many libraries also offer the option of renting a device called *Czytak*. There are libraries that even have several such devices, and of course they lend them free of charge. *Czytak* is an easy-to-use and small audio player manufactured in Poland, allowing you to play both MP3 files as well as uncompressed audio and audio in the format of your choice. The large capacity of the internal memory (which can also be expanded with an external flash card) means that dozens of audiobooks can be saved on the device. Although *Czytaks* are recommended as devices intended mainly for blind or visually impaired people, it is emphasized that they are also a good solution for seniors who have problems with reading. However, some libraries specify in their regulations for making Readers available that they can be borrowed only upon presentation of a certificate of visual impairment.

READING-RELATED FORMS

EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

Among the classes offered also to seniors, language and computer courses are the most embedded in library practice. Calling them “reading-related forms” is justified because participants of such classes also have the opportunity to use the library’s collections and borrow language learning materials or books on computer use.

It is true that there is a fee for participating in a library language course, so it is even more important to emphasize and appreciate that in many

²⁴ *Półka dla seniora – nowa oferta Biblioteki Publicznej w Radomicach* (2024 may 28). Gminna Biblioteka Publiczna w Radomicach. <https://uglipno.pl/wiadomosci/192416/polka-dla-seniora-nowa-oferta-biblioteki-publicznej-w-radomicach>

libraries these courses are free of charge. And although the offer is dominated by English, there are also courses in other languages (e.g. a German language course organized by the Public Library in Słubice, Lubusz Voivodeship)²⁵.

In turn, library computer courses are becoming more and more topic-oriented. When computers were not yet such an easily accessible element of household equipment, and the skills of older people in this area were low, computer courses for seniors were of an elementary nature, teaching the basics of using a computer, using web browsers and using e-mail. Today, when the basics of using a computer are not a particular mystery for many seniors, the library's offer also includes computer courses for more advanced users, such as using social media and application programs, e.g. graphics (see for example the computer course in the Public Library in the Wola District of the capital city of Warsaw)²⁶.

The issue of safe behavior on the Internet comes up more and more often during library computer classes for seniors. The media still provide information about Internet fraud and extortion, the victims of which are often older people, so information in this area supported by practical exercises is undoubtedly needed (see, e.g., the presentation entitled "Senior safety online" at the Municipal Public Library in Szprotawa, Lubuskie province)²⁷.

Over the years, the educational and information offer of public libraries began to expand. Library information meetings and lectures on topics related to everyday life problems and safety broadly understood may be of particular value to older people. These might be, for example:

– meetings with lawyers, which may concern housing matters, pension benefits, tax settlements, testamentary provisions, etc. (see, e.g., the Free Legal Aid Point at the Municipal Public Library in Morąg, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)²⁸;

– meetings with police officers who, for example, explain what to do to avoid becoming a victim of criminals using the "grandson" or "policeman" method (see, e.g., meetings under the slogan "Don't give in to criminals!" at the Municipal Public Library in Kołobrzeg, West Pomeranian Voivodeship)²⁹;

²⁵ *Kurs językowy dla seniorów* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Publiczna Miasta i Gminy w Słubicach. <https://biblioteka.slubice.pl/n,kurs-jezykowy-dla-seniorow>

²⁶ *Kurs komputerowy dla seniorów* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Wola m.st. Warszawy. <https://www.bpwola.waw.pl/2024/04/18/kurs-komputerowy-dla-seniorow/>

²⁷ *Senior bezpieczny w sieci* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Szprotawie. <https://www.mbpszprotawa.pl/index.php/uzytkownicy/seniorzy-w-bibliotece/1564-senior-bezpieczny-w-sieci>

²⁸ *Nieodpłatna pomoc prawna* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Morągu. <https://www.bibliotekamorag.pl/inne/nieodplatna-pomoc-prawna/>

²⁹ *Nie daj się przestępcom! Bądź czujny!* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Kołobrzegu. <https://biblioteka.kolobrzeg.pl/index.php/2024/04/09/nie-daj-sie-przestepcom-badz-czujny/>

– meetings with dietitians who will advise on how to provide the body with energy with a properly balanced menu, avoid weight gain, problems with hypertension and high glucose levels (see e.g. “Time for a senior”

– meeting with a dietitian at the Municipal Public Library in Czechowice-Dziedzice, Silesian Voivodeship)³⁰;

– meetings with a psychologist, which may also take the form of psychological workshops, during which participants will undergo memory training, learn how to deal with stress, and take care of their mental health (see, e.g., Psychological workshops for seniors at the Provincial and Municipal Public Library in Gdańsk)³¹.

The libraries’ offer also includes other examples of meetings interesting for seniors: meetings with city guards, firefighters, representatives of local government authorities, consumer advocates, etc.

ART AND HANDICRAFT WORKSHOPS

Art and handicraft classes are beneficial to maintain the intellectual and manual skills of older people. Library curricula include a whole spectrum of such activities, from drawing and painting workshops, through crocheting, embroidery and macrame courses, classes using sculpture and paper art techniques, to decoupage, linocut and origami. Participants of such classes may also gain additional satisfaction when the library presents their finished works in the form of an exhibition (see, e.g., photo report from the exhibition of seniors’ works at the Municipal Public Library in Knurów, Silesian Voivodeship)³².

This category also includes cooking workshops run by libraries. On the one hand, this may raise some doubts when products are used in the library space that are not normally found in a reading room. However, preparing salads or sweet desserts together in a limited and moderate manner should not pose a particular threat to library collections (see, e.g., culinary workshops “Speciality of the House” at the Municipal Public Library in Bielsk Podlaski, Podlaskie Voivodeship)³³.

³⁰ “Pora na seniora” – spotkanie z dietetykiem (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Czechowicach-Dziedzicach. <https://mbp.czechowice-dziedzice.pl/pora-na-seniora-spotkanie-z-dietetykiem-2/>

³¹ Warsztaty psychologiczne dla seniorów w bibliotece (2024 may 28). Wojewódzka i Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Gdańsku. <https://wbpg.org.pl/warsztaty-psychologiczne-dla-seniorow-w-bibliotece/>

³² Wystawa prac plastycznych (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Knurowie. <https://bibliotekaknurow.pl/wystawa-prac-plastycznych-seniorow-z-osrodka-wsparcia-w-knurowie/>

³³ Międzypokoleniowe gotowanie – warsztaty “Specjalność zakładu” (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Bielsku Podlaskim. <https://biblioteka-bielsk.pl/miedzypokoleniowe-gotowanie-warsztaty-specjalnosc-zakladu/>

ARTISTIC AND ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS

Libraries have long been organizing evenings of poetry and music or of music alone as part of meetings with interesting artists, inviting soloists and bands performing a variety of musics – chamber, ballad, folk, sung poetry, but also simply popular music including small jazz ensembles. Some such concerts are addressed directly to older people, and an additional value at such events comes when listeners can join in singing together.

A form that combines entertainment and relaxation elements that is beneficial for the well-being of seniors is spending time together with other seniors playing various social games – from chess, through various board games, to card games including bridge (see e.g. learning to play bridge and bridge games in one of the branches of the Municipal Public Library in Gliwice, Silesian Voivodeship)³⁴.

MOVEMENT AND EXERCISE CLASSES

Activities organized in libraries that require a bit of physical exercise from the participants can help keep the elderly in good shape. Libraries that have a multifunctional building with a separate room for physical classes are in a better situation when organizing such classes. However, there are plenty of examples online of libraries that organize all kinds of fitness classes in appropriately arranged reading spaces. These may be more relaxing exercises (e.g. yoga, tai chi), as well as general movement and gymnastic classes, or more advanced and rather dance-oriented exercises such as Zumba (see e.g. Gymnastics for seniors at the Public Library in Miastko, Pomeranian voivodship)³⁵. Speaking of dancing, on the websites of libraries with offers for seniors we can also find many announcements about ballroom dancing courses and invitations to dance evenings (see, e.g. Dance party for seniors at the Municipal Public Library in Gliwice, Silesian Voivodeship)³⁶.

The examples presented do not exhaust the wide spectrum of library activities aimed at elderly users. Librarians who are beginning to work with seniors should therefore follow the work programs of other libraries, as well as reports from successful events already held, while searching for interesting and original ideas adapted to the organizational capabilities of libraries of various types and sizes. Most of the comments and examples presented in the article concern the offer addressed to seniors by public libraries. It should be emphasized, however, that other libraries also have

³⁴ *Seniorze, przyjdź na zajęcia do biblioteki!* (2024 may 28). Miejski Serwis Internetowy – Gliwice. <https://edukacja.gliwice.eu/aktualnosci/miasto/seniorze-przyjdz-na-zajecia-do-biblioteki>

³⁵ *Gimnastyka dla seniora* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Publiczna w Miastku. <http://bpmiastko.naszabiblioteka.com/n,gimnastyka-dla-seniora>

³⁶ *Potańcówka dla Seniorów* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Gliwicach. <https://biblioteka.gliwice.pl/potancowka-dla-seniorow/>

a certain offer in terms of educational, artistic and entertainment activation for older people – primarily pedagogical³⁷ and scientific libraries³⁸.

SUMMARY

Activating seniors in libraries does not have to consist solely in trying to interest them in what libraries have to offer and encouraging them to participate in various meetings. It is worth considering a situation where seniors are not only passive participants and listeners, but can also be speakers and moderators of such meetings. Therefore, when organizing all activities with seniors, and especially meetings with specialists in various fields, it is worth considering a solution in which these specialists will also be seniors themselves. In this way, you can use various competencies and professional qualifications of people with extensive experience, but not necessarily professionally active. Moreover, it is not only about obvious professionals in the field of, for example, medicine, psychology, security or law. You can use the sometimes considerable competencies of seniors in seemingly mundane areas such as cooking, gardening, or tailoring. Such knowledgeable seniors can be credible and persuasive speakers for other seniors, and by participating in library events as hosts, they can become more involved in volunteering for libraries.

Not all seniors are lucky enough to live in multi-generational families, surrounded by kindness and loved ones. Some people may be lonely, so they will look for contact with others – in different places and in different situations. A library employee may also be a potential interlocutor, and sometimes, above all, a listener. It is important that the librarian, with whom a senior can seek contact and try to start a conversation, is open, empathetic, trustworthy and eloquent. The benefit may be mutual, because a well-treated and listened-to elderly person will leave the library in a good mood, and therefore may become its user for a longer time. That is why training for librarians in working with adult and older readers, organized by substantively superior libraries, is so important. It is also worth mentioning training for librarians conducted by the National Library in Warsaw under the slogan “Library for seniors”, during which librarians obtain information about the needs of older people and forms of working with seniors (*Biblioteka dla seniora*, 2024 may 22).

³⁷ See for example: *Oferta dla seniorów* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Pedagogiczna w Tarnowie. <https://bpt.edu.pl/index.php/nasza-oferta/oferta-dla-seniorow>

³⁸ The possibilities of such activities in scientific libraries were presented by Renata Felińska and Teresa Górniak using the example of the Library of the University of Łódź. See Felińska R., Górniak T. (2015). Miejsce Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego w życiu osób starszych. In: *Biblioteka w społeczeństwie wiedzy : informacja, edukacja, profesjonalizm : konferencja naukowa Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego : materiały konferencyjne*. Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, pp. 128-149.

Organizers of group classes with older people must demonstrate the ability to appropriately balance the difficulty of tasks and the requirements placed on participants, in activities of an intellectual nature and especially those that involve manual work or general mobility. First of all, less able participants of such classes should not feel inferior and unnecessary. As Aleksandra Guziątek from Municipal Public Library in Katowice notes, "art works can become troublesome when some participants struggle with trembling hands, visual impairment or the belief that they lack talent" (Guziątek, 2020, p. 24). Participants in meetings absolutely should not feel that they do not meet expectations or feel frustrated due to the inappropriate manner and pace of performing tasks. Therefore, the author cited above proposed ten rules for organizing classes for older people, including the following two: "Remember that seniors visit the library for entertainment" and "Do not require participants to exceed their limits. Participation in all activities is voluntary" (Guziątek, 2020, p. 26).

Finally, it is worth repeating that when we talk about older people and their gradually strengthening relationship with libraries, which is confirmed by the statistical data cited earlier, this relationship should not be described one-sidedly, in the sense that the library presents its offer to seniors, that it gives them something. It is important to recognize the potential two-way nature of this relationship, when seniors can also give something to the library themselves. As Monika Kosowiec-Placek noted, "the intellectual capital of older people in our country is not properly used and is simply wasted" (Kosowiec-Placek, 2010, p. 329). Yet some older people who have knowledge and specific professional experience or have interesting skills or achievements in various fields can share them with other library users. They may also simply be useful volunteers who want to devote their free time to working in the library – for everyone's mutual benefit.

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DZIAŁANIA BIBLIOTEK NA RZECZ WSPARCIA I AKTYWIZACJI SENIORÓW

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Starzenie się społeczeństwa. Średnia długość życia. Osoby starsze w bibliotece. Seniorzy w bibliotece. Formy animacji kulturalnej. Praca z czytelnikiem dorosłym.

ABSTRAKT: **Teza/cel** – Celem artykułu jest próba wskazania i formalno-tematycznego uporządkowania form animacji kulturalnej stosowanych w pracy z najstarszymi użytkownikami bibliotek oraz wskazanie przykładów pokazujących dobre praktyki w tym zakresie. **Metoda** – zastosowana została metoda analizy piśmiennictwa w połączeniu z analizą źródeł w postaci zestawień statystycznych i stron internetowych bibliotek. **Wnioski** – Prognozy demograficzne dla krajów rozwiniętych zapowiadają stopniowy wzrost odsetka osób w wieku powyżej 60 roku życia w ogólnej populacji. Wynika to z sukcesywnej poprawy standardów życiowych i postępów w medycynie. Statystyki biblioteczne potwierdzają obserwowaną w ostatnich latach większą procentowo obecność seniorów wśród użytkowników bibliotek. Zachodzi więc uzasadniona potrzeba, by w opracowaniu programów pracy bibliotek w większym stopniu uwzględniać w nich usługi i działania adresowane do seniorów.