

EDUCATION IN OLD AGE IN THE EXPERIENCES OF POLISH EURO GRANDPARENTS



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You can't avoid getting old or dying
Just as Autumn can be the best and the most beautiful season of the year,
old age can be the best and the most beautiful period of life,
and what you lived in your life can give you the sense of good performance.
However, Autumns are also rainy and fruitless
and old age could be barren, painful and even tragic.

Aleksander Kępiński
(Polish philosopher and psychiatrist)



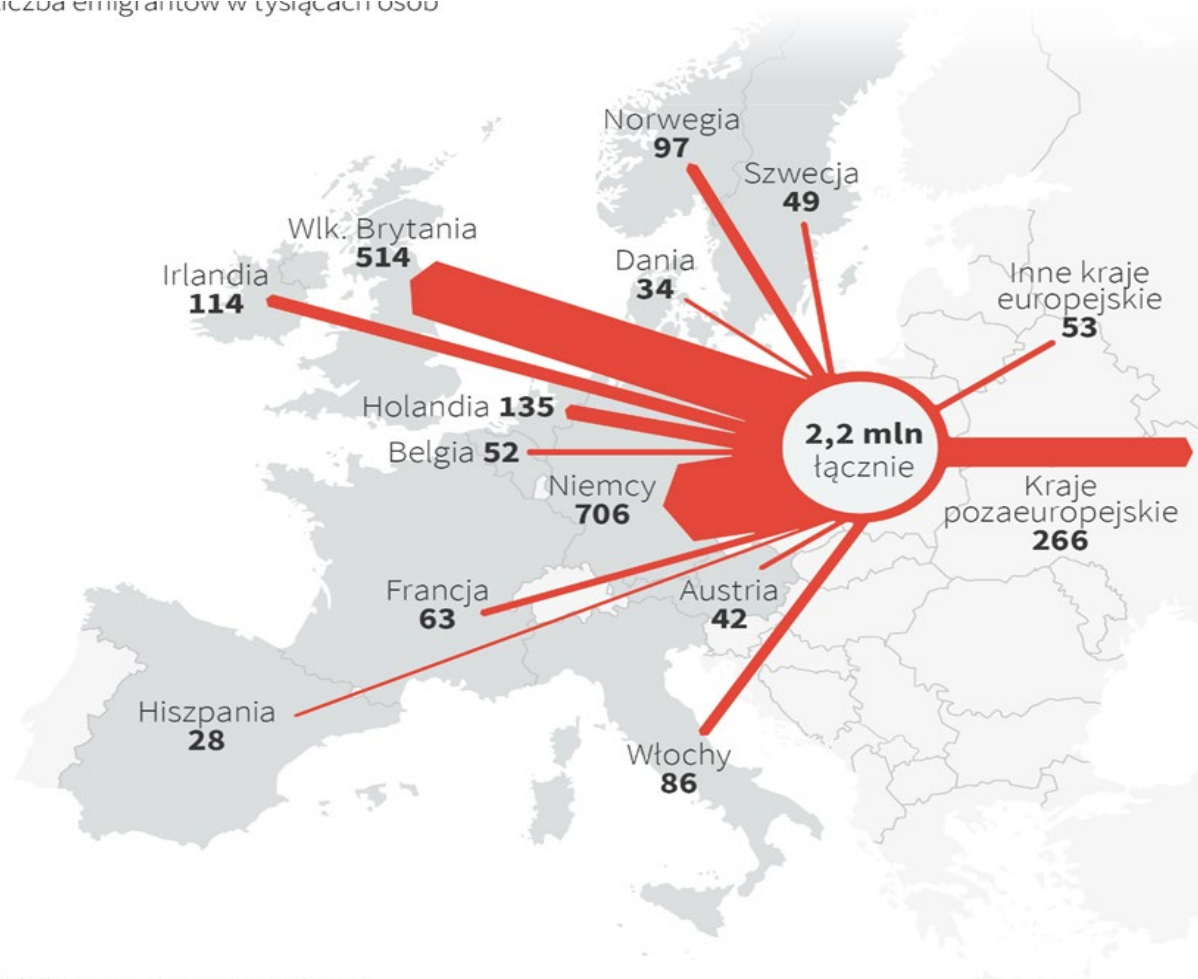
PRESENTATION PLAN

1. Polish emigrants — numbers
2. Loneliness of seniors
3. Seniors' educational activity and quality of life
4. Methodological assumptions
5. Research results
6. Discussion and summary

POLISH EMIGRANTS — NUMBERS (in thousand)

Source: GUS, 2020 (Central Statistical Office)

Liczba emigrantów w tysiącach osób



Źródło: GUS, dane szacunkowe

The most popular directions of migration of Poles within the EU

Source: GUS

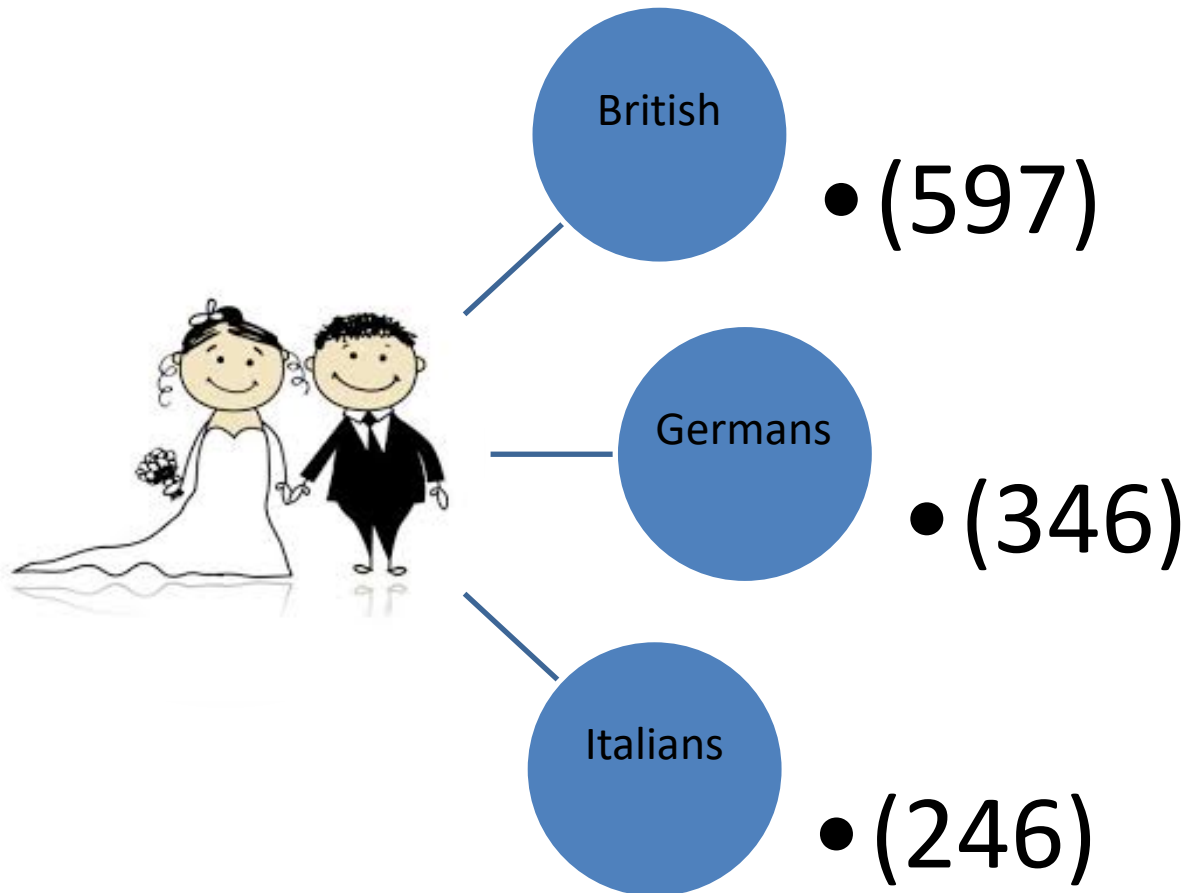
Population of emigrants by the end of 2020 (in thousand)

• Germany	706
• the United Kingdom	514
• the Netherlands	135
• Ireland	114
• Norway	97
• Italy	86

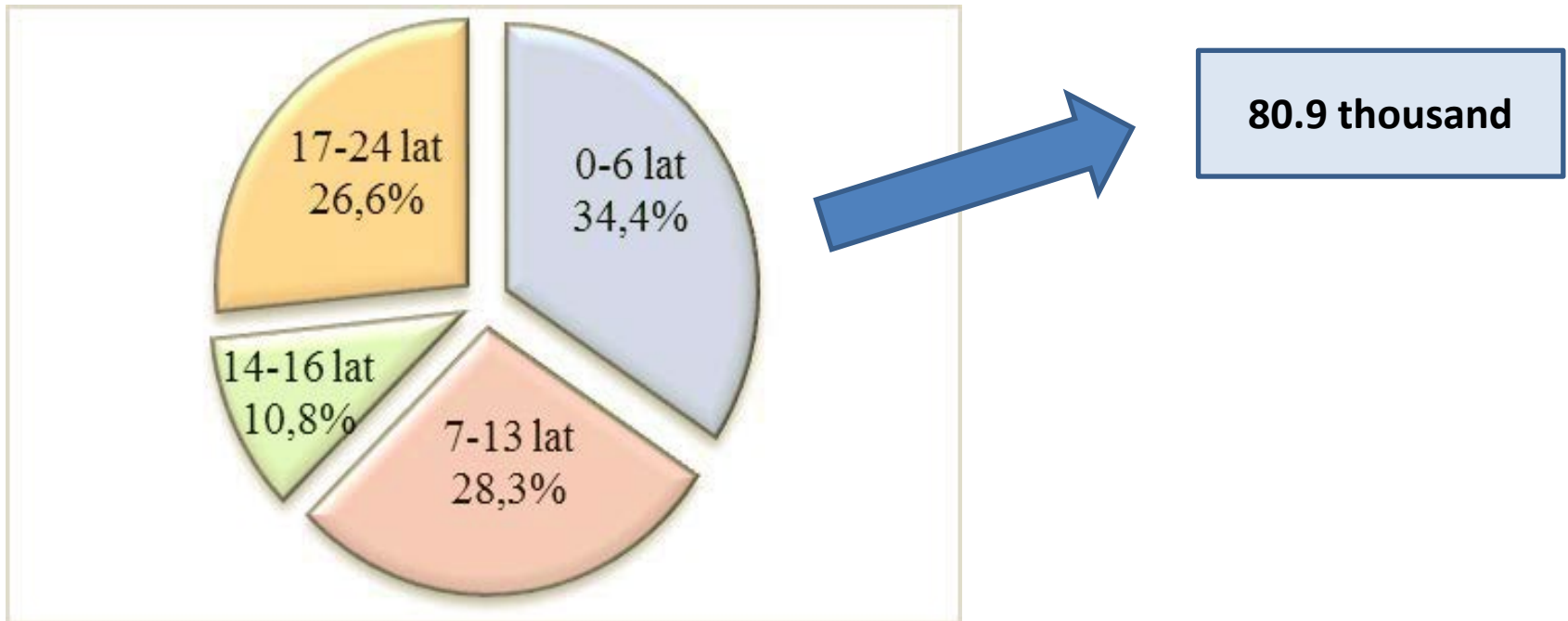


Mixed marriages

In 2018 Poles entered into over 11 thousand mixed marriages



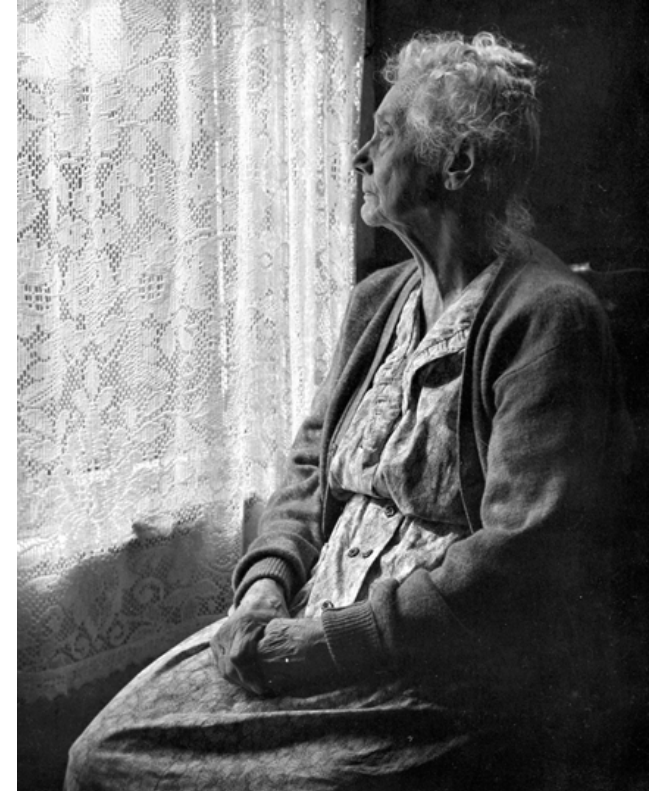
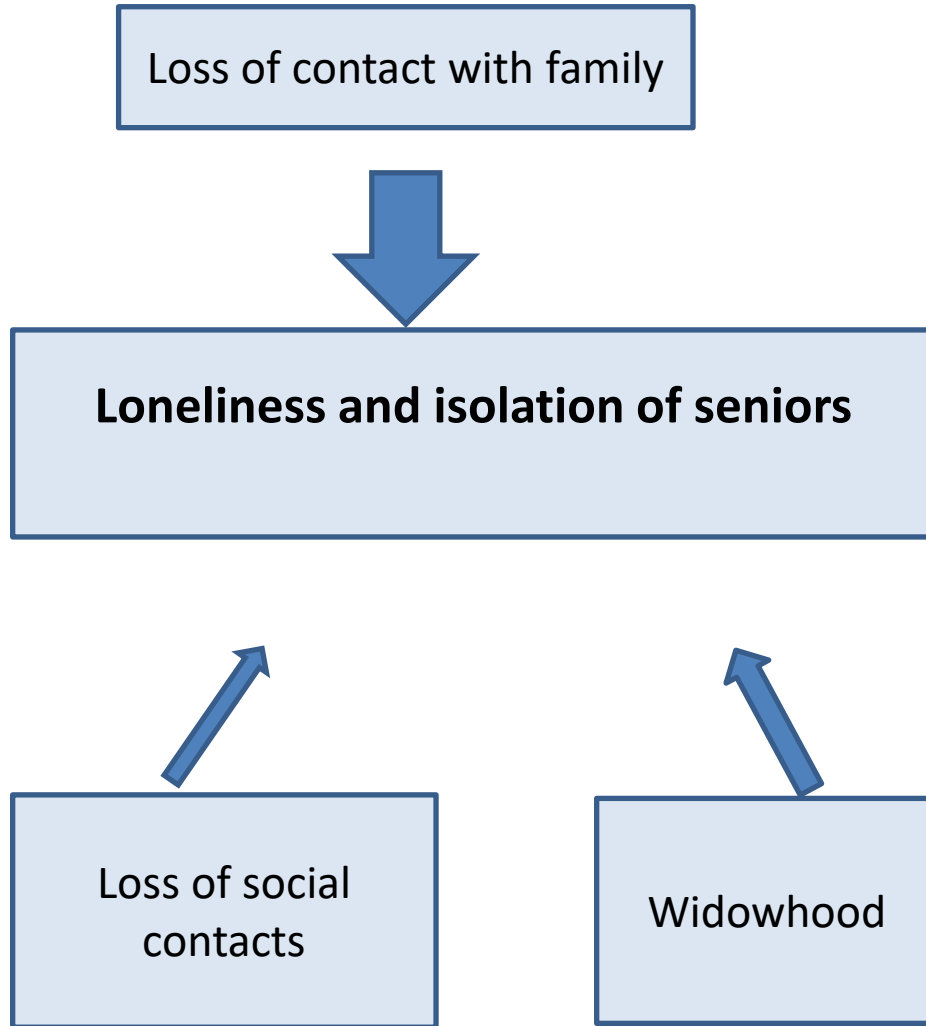
Children living abroad with their parents/parent*



N=235.5 thousand.

*according to the latest Office National Statistic (2011)

“Euro-orphanhood” of old people



Sense of loneliness among seniors

Source: POLSENIOR survey, 2012 (percentage data)

Jak często czuje się Pan(i) osamotniony How often?	55-59 lat		65-74 lata		≥75 lat	
	Mężczyzna	Kobieta	Mężczyzna	Kobieta	Mężczyzna	Kobieta
	Man/Woman		Man/Woman		Man/Woman	
Nigdy Never	52,3	39,6	48,9	34,8	40,4	26,2
Prawie nigdy Almost never	18,4	19,1	20,8	24,0	25,4	20,6
Czasami Sometimes	24,6	34,5	24,6	33,1	26,4	40,5
Często Often	3,3	6,2	3,6	6,8	5,3	9,7
Zawsze Always	0,7	0	0,6	0,7	1,3	2,2
Trudno powiedzieć	0,7	0,5	1,6	0,6	1,2	0,9

Education and quality of life

The quality of life can be both, objective and subjective.

Objective — refers to the state of health and social security.

Subjective perception depends on individual traits and predispositions of a person. In case of seniors it's correlated with the process of ageing and adaptation to it;

Primary activities to increase the quality of life in senior age are the following:

- adaptation to changes
- social participation,
- receiving and giving support,
- activity and lifelong education (Pilar Escuder-Mollon, 2014)

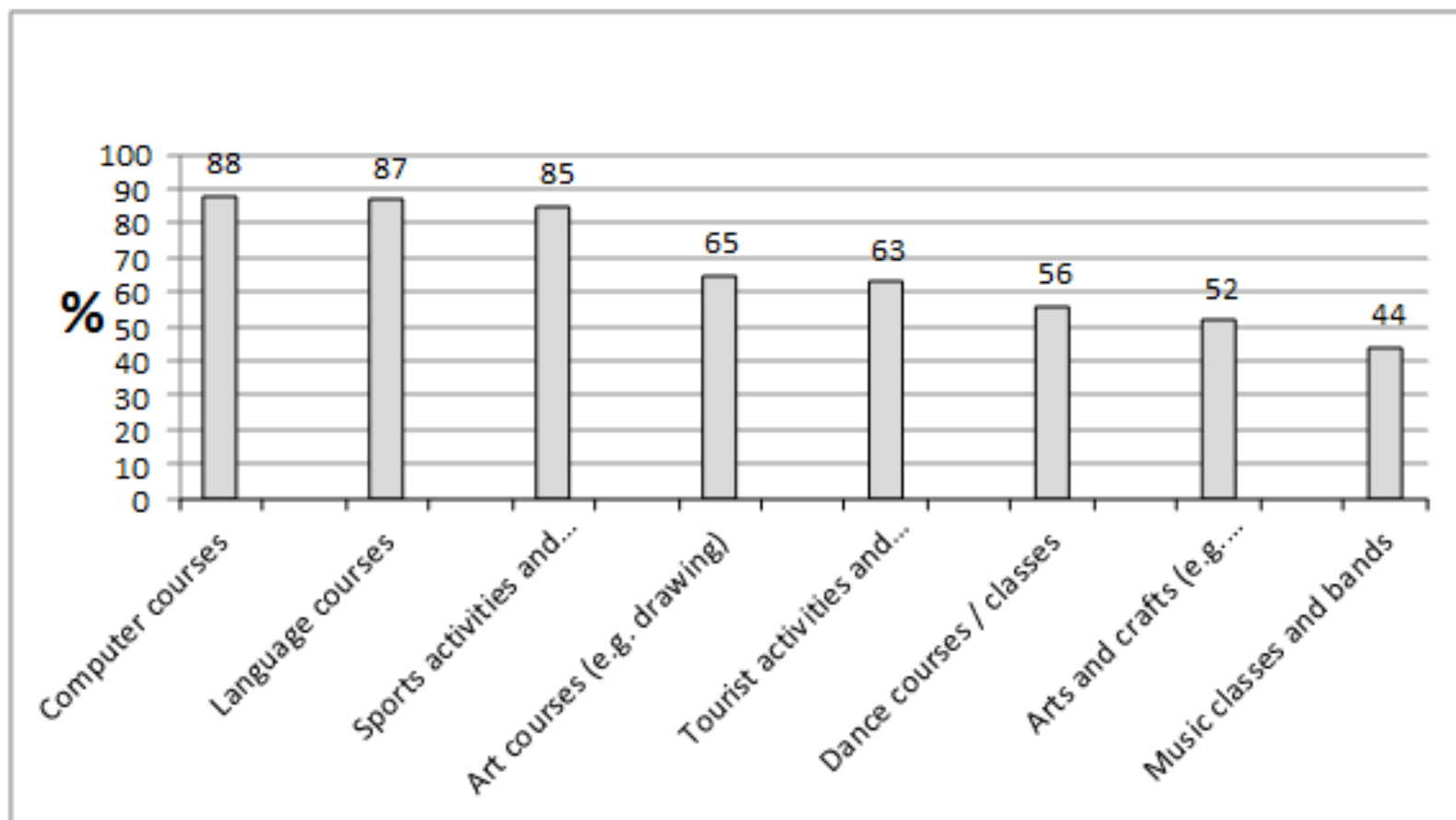
Education is not only an attribute of youth...

Polish Universities of the Third Age

- Universities of the Third Age (U3As) have been one of the most popular forms of education for older people in recent years, being an important and necessary issue in the light of worldwide demographic changes and their consequences.
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- First such University was established in France in 1973.
- In Poland, the first University of the Third Age was founded in 1975 in Warsaw. It was the third U3A in the world and is still in operation.

The most popular courses at Universities of the Third Age (data for 2011/12)

Source: own work based on Goldys et al 2012, p. 21



Methodological assumptions

- **Objective:** Determining the role of U3As in improving quality of life of the oldest generation, also when faced with economical migration of adult children
- **Research questions:**
 1. How do U3As support the process of finding new roles among “euro-grandparents” and motivate to keep up with changes generated by migration of children and grandchildren? What are the benefits of participation in U3A classes?
 2. Does it prevent isolation?
 3. In what ways participation in U3A classes translate into personal activity?
- **Method:** collective case study (Stake, 2009, p. 623) with an in-depth interview.
- The research was conducted among 12 U3A students (aged 59-72)

FINDING NEW ROLES BY “EURO-GRANDPARENTS”

I've been attending English class for several years. My grandchildren speak poor Polish, so their grandma began to learn to be able to talk to them

[Zofia, Ireland]

I have learned to use computer and thanks to Skype I watch how my granddaughter bathing and babbling.

I'm sad I can't hold her, but it is still better than photographs
[Anna, Ireland]

I cannot accept the fact that my only granddaughter does not understand me...

So even I'm 72, I learn English so she can understand me when she comes to Poland [Ewa, UK]



There were situations when my son... called me to have an eye on my granddaughter. We turned on Skype and I was watching over her via computer: I was telling her stories, singing and dancing for her in from of my laptop and she was clapping her hands... I was grandparenting [Józef, Spain]

I "tamed" computer in U3A classes, and thanks to knowledge I got there, I was able to visit kindergarten's website and see what my grandchildren in the US were doing [Maria, USA]

In U3A we prepare cabaret shows with stories, for example by Tuwim or Brzechwa. Then we present them in kindergartens, hospices. I send photos and videos from the shows to my grandchildren. For them, these are funny Polish lessons [Barbara, Canada]



What does participation in U3A give me?

The participation in the U3A courses mobilized me to come out, take care of my appearance.

I have changed my life. I've always known I don't want to be an old lady who checks every hour if the curtains are clean and what the neighbors do [Zofia]

For one reason: I can go out [Eva]



The lectures at the U3A enabled me to visit a lot of very interesting places, to see things I haven't paid attention to before [Maria]

You can always learn something you didn't know about, or you partly knew. I'm very content and I recommend it to others [Eva]

The lectures and the trips are very interesting and make me think, they also show me a better quality of life [Elzbieta]



Preventing loneliness

I've met many wonderful people. My mood has changed because I go out [Elzbieta]

I am looking forward to these classes because they are not only educational but also social... all this makes me feel better [Barbara]

Participation in the language course has influenced my social life. I have someone to talk to or meet for a cup of coffee [Zofia]



New activities

I have become more active,
I do many things, and on
Thursdays I come out and
come here regardless of the
weather [Eva]

My life is
more
optimistic and
cheery. I feel
needed
[Zofia]

I have met people here,
who encouraged me to take
up Nordic walking, and this
allowed me to get to know
them better and make some
new friends [Emilia]



Online contact with grandchildren

I teach my grandson
maths online. Together,
we solve the problems
and discuss life.
This is our time [Adam]

My grandson taught
me how to play games and now
we spend time together.
I manage not to lose more and
more often and that is my
success [Jan]

Sometimes I read
bedtime stories to
my granddaughter
to skype [Ida]



Discussion

Education is often the first step towards further actions:

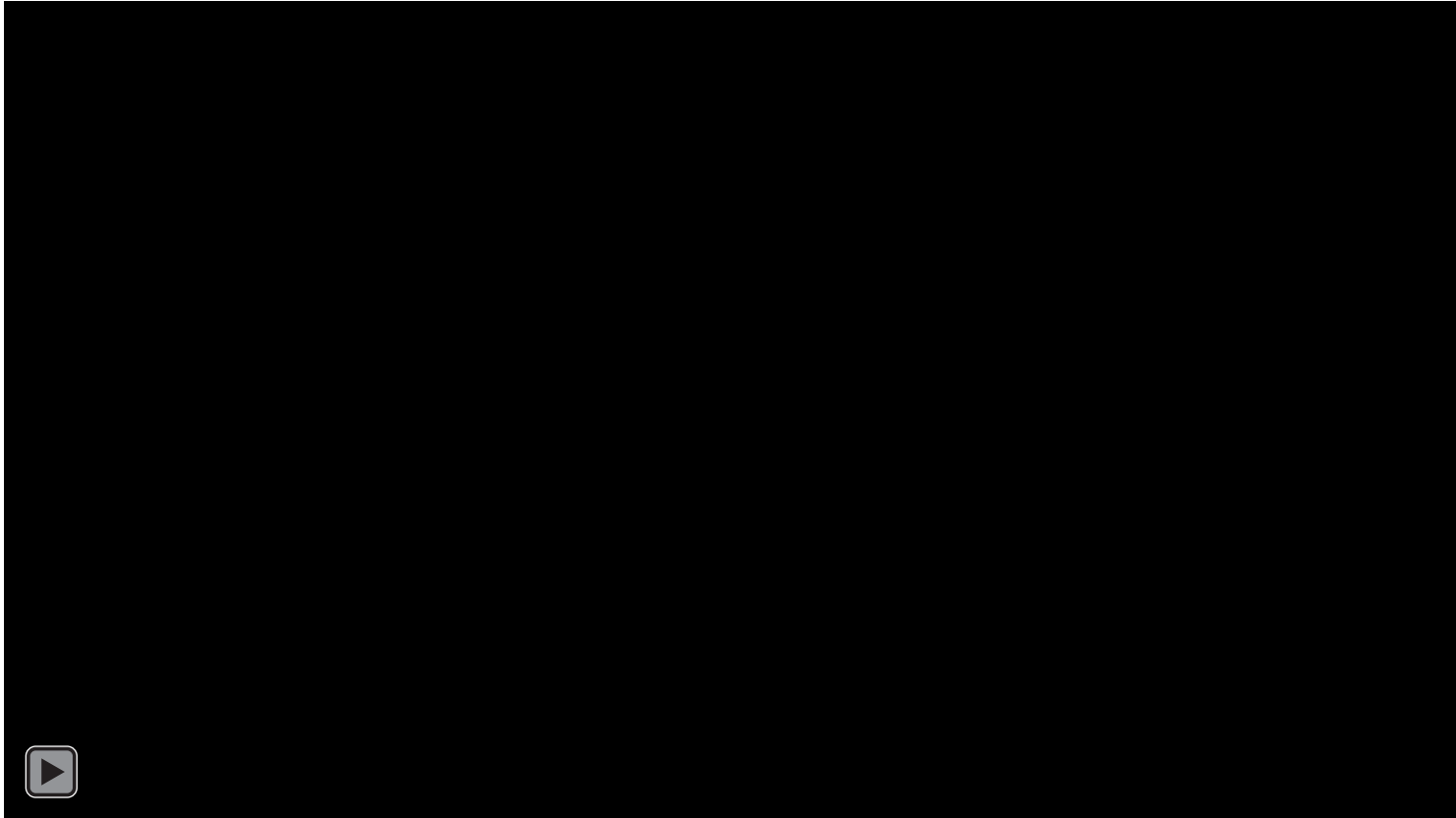
- It supports developing new passions and organization of free time;
- It allows to integrate and participate in social life;
- It protects from loneliness;
- No educational offers in small towns and villages.

Conclusions

- The conducted research indicate strong determination of Polish grandparents who are ready to learn a foreign language or learn how to use modern communication technologies in order to maintain, and sometimes initiate, relationship with their grandchildren living abroad. Learning a foreign language “from the scratch” is not easy (regardless of age) and requires strong motivation and self-discipline.
- Another challenge seniors face is to learn how to use modern technologies such as Skype, WhatsApp or YouTube, and computer, especially if they had never used them before . This persistence of older people in achieving their goals despite different difficulties and limitations clearly shows how important it is for them to stay in touch with their grandchildren.

- The main motivation to re-enter education was to learn a foreign language or become technology literate, to be able to build relationships with grandchildren and be present in their life.
- However, the studied cases show that participation in different forms of education gave them an opportunity to develop social relations and increased their social integration. Seniors admit that they are more satisfied and motivated to be active.





Thank you for your attention 😊