

ACTIVITIES OF SENIOR COUNCILS IN POLAND

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Abstract. We live in times of unprecedented economic and social changes, as well as accelerated medical progress in the sphere of improving health and extending human life. Although these are changes rated as positive, they also give birth negative consequences for the generation of today's sixty-year-olds. The future demography processes in Poland have similar tendency like in other EU member countries. In many European countries public activation and participation in the commune life is very popular idea. One of the method to activate elderly population is creating the Senior Councils.

The main aim of the research was recognition of the peculiarities of functioning and development of the Senior Councils in Poland. The authors decided to make investigation in this areas taking into consideration changes which took place in the country within 2012-2018. In the research paper the descriptive and comparative methods were used. Development of the Senior Councils is important for the commune authorities create local law adapted to the needs of older people. Members of the Senior Councils have knowledge and life experience that they can share with others.

Key words: aging problems, demography, senior councils, Poland, Active Ageing Index.

JEL code: J10, H89, O35.

Introduction

The progressive aging of society in Poland is already a well-known and statistically proven fact. In year 1988, people over 65 made up 9.8 % of the population, and in 2010 year - 13.6 %, which means an increase of over 1.5 million people. Population forecasts for 2008-2035 years by the Central Statistical Office show that by 2035 the percentage of children under 14 years of age and those people in middle age will be clearly lower than in previous years, while a significant increase in the population aged over 50 - 60 is expected.

The Active Ageing Index (AAI) is a tool to measure the untapped potential of older people for active and healthy ageing at national and subnational levels. (Active Ageing Index Home, 2018) The index has been developed within the framework of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Launch of AAI also coincided with the 10th anniversary of the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing and the 2nd cycle of review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy (European Year for Active Ageing ...,2012).

One of the foundations on which every civil society is based, there is public participation. The essence of participation lies in active participation citizens in establishing and implementing public policies, joining the process creating planning documents and making key decisions. Participation can be seen as a continuous dialogue with the community and development of such communication mechanisms and joint decision-making that will result in greater transparency of processes, increased openness and mutual trust. The term "participation" derives from the Latin word „particeps", i.e. take part in "participation" in other words to participate in a larger group, formation, project or institution. In the broader sense of the word, it is also the ability to create relationships and interact with others, the ability to work in a group to achieve common goals, perform tasks collectively and solve problems together (Neverauskas and Tijunaitiene, 2007).

The main aim of the research was recognition of the peculiarities of functioning and development of the Senior Councils in Poland. The following problems were examined:

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- legal aspects of the Senior Councils in Poland;
- development of the Senior Councils in Poland.

As well the Senior Councils activity was presented on the example of the Senior Council in Stare Babice commune.

The main sources of information were the Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Administration and Digitization and Reports of Stare Babice commune, which were the source of data about seniors in Poland during 2012-2018. The study also made use of interviews with the experts in the social science and data storage statistics. Experts were scientists dealing with demographic problems and social policy. Interviews were conducted in 2015-2017 with elected members of the municipal council and senior council of Stare Babice commune. In addition, the authors undertook the review of literature and legal acts related to the processes. There are also own experience thanks the activity in Stare Babice commune. The presentation of the research results uses descriptive and tabular methods.

Research results and discussion

According to a report prepared by the Central Statistical Office, the Polish society is aging: By 2050, the share of older people will exceed 30 % in rural areas and will approach 35 % in urban areas.

Table 1

The share of the population aged 65 years or more in the population (%) in the years 2013, 2020, 2035 and 2050

Voivodeship	Total				Urban				Rural			
	2013	2020	2035	2050	2013	2020	2035	2050	2013	2020	2035	2050
POLAND	14.7	18.9	24.5	32.7	15.7	20.8	26.3	34.7	13.3	16.1	22.0	30.2
Dolnoslaski	14.9	20.0	25.1	33.5	16.1	21.8	26.8	35.3	12.0	15.9	21.8	30.5
Kujawsko-pomorskie	14.1	18.5	24.5	32.8	15.5	20.8	27.1	35.7	12.0	15.2	21.3	29.4
Lubelskie	15.4	19.3	25.6	34.7	14.9	20.8	28.1	37.6	15.9	18.1	23.7	32.6
Lubuskie	13.4	18.5	24.4	32.9	14.4	20.2	26.0	34.4	11.6	15.6	22.0	30.7
Lodzkie	16.6	20.9	26.0	34.2	17.1	22.6	28.1	36.7	15.6	18.0	23.0	31.0
Malopolskie	14.5	17.7	23.0	31.2	16.2	20.5	25.4	34.1	12.9	15.1	21.1	28.9
Mazowieckie	15.4	19.0	23.1	31.3	16.3	20.4	23.8	32.1	13.9	16.4	21.9	29.7
Opolskie	15.3	19.6	27.3	36.1	16.1	21.6	29.1	38.0	14.5	17.3	25.5	34.3
Podkarpackie	14.0	17.6	24.4	33.5	14.3	19.9	27.4	36.9	13.8	16.0	22.5	31.5
Podlaskie	15.4	18.6	26.1	35.1	13.8	18.4	26.8	35.5	17.7	18.9	25.1	34.4
Pomorskie	13.5	17.7	22.6	30.0	15.6	20.6	25.2	33.0	9.7	12.8	18.7	26.0
Slaskie	15.5	20.0	26.0	34.0	15.9	20.8	26.9	34.9	14.1	17.1	23.4	31.5
Swietokrzyskie	16.1	20.5	26.9	36.0	16.7	23.1	30.5	40.4	15.6	18.4	24.3	33.3
Warminsko-mazurskie	12.8	17.4	24.5	32.9	13.8	19.4	26.5	34.8	11.4	14.6	21.8	30.3
Wielkopolskie	13.5	17.5	22.7	30.9	15.0	20.0	25.6	34.4	11.7	14.6	19.9	27.8
Zachodniopomorskie	13.9	19.3	25.2	33.6	15.2	21.3	26.9	35.2	11.1	15.1	22.0	30.5

Source: Population forecast for 2014-2050, (2014) Warsaw, Central Statistical Office

In the scale of the country, the number of this population will increase by 5.4 million. In 2050, the number of people aged 65 and more will represent 179.3 % of the state in 2013 and 224.9 % in rural areas.

Analysing the data in Table 1, it is easy to see: it is estimated that in 2035 the percentage of people aged 65 and more will be 23.2 %⁶, while according to Eurostat's forecasts in 2060, it will exceed 36 % in Poland (Population forecast for 2014-2050, 2014).

Nowadays the local authorities should find the way to recognize and full in the needs of older local population. Significant assistance in these tasks can be met by the Senior Councils. It is important to know the legal possibilities of their creation and functioning on the territory of Poland.

1. Legal aspects of the Senior Council in Poland

The possibility of creating Communal Seniors' Councils in Poland was introduced along with the amendment to the Act on municipal self-government¹. The amendment was adopted by the Sejm in 2013 according to the following regulations:

- the commune promotes intergenerational solidarity and creates conditions for stimulating civic activity of the elderly in the local community,
- the commune council, on its own initiative or at the request of the communities concerned, may establish a municipal council of seniors,
- the council of seniors has consultative, advising and initiative character,
- council of seniors consists of representatives of the elderly and representatives of entities acting for the benefit of the elderly, in particular representatives of non-governmental organizations and entities running universities of the third century,
- the commune council, setting up a council of seniors, gives it a statute determining the mode of election of its members and rules of operation, seeking to use the potential of existing organizations of the elderly and entities acting for the elderly, and ensuring an efficient manner of selecting members of the municipal council of seniors.

The legal regulations in force in Poland provide for many possible forms of active participation of citizens in co-deciding on issues relevant to the local community - this article is particularly concerned with the issue of the institutions of councils for seniors. However, it is necessary to mention other existing forms, especially those that are legally authorized in the Act of 24 April 2003 on public benefit and voluntary work. Knowledge and ability to use these forms are important for non-governmental organizations, because the practice of active use of the participative instruments described by law depends largely on them. Among these forms should be mentioned:

- public benefit activity boards,
- cooperation program of local self-government with non-governmental organizations,
- local initiatives.

The content of these framework provisions is left to the statutes regulating the principles of the functioning of municipal councils of seniors and practice, which in each municipality may be different and depends on the skills and activity of board members, as well as openness to cooperation with this body from local self-government authorities.

The commune council, setting up a council of seniors, gives it a statute determining the mode of election of its members and rules of operation. It has to use the potential of existing organizations of the elderly and entities acting for the elderly, and ensuring an efficient manner of selecting members of the council of seniors.

¹ the Act of 8 March 1990 on municipal self-government (Journal of Laws No. 2016, item 446)

All activities taken by the Seniors' Council are specified in the statute of the given Council. Each Senior Council has the possibility to adjust the scope of its activities to individual preferences and needs in a given municipality.

The Senior Council, as a body supporting the shaping of the senior policy in the commune, should give opinions on documents that affect the situation of seniors such as

- resolutions of the commune council,
- strategies of commune development,
- projects dedicated to seniors, e.g. senior card,
- commune co-operation programs with non-governmental organizations etc.

When acting as an advisor, the Senior Council may:

- create own propositions of solutions in matters relating to seniors,
- produce solutions to problems affecting the elderly in the commune,
- respond to cases reported by seniors, giving them formal run.

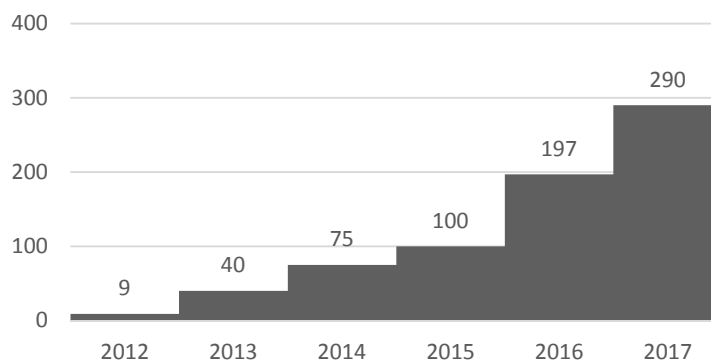
Implementing the initiative function, the Senior Council can initiate new ideas and solutions that aim to improve the situation of older people in the municipality:

- can encourage the municipality to take action for the elderly,
- may also carry out its own projects in cooperation with the commune authorities.

The equivalents of Polish Seniors' Councils function in many countries. Although they differ in name, composition, way of calling and acting, but they associate people of all ages. They are linked to the fact that they work for the benefit of seniors. Seniors citizens' councils are active in: Germany, Italy, Denmark, Great Britain (Seniors' Schools in Great Britain - AGE UK Speaking Up for Our Age) as well in USA. In Germany, local senior councils have been in existence since the 1970s. There are currently around 1,200 of them. Their main tasks are mediation between seniors and policy-makers, and giving opinions on projects of actions that affect the lives of people the elderly.

2. Development of the Senior Councils in Poland

According to the report of the Ministry of Administration and Digitization in 2012 there were 9 Senior Councils in Poland, in 2014 there were already 75 (Borczyk W., Jachimowicz D., Nalepa W. 2014). Since the amendment to the Local Government Act, the number of senior citizens' councils in entire Poland has grown rapidly - from over 40 in 2013 to over 100 in December 2015. At the beginning of 2016, there were 197 Councils in Poland, and at the end of 2016 less than 220. At June 2017 in almost 2.5 thousand Polish municipalities worked 290 Senior Council.



Source: authors' calculation on the base of the data from Ministry of Administration and Digitization

Fig. 1. Number of Senior Councils in Poland during 2012-2017

It's about 50 % increase in relation to the beginning of the previous year. However, they still function in less than one tenth of the Polish commune. Only a handful of them has a senior citizen

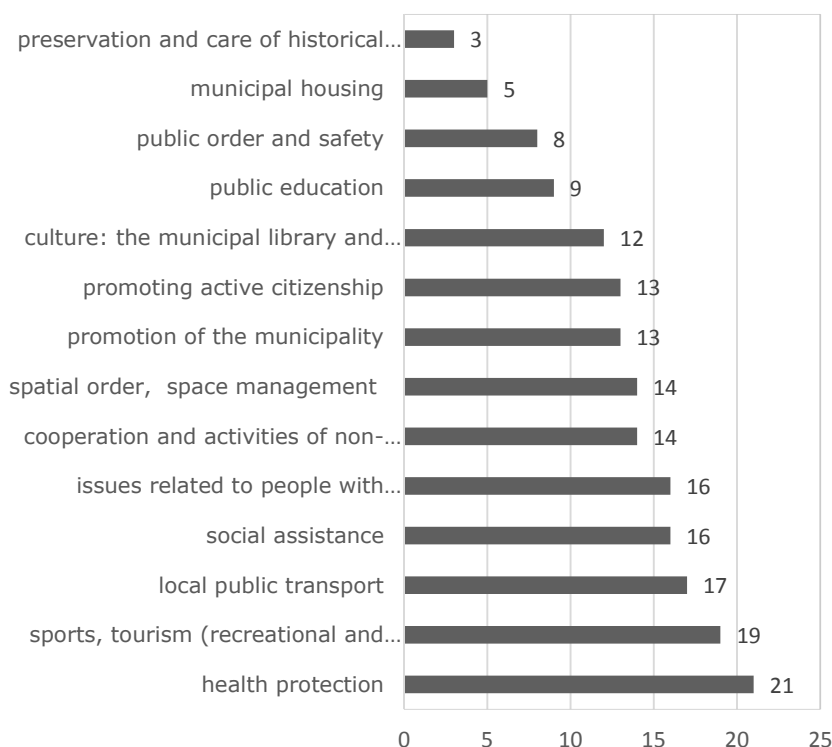
advice today. It should be added that the majority of the residents in the municipalities, villages and small towns, where a large percentage of the elderly live, have not yet included seniors in the decision-making process. In individual voivodeship in Poland, the large disproportions between the number of seniors' councils can be observed (Fig. 2).



Source: Ganeczko A. (2017) Council of Seniors in Poland Legal basis and number, Senior Policy No. 4/2017, Senior Policy <http://polityka.zaczyn.org/polityka-Seniorna-dodatek-o-radach-seniorow>

Fig. 2. Number of municipalities in which Senior Councils are functioning in 2017

The areas of activity of the Senior Councils are diverse and rich. One can observe those areas on the Figure 3. Senior's Councils foster intergenerational solidarity and create conditions to stimulate civic activity of older people in the local community, they have been present in public space for at least several years.



Source: Zoom on senior councils -National Polish study of Senior Councils from all over Poland and cooperation project with partnerships of senior councils and municipal self-governments

Fig. 3. The areas of activity of Seniors' Councils

There was difficult to make precise statistics sometimes, but according to the "Zoom on the Senior Citizens" project (app. 5) online research, in Poland before the introduction of the abovementioned statutory regulation, at least 150 senior citizens' councils were appointed. "ZOOM for Senior Councils" is a nationwide survey of senior councils from all over Poland and a cooperation project with

partnerships of senior councils and municipal governments implemented by the Society of Creative Initiatives "e" in cooperation with Laboratory of Societies and Social Innovation "Stocznia" and the Foundation for local communities „ On the spot "(www.zoomnaradyseniorow.pl).

Many events organised by senior councils take place in the whole country. They are very often organised in cooperation with others nongovernmental organisations. A big event was the meeting on November 30, 2018 at the headquarters of the Mazowieckie Social Policy Centre in Warsaw, which summarized the cooperation of the Mazovian voivodeship self-government with senior communities.

In August 2016, in Jachranka in the commune of Serock the 1st Summer School of Senior Councils was held. It was the first meeting of the Senior's Councils in Poland. It can be said that this form has been a success and has been very well received throughout the entire senior environment. Based on the experiences from the Summer School, an idea was created on the format of one-day trips to the Councils that they will want become the host of such meeting. The point was deepening integration, presentation of the Councils and further training and education activities that have been refined at based on a questionnaire completed after the Summer School. The idea of the Second Flying (Volatile) School was initiated by the Senior's Council of Bielany Warsaw District and the Senior's Council of Stare Babice Commune. That was completely devoted to the topic of Senior Voluntary Service, which both Councils would like to run in their councils. (Ganeczko, 2017).

3. Case study – activity of the Senior Council in Stare Babice commune

The Stare Babice commune is a rural commune in the central part of the Masovian voivodeship in the Warsaw West District. From 16/03/1995, the area of the Stare Babice commune includes 23 places i.e. Babice Nowe, Blizne Jasynskiego, Blizne Laszczynskiego, Borzecin Duzy, Borzecin Maly, Buda, Janow, Koczargi Stare, Koczargi Nowe, Klaudyn, Kwirynow, Latchorzew, Lipkow, Lubiczow, Mariew, Stanislawow, Topolin, Wierzbin, Wojcieszyn, Zalesie, Zielonki Wies, Zielonki Parcela and Stare Babice.

The Stare Babice commune covers an area of 62 km². It is located in the immediate vicinity of the western part of left part of Warsaw and borders the districts of Bemowo and Bielany. At the same time, the commune borders with the following municipalities: Ozarow Mazowiecki, Leszno and Izabelin. The location of the commune on the outskirts of the Kampinos Forest and between two routes of international importance (the Poznan route and the Gdansk route) creates favourable conditions for the development of tourism, leisure and settlement. The location of the commune in the immediate vicinity of Warsaw, on the other hand, makes it a "bedroom of Warsaw" and is one of the factors determining the intensive growth of the number of residents in the commune over the last twenty years.

The structure of the commune, depending on the economic age groups¹, is illustrated in Table 2. In the case of the Stare Babice commune, in the years 1995-2017, an increase number of inhabitants in each of the defined groups is observed. Nevertheless, starting from 2020, the number of inhabitants in post-productive age will be systematically growing, and the growth rate in this age group will be statistically significantly higher than the rate of growth of the population in the pre-working age. It means a much larger share of people over 60/65 in the commune community.

¹ Within this division, three age groups were distinguished: people in the pre-productive age (0-17), people of working age (men – 18-64; women – 18-59) and people in post-productive age. In the case of the post-working age, the border was set at the age of 60 for women and 65 for men as the retirement age.

The number of inhabitants in the commune of Stare Babice according to economic age groups - the data in the years 1995 - 2017 and the forecast for 2018 - 2040

Age	Data in the years					Forecast in the years				
	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
pre-productive age	2264	2503	2684	3267	3715	4183	4651	5119	5587	6055
working age	5281	6446	8131	9402	9907	10234	10562	10889	11217	11544
post-working age	1878	1984	2132	2723	3387	4109	4831	5553	6275	6997

Source: authors' calculation on based of demographic data from the municipalities of Stare Babice, Koziol, D. Parlinska, M., Parlinska, A., (2018)

Due to the aging problems of the commune the Senior Council of Stare Babice commune was established in December 2015. We should to make remark, that the creation of the Senior Council is only an image-building success. Key to working out solutions that will improve the standard of living for seniors in the municipality is to develop feasible plans operational and pro-annual strategies that will be implemented in rapidly aging municipalities. Such strategies should be developed in a cross-sectoral way, in cooperation with Senior's Councils, local governments, officials, non-governmental organizations. Senior Council in Stare Babice was also working hardly for preparing such strategy last year. The continuation with local government will take place this year.

Table 3

The Expenditure of Stare Babice municipality for seniors in years 2017-2018

The name of the project	Leading institution	2017	2018	2017	2018	2018/ 2017
		PLN		%		
Seniors Club "Hope"	Municipal Social assistance centre	24 907	25 667	38.0	34.3	103,05
Active and cultural Senior	Association of Starobabicki University of the third age	4 500	12 500	6.9	16.7	277,78
Interesting India for seniors	Polish Association Of Carron	3 200	3 200	4.9	4.3	100,00
Sami Swoi	Cultural Association Anchor	9 500	6 500	14.5	8.7	68,42
Seniors in action	KIM Foundation	17 000	17 000	25.9	22.7	100,00
Babiczanie	Cultural Association Anchor	6 500	10 000	9.9	13.4	153,85
Total		65 607	74 867	100,0	100.0	114.11

Source: authors' calculation on the base Reports of Stare Babice commune

The Senior Council supports the municipality's activities to make it friendly for seniors. They are the initiators of many events and workshops organized for senior citizens of the Stare Babice commune. The list of expenses incurred in the last two years for the benefit of seniors is presented in the Table3. Many activities in the commune took place during last 2 years. Comparison between those 2 years easily shows, that continuation will take place. Currently, work is underway on updating the senior policy program and presenting it to councillors for opinion.

Also an important element of many activities is intergenerational integration, that the youngest generation is invited to cooperate. As an example: on the last weekend of September 2018, the poviats day of senior sport was organized at the initiative of the Communal Seniors' Council. Seniors competed in 10 competitions, including throwing a basketball into the basket, throwing a ring or hockey slalom. Co-organizers and judges in sports competitions of seniors were young people from the school in Borzecin. The idea turned out to be a hit and worth continuing in the following years.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1) In general, the scale of growing number of the Seniors' Councils in Poland still is not satisfactory. The vast majority of older people remain outside its influence.
- 2) The state of social infrastructure used to provide support services and organize activities of older people is unsatisfactory. There is a shortage of staff specialized in working with elderly people with varying degrees of independence, different cultural potential and social capital. These deficiencies are largely supplemented by the enthusiastically active Seniors' Councils.
- 3) The question arises: why Senior Councils are needed? The answer seems to be clear: Senior Councils are a source of knowledge about the situation and problems of seniors in the commune. They help the commune authorities create local law adapted to the needs of older people.
- 4) Senior Councils have knowledge and life experience that they can share with others. They are spokespersons for older people who are struggling with various problems.
- 5) The Councils are an activating institution for seniors, which care for a worthy image of older people. They promote intergenerational cooperation.

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