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VI

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY IN LATE ADULTHOOD. MOTIVES AND PERSONALITY CONDITIONING

**Działalność wolontarystyczna w późnej dorosłości.
Motywy i uwarunkowania osobowościowe**

ABSTRACT

One of the issues that challenge modern societies today is improving the quality of life among elderly people. It is also important to prevent the old from being excluded. Although people believe that every age has its privileges, more and more frequently it appears that the late adulthood is described easier by disadvantages than the advantages it can offer. That is why it is so important to work on socially positive attitude towards the old. Nowadays, there are many organizations designed to facilitate elderly people's lives. However, not even one of them seems to identify and meet their needs as aptly as the Universities of the Third Age. They not only educate but also help students gain satisfaction and self-fulfillment. This is mainly achieved through the idea of volunteer work that currently becomes increasingly popular among seniors.

The primary objective of the study was to indicate and describe the conditioning of the volunteer activity among the students at the Universities of the Third Age. The data was obtained from a random sample of 72 students of the University: 36 volunteers and 36 non-volunteers.

The analysis was carried out by means of the following methods: Neo – FFI Personality Inventory, Cantril's Self – Anchoring Ladder, Volunteer Survey/Non-volunteer Survey.

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In the study, when compared with non-volunteers, volunteers were found to be higher in Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Differences between the groups were not statistically significant. In the analysis of the Cantril's Self – Anchoring Ladder it appeared that volunteers did not differ from non-volunteers in their sense of life satisfaction. The data from the Volunteer survey / Non-volunteer survey revealed that volunteer activity was essentially determined by motivation to satisfy one's personal and social needs.

Key words: the University of the Third Age (U3A), volunteer activity, personality conditionings, quality of life

Streszczenie

Udział osób starszych w społeczeństwie zwiększa się, co przyczynia się do kulturowej i ekonomicznej ewolucji. Jednym z jej następstw jest troska o podnoszenie jakości życia osób starszych i przeciwdziałanie ich społecznej marginalizacji. Obecnie seniorzy stanowią prawie 13% polskiego społeczeństwa, a ich liczba rośnie. Prognozy przewidują, że za 15 lat będą stanowić już 17% ogółu ludności w Polsce (Dobroniewski, 1998). Jedną z propozycji dobrego poradzenia sobie z tym wyzwaniem jest działalność Uniwersytetów Trzeciego Wieku, a szczególnie ta ukierunkowana na rozwój i popularyzację wolontariatu wśród osób starszych.

Otwartość na wolontariat jest zjawiskiem pożądanym, ale złożonym. Autorki rozdziału próbowały zbadać czy istnieją zależności pomiędzy cechami osobowości a podejmowaniem działalności wolontaryjnej przez słuchaczy Uniwersytetów Trzeciego Wieku. W analizach uwzględnili również jako źródło zmienności odczuwane poczucie jakości życia. Badania miały także na celu poznanie motywów, którymi kierują się seniorzy chcący pracować jako wolontariusze. Ponadto pytano się o ich obraz wolontariusza. Próba kontrolna złożona była ze słuchaczy UTW nie interesujących się aktywnością wolontariacką.

Pomiar objął próbę 72 słuchaczy Kazimierzowskiego Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku w Bydgoszcy oraz Toruńskiego Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku. Wśród respondentów było 36 wolontariuszy oraz 36 nie-wolontariuszy. W badaniu wykorzystano Inwentarz Osobowości NEO-FFI Costy i McCrae, Drabinę Cantrila oraz opracowaną na potrzeby projektu Ankietę Wolontariusza/Nie – wolontariusza.

Zebrane wyniki, chociaż poszerzyły wiedzę badaczek o wolontariacie osób starszych, nie dały podstaw do rozstrzygnięcia hipotezy o zależności pomiędzy cechami osobowości w modelu Wielkiej Piątki a działalnością wolontaryjną słuchaczy Uniwersytetów Trzeciego Wieku. Przeprowadzone analizy pokazały, iż osoby starsze, tak z grupy wolontariuszy, jak i nie-wolontariuszy, przejawiają wysokie poczucie jakości życia. Wśród najczęstszych motywów bycia wolontariuszem stwierdzona chęć bycia potrzebnym i użytecznym, chęć pomocy innym oraz rozwój własny. Dla wielu badanych wolontariat stanowi źródło wzajemnych korzyści, a nie jednostronny zysk osób z tej pomocy korzystających. Ponadto zaobserwowano silne utożsamianie się seniorów z rolą wolontariusza.

Słowa kluczowe: Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku (UTW), aktywność wolontariacka, uwarunkowania osobowościowe, jakość życia.

INTRODUCTION

The number of the elderly in the society is constantly increasing, thus dynamizing cultural and economic evolution. The aspect that until now was merely possible has become a necessity now; increasing the quality of life of elderly people and preventing them from being excluded from the society. Currently, elderly people constitute almost 13% of Polish society, and experts forecast that in 15 years they will constitute 17% of all people in Poland (Dobroniewski, 1998). One of the suggestions of dealing with this challenge is work of the Universities of the Third Age, in particular volunteer activities developed at them. As Peter Drucker (2001) points out, active attitude to life of elderly people does not have to be limited to professional activities; it is better if it can find its continuation in various non-profit activities. They can provide social contacts to the individual, be great source of challengers, and finally bring significant success. Unfortunately, voluntary service is the source of satisfaction and joy of life for very few senior citizens. Most of them cannot deal with sad stereotype of old age and ageism.

In this article the authors share with their knowledge, reflections, and experience in the field of popularizing voluntary service among senior citizens. Apart from analyzing literature on the subject they present reports from their own research projects into the field of old age. The aspect that deserves particular attention is the most recent attempt of measuring personal and situational conditioning of involvement in voluntary activities among people in the late stages of adulthood, namely the students all of Universities of the Third Age.

THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

1. Demographic justification of the significance of old age

Demographic changes that can be observed throughout recent decades have generated the increase of the interests with old age and aging among scholars within the scope of social and medical sciences as well as politicians and economists. In case of scholars this interest has been centered mostly on the exploration of true nature of the phenomenon in the scope of its individual diversification. The socio-economical implications of old age in turn give sleepless nights mostly to economists and politicians. The explanation to the question: 'why?' is provided in the following figures.

In the 17th century probably only 1% of the population lived beyond the age of 65. In the 19th century that rate increased to 4% (Cowgill, 1970; in: Stuart-Hamilton, 2000). Last decades, with their civilization progress made old age common experience that can be shared by still increasing number of members of industrialized societies. Presently, people reach late adulthood much more frequently than they used to. According to demographers, at the beginning of the 20th century not more than 25% of the populations of European countries could expect to live until 65 years old (Brody, 1988; in: Stuart-Hamilton, 2000). Although the data for Poland has not created the illustration of the phenomenon of aging society yet, the participation of old people in this society has been increasing systematically.

The forecasts for next years are even more optimistic. It is estimated that in the industrialized societies of Europe almost 70% of the population is going to reach the age of 65, and between 30 and 40% will live until 80 years old (see: Stuart-Hamilton, 2000). The United States observes equally dynamic increase of the number of people at the retirement age (see Fig. 1); it is predicted that the number is going to increase from 12.4% of the population in the year 2000 to over 70 million citizens in 2030, thus being at least doubled.

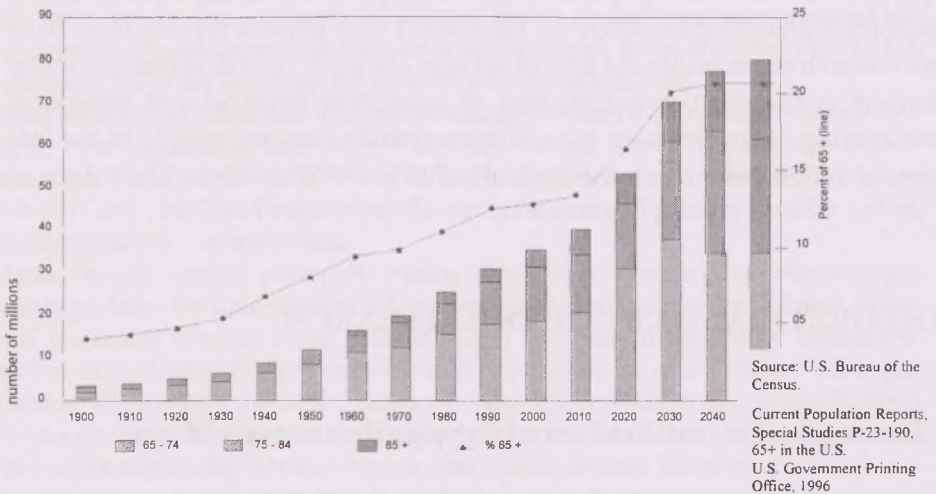


Fig. 1 Old people number in age brackets: 1900 to 2050

Data presented above may be promising from an individual's point of view, when perceived from the macro-scale of a society, however, it may raise some uncertainty about the country's economic condition in future. This is the consequence of the fact that the increasing number of senior citizens is not accompanied by the increase in the number of people at economically productive

age. The scale of the problem connected with so-called 'greying generation', is illustrated by old-age dependency ratio proposed by Ian Stuart-Hamilton (2000). It expresses the proportion of people at retirement age, so those benefiting from various forms of social and health welfare financial assistance: pensions, allowances, and state health care system, to those in employment, and as a result adding to the State Treasury by paying their taxes. Currently, the rate of old-age dependency ratio is about 1/5 among most industrialized nations, and probably is going to rise to at least 1/3 before 2040. Hastily generated solutions for this economically challenging situation, relying mostly on rising the labour age thus postponing pension benefits in time, lead to increasing social dissatisfaction among all age groups; elderly people are top-down pressured to block workplaces for the young who are in constant search of jobs. This leads to the increase of social animosities, frequently expressed by strengthening age prejudices.

2. The profile of late adulthood

Late adulthood is commonly known as old age. Literature on the subject does not provide an explicit characterization of this stage. Even the very beginning of the old age period constitutes the field of academic discussion, and can be defined between 45 and 75 years of age (Straś-Romanowska, 2003). For the sake of clarity, the age of 65 becomes the point at which a person enters late adulthood (Birch, Malim 1997; Coni, Davison, Webster; 1994; Hayflick, 1998). This statement, however, does not surmount difficulties in the description and clarification the nature of aging and old age of a person, e.g. the discussion on when a person really becomes old results from taking into consideration the interpersonal variability criterion, combining individual rate of aging and the lack of consistent image of old age, hence differences in selecting old-age criterion. The measures used most frequently are: **1. biological criterion** – changes of physiological functions of individual's body, and **2. socioeconomic criterion** – defined as subjecting one's life space to economic, institutional, and sociological factors. The factor that is also pointed as crucial one is **psychological criterion** that encompasses changes into the sphere of psychological processes, personality and in the sphere of subjective experience (see: Stuart-Hamilton; 2000). The above-mentioned criteria of the late adulthood refer to three dimensions of human life: the biological, the psychosocial, and the psycho-subjective one (Straś-Romanowska, 2003).

The analysis of the literature on the subject reveals the fact that with age the importance of the genetic factor in development decreases. On the other hand, the function of culture and of ecological factors increases (Błachnio, 2007). One

can conclude that biological existence, joy, sadness or life dynamics of an old individual result from social relations within which she or he functions and his or her current position in life (Ossowski, 2006).

The main category of defining individual's situation in late adulthood is loss and/or costs of aging. The following aspects are analysed from the following angles: loss of health, slump in physical condition and activity, decrease of physical attractiveness; death of people significant for an individual; decreasing social and economic status; increasing the sense of uselessness and lack of respect; and approaching the perspective of death (Straś-Romanowska, 2003). Old people use different strategies while dealing with these events; some of them include escaping the problem, distancing from it, evaluating the problem, confrontation strategies, and/or solving the problem. An important part in selecting particular strategy has one's personality and social support. Social contacts maintain self-esteem; decrease social isolation, and can serve as direct preventive methods for critical situations (Bilikiewicz, Parnowski, 2003).

3. Personality of elderly people

“...old age is indeed natural, but not all changes that accompany it are necessary in a given time and shape, since they depend on personality.”
(Obuchowski, 2002, p. 67)

Data referring the personality of elderly people is not explicit. There is evidence that the traits listed in the ‘Big Five’ model (extroversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness) demonstrate stability and do not change throughout the life of an individual (Costa, McCrae, 1997; in: Straś-Romanowska 2003). Additionally, numerous research has demonstrated significant correlation of the Big Five with health advocacy, post-stroke recovery, the sense of well-being or general morale (see: Stuart-Hamilton, 2000).

The literature presenting the research supporting the proposition about the changeability of personality in course of individual's life is available as well. The research conducted by A. A. J. Hendricks (2008) on a group of people between 16 and 91 years old with a use of FFPI (Five- Factor Personality Inventory) questionnaire can serve as an illustration here. In the course of research it was presented that people in late stages of adulthood display changes within five factors of personality. In the group of elderly people the researchers noticed higher level of tendency to compromise and conscientiousness. Minor changes were also observed in the sphere of extroversion; the intensity of that feature decreases with age.

Similar conclusions were reached by Hans Eysenck, who in his research also noticed the decrease of extroversion (in: Stuart-Hamilton; 2000). After designing and employing a questionnaire (Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, EPQ) Eysenck proved that physiological changes developed during old age result in changes on the arousal level in nervous system. In consequence, old people experience the decrease of extroversion, psychoticism, and neuroticism.

Other interesting conclusions in the field of personality have been gathered by one of the authors of this paper.³ Examining the construction of author personality put forward by Kazimierz Obuchowski⁴ enabled testing to what extent the established conviction about the low adaptation level of old people, commonly consolidated in a folk wisdom about "the inability of teaching an old dog new tricks" provides an accurate illustration of the functioning of the elderly. In opposition to this statement, but in accordance with the subject revolution theory by Obuchowski, it was accepted that the new quality of author personality could also develop in old people. This assumption entails the argument that elderly people still preserve the ability to learn and develop new subject quality of individual-world relation. Should the thesis be proved false, and old age was really connected with functional stiffness, the generation of people in their late adulthood would be dominated by individuals illustrating the types following previous types of personality: the role man and the learning man; for the sake of clarity they were classified together as non-author personalities.

The research was conducted on the sample of 166 persons in the period of late adulthood. One of the tools used in the research was the *Self-author Personality Questionnaire* designed by the research team of General Psychology and Personality Department at UKW in Bydgoszcz.

Results were presented in the chart (Chart 1).

Chart 1. Percentage participation of homogeneous (full/no) and heterogeneous categorial results in the period of late adulthood

	FULL SCOPE	LIMITED SCOPE	NO SCOPE
Old adults	8,40%	85,60%	6,00%

It becomes visible that only small percentage of the respondents revealed features typical for model of self-author personality. Nevertheless, vast majority

³ Detailed description of research procedure as well as presentation and the analysis of the results are available in monograph published at UKW (Błachnio, 2006).

⁴ The theory of the of civilization changes and the implications were the organization and functioning of human personality resulting from this theory have been explained by the author in the numerous publications (see: Obuchowski, 2000a, b; 2002; 2005).

of senior citizens possess certain author properties, though they do not create a complete author personality of themselves. The participation of non-authors comes to about 6%. The results allow for the conclusion that an old person remains an active participant of socio-cultural changes preserving certain development potential. The conclusion is confirmed by the research conducted on the same group of respondents referring to their temporal orientation.

Temporal orientation that is beneficial for the development of an individual has great potential. According to life-span psychology and in agreement with normative order of time in temporal psychology, it remains young people's domain. Old people are commonly attributed with yesteryear orientation that enables them to balance their own lives, extensively described in literature on the subject, in order to successfully experience the process of acceptance of loss (death of family members and friends, loneliness) and approaching death. The domination of the past in temporal perspective of an old person limits his or her chance for development or deprives him or her of this chance at all. The person is denied the possibility of creating the features of author personality in him or her. How should one interpret the results obtained by the senior citizens during author personality measurement then? In order to answer the question it was decided to measure empirically temporal orientation of senior respondents.

The research on the temporal perspective was conducted with the use of AION-99 questionnaires by Czesław Nosal and Beata Bajcar. Following the authors of the tool, it was assumed that the evidence of the orientation on a given time dimension is the highest score from three scales separately measuring the attitude of the respondents towards past, present, and future. The results are presented in the chart below (Chart 2)

Chart 2 The layout of temporal orientation in the period of late adulthood

AGE GROUP	PAST ORIENTATION	PRESENT ORIENTATION	FUTURE ORIENTATION	NO DISTINCT ORIENTATION
LATE ADULTHOOD	44 (26,51%)	81 (48,80%)	22 (13,25%)	19 (11,44%)

Data on temporal orientation of all the respondents turned out to be very interesting. It showed that stereotypical connecting an old person with past is a false generalization. Only about 26% of respondents were truly oriented towards past. Great majority of people in their late adulthood turned out to be presentists, and over 11% preserved future orientation. These results confirmed the possibility of further development of old people implicated by the measurement of properties of author personality described earlier.

4. Different faces of old age

The mode of functioning of senior citizens is marked by biological and psychological changes, social context of their lives, and the scope of identification with the role of an old person. The content of the identification depends mostly on the notions about old age and aging taken by a given society or general culture patterns of old age. Frequently, they constitute the mirroring of the situation of old people in this society. The content includes positive notions on elderly people as experienced and wise members of the society as well as negative ones about their social and professional uselessness. The ambivalence in describing old age has been present in former as well as contemporary cultures (Bugajska, 2005). In ancient Greece and Rome old people were depicted with veneration and respect (Plato, Cicero, etc.), but also as cantankerous, quarrelsome, mean, craven, and unduly meticulous (e.g. Aristotle) (Dubas, 2002).

The time of late adulthood is connected with numerous changes. One of them is the visible slump in the body functions e.g. in nervous system, failing eyesight and hearing; developing difficulties with verticalization of one's body, weakening function of heart and cardiovascular system, and/or lower potency. The brain is aging as well; one of the symptoms is the loss of gray matter in upper part of temporal lobe and in frontal lobe; it is more visible among people preferring passive lifestyle. Disability in old age is frequently connected with the numerous disorders e.g. psychosis, depressive states, senile dementia in the form of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease (Ossowski, 2006). All these factors contribute the fact that the period of late adulthood is perceived as the time of loss, time causing fear or even disgust.

An old person is faced with a necessity of adapting to pension, still growing physical limitations, losing people who are close to her or him, and additionally he or she is expected to create a mature attitude towards death (Pietrański, 1990). Moreover, old age is associated with degradation of corporeality. The sad picture of senility becomes frequently a part of senior citizens themselves who overlook their possibilities and act up on loss and their own waning, thus impairing their own life potential (Błachnio, 2008). Frequently, while being sound in body and full of plans for the future, they lead themselves to believe that being old is tantamount to being ill, weak, helpless, asexual, and lonely (Zych, 1995; in: Bugajska, 2005; Pichaud, Thareauova, 1998). As a result, they close all prospects for the future and rarely set any goals; they feel anxiety and lack of the sense of security. Without any reflection, they accept the fact that the only activity that is expected from them is withdrawal and yielding space to the next, young generation (Hauziński, 2007; in: Błachnio, 2008).

Common perception of old age is also distorted by various myths. They mainly refer to psychological functioning of an individual. One of most common

fallacies is the belief that because of fading memory a person in late stage of adulthood is not able to make accurate independent decisions, solve problems or learn (Zych, 1999).

There is another face of old age though. According to Erik H. Erikson, old age is a time when an individual reaches complete maturity, wisdom and internal integrity. Then, senior citizens can fully recognize and see define sense of life (Dubas, 2002). The developmental task of this period is also the acceptance of one's life via understanding it (Pietrasiniński, 1990). By drawing up an active balance of one's life so far results in achieving psychological integrity.

The source of life satisfaction among elderly people is mostly their active participation in social life via acting out the parts imposed by the society and by the individuals themselves (Ossowski, 2006). A human being is a social creature and always needs contacts with other people. With age, this need becomes stronger. That is why an important element of entering the age of late adulthood is training the ability to establish and keep social interaction (Zych, 1999). Displaying activity, especially social, favours not only adaptation to but also the acceptance of that stage of life.

The Universities of the Third Age, Senior's Clubs, and Day Care Centers constitute attempts to depart from stereotypical perception of old age as a time of passivity and decline. They offer the chance for the elderly people to develop their interests and gain new experience and skills. Additionally, these organizations favour shaping open and active attitudes towards world and life (Domańska, 2000).

5. Universities of the Third Age and their significance for elderly people

The first University of the Third Age (U3A) was established in France. It was created in 1973 by Pierre Vellas, a social sciences professor (Polish site: www.utw.pl; www.harrowu3a.co.uk). Among chief goals of the organization were:

- the improvement of psycho-physiological and social condition of elderly people and the quality of their lives;
- taking up and carrying out the goals of lifelong learning;
- extending knowledge in the field of gerontology;
- acting together with local communities and in the field of diseases of people (see: Błachnio, 2008).

The first University of the Third Age in Poland was established in Warsaw in 1975, and its originator was Professor Halina Szwarc. Currently, there are almost 110 Universities of the Third Age in the country opened for 25 thousand

of students (Jopkiewicz, 2006). The diversity and content of the offered classes allows the students of Universities of the Third Age to discover the areas they find most interesting (Dobroniewski, 1998). The curricula of U3As favour the cognitive development of an individual that gives chance of both learning about and understanding the world as well as one's place within it (Ossowski, 2006). Taking up activities in accordance with student's interests can give pleasure and result in general satisfaction in life. This in turn greatly influences good psychophysical condition that frequently increases as the classes progress (Dobroniewski, 1998). An issue of great importance seems to be the fact that U3As facilitate the chances of establishing social relations and informal meetings based mostly on shared interests, attitudes, and needs (Ossowski, 2006).

6. The function of Universities of the Third Age in creating the quality of life among elderly people

Quality of life constitutes evaluative profile of a situation of a given person or group of people; frequently it is limited to a list of objective factors such as health condition, family situation, the amount of income, the level of education, the character of relations with other people, material goods one possesses, economic situation of the country, ect. (Levine 1995 in: Trzebińska, Łuszczynska, 2002; see also: Błachnio 2005).

Psychological well-being undergoes dynamic changes in time, and those changes can be either of **contextual** or **developmental** nature. **Contextual** character describes the feeling of happiness resulting from obtained goods and consuming them. The amount of goods, their quality as well as the attitude towards them in time are fluid, thus evaluating individual happiness. **Developmental** category defines happiness and well-being as the process of development and constructing mental representation of the whole life relying on incoming information, also that referring to goods an individual uses. While making an evaluation of the quality of life an individual uses various sources of information, e.g. affective states, previous experience and events, expectations towards future, social comparisons (Bańka, 2005). The quality of life is then the effect of ontogenetic development.

The correlation between activity and the sense of quality of life among senior citizens has been extensively described in the literature on the subject. Activity is identified as the main determinant of positive adapting to the process of aging and old age. Individuals who remain active successfully deal even with their personal limitations; passivity in turn significantly lowers the sense of quality of life (Błachnio, 2002).

The Universities of the Third Age help maintaining the activity of an individual not only in intellectual sphere. They perform culture-forming role, but mostly enable experiencing self-fulfillment via various forms of non-profit activities. This mode they help senior citizens shaping their own good mental and physical state (Ossowski, 2006).

7. Motivation to take voluntary activities

The words 'volunteer' comes from Latin *voluntarius*, which stands for 'of one's free will'. Polish offers a synonym 'community worker' [*społecznik*] that initially referred to a person who was an active member of community life without receiving any remuneration, merely for the benefit of the others. The term became compromised during Polish People's Republic years, and today few people use this name (Kamiński, 2004). Volunteer can be distinguished by motivation serving as the base of his or her commitment that is a strong need for non-profit activity, understanding its purpose and value (Kamiński, 2004).

Christianity played an important part in the development of benevolent activities. It has formed numerous patterns that activated helping within the community, e.g. the Good Samaritan model. John Paul II in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* stressed the value of voluntary work and its connection with Christian obligation to love one's neighbour as well as care for building a civilization of life (Tokarski, 2008). Holy Father wrote: "...groups of volunteers prepared to offer hospitality to persons without a family, who find themselves in conditions of particular distress or who need a supportive environment to help them to overcome destructive habits and discover anew the meaning of life (John Paul II, 1996; in: Tokarski, 2008⁵).

Voluntarism has become an important element of contemporary communication thanks to way of life and values it represents; they include:

- putting an individual at the core of interest;
- directing the attention to the most needing and the weakest ones;
- civic sense of responsibility and participation in social life;
- respect for the others;
- selflessness in empathy activities;
- sharing one's life with the lives of the others (Gawroński, 1999).

Relying on such foundations voluntarism fulfills certain responsibilities, among other tasks it:

- stimulates public institutions and demands from the state the rights for the weakest ones;

⁵ English text obtained from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html ; retrieved:27.12.2010.

- anticipates the response of the state to the unexpected needs;
- creates a different awareness in people who usually do not care about difficult situation of the others;
- integrates public service;
- imparts the sense of humanity in service (Gawroński, 1999).

Literature on the subject provides numerous theories explaining socially-minded activities of an adult person. One of them is the phenomenon of empathy; it assumes that fellow experiencing with other person his or her misfortunes creates motivation for helping this person, satisfying his or her needs, alleviating his or her suffering, ect. (Mandał, 1999; in: Tokarski, 2008)

Another concept constitute two types of altruism described by Jerzy Karyłowski: **endocentrically motivated** one and **exocentrically motivated** one. The former is based on expecting internal reward or punishment (e.g. in the form of satisfaction, pleasure or sense of guilt or shame). The latter situates the person who needs help and his or her good at the core of its attention. The author sees exocentric altruism as the highest level of selflessness. Endocentric motivation is understood as internal motivation contributing to the increase of one's self-esteem. Following this motivation, volunteers expect that their activities are going to be rewarded by the person or the society that benefited from these activities.

The activities of volunteers can also be marked by ostensible altruism. It appears when one individual sacrifices him or herself for another person without distinct request or even against the will of that person. This type of help is frequently oppressive for the people who experience it. Additionally, it can humiliate the recipient, frequently making him or her helpless and dependent on the environment (Tokarski, 2008). A recurrent motive pushing people into voluntary activities is the wish to repay a debt, sense of gratitude for help they once received. People who are guided by this motivation feel the need to reciprocate via offering their support and help to those who are in need.

Many authors looking for the answer to the question "What serves as the remuneration for voluntary work?" refer to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy-of-needs pyramid (Pisarek, 2002). They believe voluntary work fulfills the need of affiliation and love, respect and self-fulfillment. Among factors volunteers find crucial are group work; interpersonal contacts; affiliation and personal development (Pisarek 2002).

Many people treat voluntary work as a chance for testing themselves in new life role. Numerous forms of voluntary work are treated as traineeship, apprenticeship, attempts made in order to prepare oneself for performing similar roles in professional activities. Sometimes volunteers perceive their activity as the fulfillment of their own interests and/or development of their personality (Kamiński, 2004).

8. Voluntary activities of the Universities of the Third Age

- Kazimierzowski University of the Third Age

The first person to promote the ideals of voluntary work among the students was Professor Roman Ossowski with his lecture “Voluntarism at the Universities of the Third Age – life adventure or necessity”. KU3A received a grant from *The Universities of the Third Age* programme carried out by Polish-American Freedom Foundation at the Jagiellonian University for the project “Creating Voluntarism”. Students – volunteers took a course in psychological aid preparing them for taking part of a volunteer. The course consisted of five modules: Support and Life Help; Children and Adolescent Counselling; Late Adulthood Counselling; Helpline; Interpersonal Communication.

Currently, students at KU3A cooperate with Social Welfare Center in Bydgoszcz; it has appointed those trained volunteers to the posts that are suitable for their interests, and competence (Błachnio, 2008).

- Torun University of the Third Age

In April 2006, Toruń University of the Third Age together with *TŁOK* Kuyavian-Pomeranian Centre for the Support of Nongovernmental Initiatives [Kujawsko-Pomorski Ośrodek Wsparcia Inicjatyw Pozarządowych *Tłok*] undertook activities connected with creating the local *Time Bank*. The project titled “Senior’s, Junior’s and Child’s Time Bank” supported by Polish-American Freedom Foundation and the Foundation for the Jagiellonian University was created at that time. The essential idea behind *Time Bank* is combining knowledge and skills of the students with the requests of people and institutions that are in need of volunteers’ assistance.

The second project of TU3A has been “Generation Relay”. The work of volunteers has been based on the agreement with the school authorities, tutors, educators, and librarians. Thanks to “Generation Relay”, gifted students from the city of Torun, and its vicinity receive support and care of the volunteers.

- Słupsk University of the Third Age

Voluntary service at the University of the Third Age in Słupsk operates as a part of the project titled “We learn, have fun and act together”. The project is to change negative stereotypical perception of elderly people. In difficult socioeconomic situation, it enables senior citizens to join actively in the course of social life via supporting education and tutoring of children and youngsters.

- The University of the Third Age in Konin

Voluntary service at this University functions within the project “Voluntary Service of the Third Age”, carried out by *Pay It Forward* Foundation of Doctor Piotr Janaszek. The major goal of the action is supporting the integration of

children and youngsters with senior citizens and acting against mutual exclusion of those groups.

- Ustka University of the Third Age

Voluntary initiative operating at UU3A is *Time Bank*. The Bank was created by the students of the University. The deposit constitutes the services the students are willing to provide to the others free of charge. The students do the shopping; accompany during walks, read, look after pets, assist while preparing meals or while dealing with various formal affairs and institutions, they help with housework and running repairs, etc. The initiative is to enhance their help and support to other individuals in need. An elderly person who is not a student at UU3A can also become member of the Bank.

- The University of the Third Age in Knurów

Every year the students of U3A organize the collection for children from youth clubs in Knurów. During Christmas time, volunteers collect funds that are later donated for presents for children. Additionally, in 2009 the 3rd Charity Evening organized by the District Board of Polish Red Cross took place in Knurów. The representatives of Knurów U3A volunteers present during the meeting handed over to the president of Polish Red Cross non-cash aid for children from the youth club in Szczygłowice. Volunteers have organized collections of money that have been donated for U3A students needing help.

- Rzeszów University of the Third Age

Volunteers in Rzeszów have undertaken activities rooted in the need to share their time, skills, and heart with those who need various types of help, support, advice or simply somebody to talk to. Voluntarism comes down to friendly mutual help free of charge in demanding life situations. Additionally, they offer help and care to the present and former oldest students. They also organize meetings of so-called U3A veteran group.

- The University of the Third Age in Zielona Góra

As a part of voluntary service, the students have organized Friendly Aid Team. Volunteers help the solitary students or those in need of support in sickness and in health; they keep in touch with the students that for different reasons ceased to participate the classes. Additionally, they systematically visit and look after the graves of the deceased students.

- Świętokrzyski University of the Third Age

The students of the University work as volunteers in Children's Homes and in the local Oncology Center. They cooperate with Generations' Club, Music School, Welfare Homes, and *Amazons* Club. Volunteers have organized numerous charity actions, e.g. the collection of money for the purchase of artificial leg for seven-year-old Kasia who suffers from tumour; collections of books, magazines, jewellery, and other knick-knacks helpful during art classes in Occupational

Therapy Room of Świętokrzyskie Oncology Center. Students have been gathering money for buying Christmas presents (teaching aids, school goods and socks) for children from 'Home for Children'; they also collected money for buying table tennis accessories for children from *Dobra Chata* [Groovy place] youth club. Senior citizens from the region are planning to broaden their activities and take up helping children in studying or looking after challenged, solitary and ill people (in Welfare Houses, centers for the challenged and the solitary ones). They also plan starting to work on the ŚU3A chronicle, start cooperation with the students from other U3As in the field of voluntary service and beyond. Additionally, they are planning the accomplishments of numerous ideas for the integration with the environment of children and adults of the city of Kielce.

- Łódź University of the Third Age

The students of Łódź U3A together with the students of ViLE e.V of Ulm University in Germany take part in FELIZ Project titled "Voluntary work in Europe: Lifelong learning through intercultural, intergenerational and Internet-based cooperation". The main purpose of the project is strengthening the value of voluntary service of elderly people and strengthening European identity of senior citizens. Additionally the product supports European mobility of elderly people and international exchange of experience and knowledge in the field of non-profit activity.

- The University of the Third Age in Działdowo

The University of the Third Age in Działdowo has two sections: Caritas Voluntary Service Section and Mutual Help Section.

The agreement on voluntary service between Caritas and U3A was signed in January 2006. The cooperation relies on giving private classes to children and youngsters by retired teachers, the students of U3A. Between January 2006 and June 2009 volunteers organized 388 two-hour classes on the following subjects: Polish, History, Social Studies, English, German, Science, Biology, Maths and Chemistry. Apart from that, the students of U3A have helped pupils of grades 1-3 in mastering their reading, writing, and counting skills.

The senior citizens in the Section of Mutual Help take two-person shifts during lectures and other U3A celebrations during which they share with their experience with other people. They offer their help, support, and care to ill and disabled students. Additionally, they offer legal counselling in formal, administrative, and rehabilitation cases.

- Lublin University of the Third Age

In 2006, U3A in Lublin established Multigenerational Volunteer Club. Its members have organized help for elderly, poor, solitary, and ill people. They have cooperated with Special Education Youth Club, in which they have held classes for children. During Christmas, the members of the Club have organized the

action called The GIFT of Time and Heart for elderly, solitary, and ill people who have no contact with the exterior world. Volunteers visit people in welfare homes, in old-people homes and children who remain in hospitals.

THE RESEARCH OF THE VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF U3A STUDENTS

Theoretical discussions explain the academic interest of the authors in voluntary service among people in late stages of adulthood. Within the larger academic project designed by Professor Roman Ossowski and Aleksandra Błachnio and financed from *The Universities of the Third Age* program of Polish-American Freedom Foundation, and carried out by the Foundation for Jagiellonian University⁶, Joanna Adamska explored personal and situational conditioning of voluntary activities of the students of the Universities of the Third Age. In her research, she concentrated on resolving the following issues:

- Is there any correlation between the features of personality and taking up voluntary activities by U3A students?
- Is there any dependence between the sense of the quality of life and taking up voluntary activities by U3A students?
- What is the motivation of the U3A students for taking up voluntary activities?
- What is the image of voluntary service and volunteers among U3A students?

Respondents

In total 72 students of Kazimierzowski University the Third Age in Bydgoszcz and Torun University the Third Age took part in the survey, 62 females and 10 males, aged between 52 and 80.

The research group consisted of the students of KU3A and TU3A who have taken up voluntary activities. The group consisted of 36 people, 33 women and 3 men.

The control group consisted of the students of KU3A and TU3A who express no wish to be active as volunteers. The group consisted of 36 people: 29 females and 7 males.

⁶ *Creating Voluntary Service* project was described in a separate monograph (Błachnio, 2008).

The course of research

Research consisted of two stages. The first stage was meeting the students during the lecture of KU3A; the second – meeting the students of TU3A. Students were informed about the research during the lectures and asked whether they agreed to take part in it. After giving their consent people willing to take part in the research received *NEO-Five Factor Inventory* by Paul T. Costa and Robert T. McCrae; *Quality of Current Life Scale*; and the *Volunteer/Non-volunteer Questionnaire*.

NEO-Five Factor Inventory by Costa and McCrae – the inventory consists of 60 items that constitute five subscales:

Neuroticism (NEU) – constitutes emotional adaptation versus emotional instability dimension. It describes the susceptibility to experiencing negative emotions (fear, embarrassment, dissatisfaction, anger, sense of guilt, vulnerability to psychological stress). It includes six factors: anxiety, aggressive hostility, depression, impulsiveness, oversensitivity, and excessive self-criticism.

Extroversion (EXT) is a dimension characterized quality and quantity of social interaction as well as the level of activity, energy, and the ability to feel positive emotions.

Openness to experience (OTE) describes the tendency of an individual to look for and positive evaluation of life experience, tolerance towards novelty and cognitive curiosity.

Agreeableness (AGR) is the positive-negative dimension of attitudes to other people, interpersonal orientation: altruism-egoism, experienced in feelings (sensitivity-indifference to the affairs of other people), thoughts (trust-lack of trust) and acting (cooperative-competitive attitude).

Conscientiousness (CON) is the dimension of the degree of organization, perseverance, and motivation in goal-oriented actions; it defines the attitudes of an individual to work (“the will to accomplish something” or “character”) (Zawadzki, et.al. 1998).

Quality of Current Life Scale. *Quality of Current Life Scale* was employed in order to obtain individual evaluation made by particular people; the evaluated element was the level of the quality-of-life. This scale is constructed following the pattern of the Cantril ladder. The person is to mark on a ten-level scale his or her own evaluation of his or her own life; 1 describes the quality of life as definitely low, whereas 10 as definitely high (see: Błachnio, 2003).

Volunteer/Non-Volunteer Questionnaire. The *Volunteer Questionnaire* included open questions about the motivation of students to take up voluntary activities as well as about profits taken from working as a volunteer for the

volunteer him or herself, as well and as for the person who asks for help. The Non-Volunteer Questionnaire enquires why voluntary activity is not attractive to the respondent as well as asks about the benefits of voluntary service for the people who turn to help to volunteers. Additionally, both groups were asked about a definition of a 'perfect volunteer'; each respondent could choose from 20 features. Next, they were asked to list the features provided in the questionnaire that describe the asked person as well. Both versions on the questionnaire included personal data section that included questions about age, gender, and place of residence.

The results of the research

The results gathered in the group of volunteers and non-volunteers in the circle of U3A students gave the following image of their pro-social activity. Personal conditioning did not bring unambiguous answers; it can be explained by a small number of respondents. The very idea, however, that the study is to be conducted among the volunteers and the beginning of voluntary service at Kazimierzowski University of the Third Age did not allow for increasing the testing group. Nevertheless, some subtle tendency became visible; they are presented chart 3.

Chart 3. The distribution of the results obtained in NEO – Five-Factor Inventory in the group of volunteers and non-volunteers

NEO-FFI	Volunteers		Non-Volunteers	
	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation
NEU	4,17	1,99	4,16	1,65
EXT	6,61	1,89	6,03	1,59
OTE	6,58	1,96	6,22	1,89
AGR	6,72	1,83	6,36	1,72
CON	6,44	1,90	6,33	0,26

The analysis of the distribution of the results illustrates that the average of the results obtained at the Neuroticism scale by Volunteers and Non-Volunteers is the same. The average results of Volunteers obtained on the remaining scales, Extroversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, are slightly higher than the average results obtained by Non-Volunteers. The analysis with the use of independent Student's t-test samples did not reveal statistically significant differences for gathered averages. The results for particular NEO-FFI scales are presented the chart below.

Chart 4. The analysis of the average results obtained in NEO-FFI questionnaire in Volunteers and Non-Volunteer groups with the use of Student's t test.

	T	Df	P
NEU	2,06	70	1
EXT	-1,42	70	0,161
OTE	-0,80	70	0,428
AGR	-0,86	70	0,392
CON	-0,29	70	0,771

Chart 5. The distribution of the sense of the quality of life in the group of Volunteers and Non-Volunteers.

Variables	Average	Standard deviation
Volunteer	7,5	1,48
Non-Volunteer	7,22	1,33

The analysis of the distribution of the results reveals that the average of the results on the Sense of Quality of Life scale is higher in the group of Volunteers. The difference is insignificant though, the fact that is also supported by the analysis with the use of Mann-Whitney U test that reveals the existence of statistically significant differences in the level of quality of life between the group of Volunteers and Non-Volunteers ($z = -0,66$; $p = 0,506$).

Interesting list was reached after quality analysis of the results obtained in Volunteer and Non-Volunteer Questionnaires. The analysis of individual answers from the Volunteer Questionnaire revealed search in repetitive motives of voluntary activity. In order to analyze the results, the answers of the respondents were grouped into categories. The most frequent are:

- the wish to feel useful;
- the wish to help others;
- the wish to gain experience and obtain new competence.

The analysis of the answers given by the respondents in the Non-Volunteer Questionnaire also allowed for creating general categories; they defined the reasons for the lack of interest in voluntary activity. The most frequent were:

- being touched by one's personal problems;
- poor health condition;
- lack of competence and/or anxiety about failing in the role of a volunteer;
- lack of time.

Additionally, the respondents were asked about the benefits resulting from voluntary service. The most frequent categories answers were:

- the possibility of contact with other people;
- the sense of being useful/needed;
- personal development, especially spiritual one.

Analyzing the answers of the respondents on the question about the benefits resulting from voluntary service for the people who used this help, certain tendencies common for volunteers and non-volunteers became visible, namely in both groups the respondents stressed the ability of obtaining **support and constructive help** by those who needed it.

Both questionnaires included questions about features desirable for a volunteer. The answers obtained from the respondents are presented below (Fig. 2 and 3.)

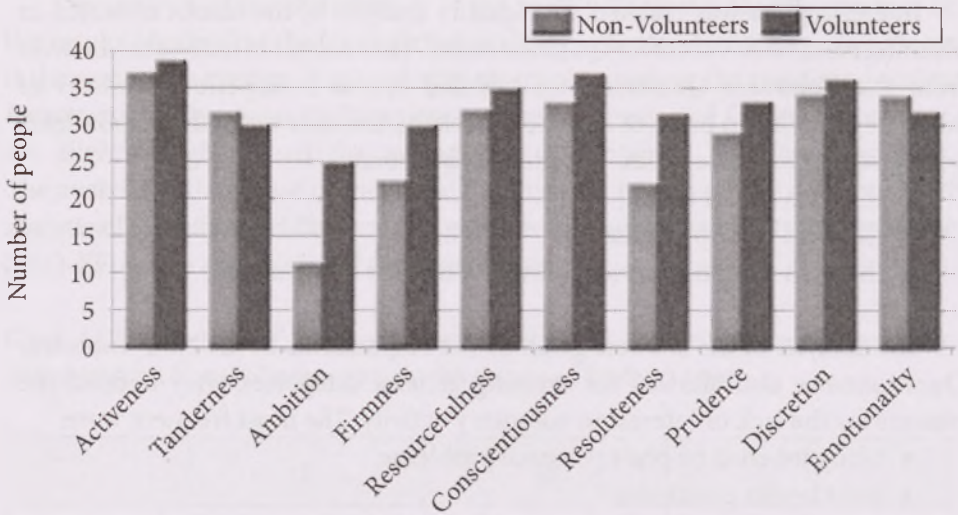


Figure 2. Volunteer's desired features – part one

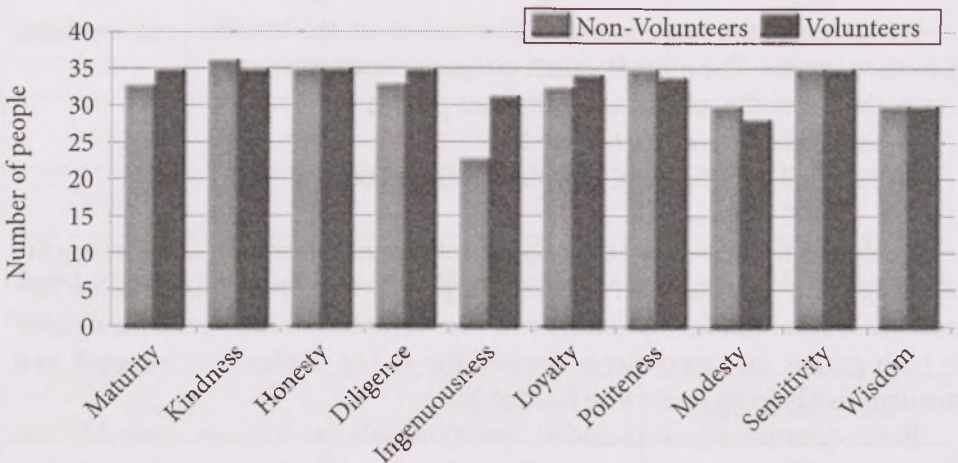


Figure 3 Volunteer's desired feature – part two

In both groups majority of respondents chose **discretion**, **kindness**, and **conscientiousness** as the features desired in a volunteer. Apart from that, **honestly**, **sensitivity**, and **politeness** were also frequently selected features.

The characteristic given the lowest value by the respondents was volunteer's **ambition**. It is worth mentioning, however, that the respondents who were active volunteers pointed it as desired characteristic more frequently than non-volunteers did.

Volunteer activity in late adulthood

In the course of the research the respondents were asked to perform self-description. The purpose of this task was testing to what extent characteristics desired in voluntary service functioned as descriptors of individuals taking part in the measurement. The results are presented below (Fig. 4 and 5).

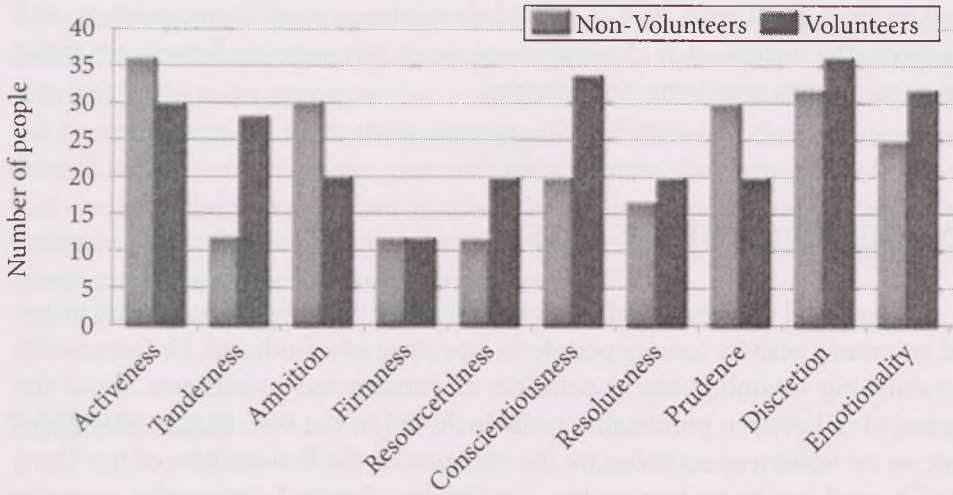


Fig. 4 Features ascribed to oneself by persons tested in Volunteer and Non-Volunteer group (part one)

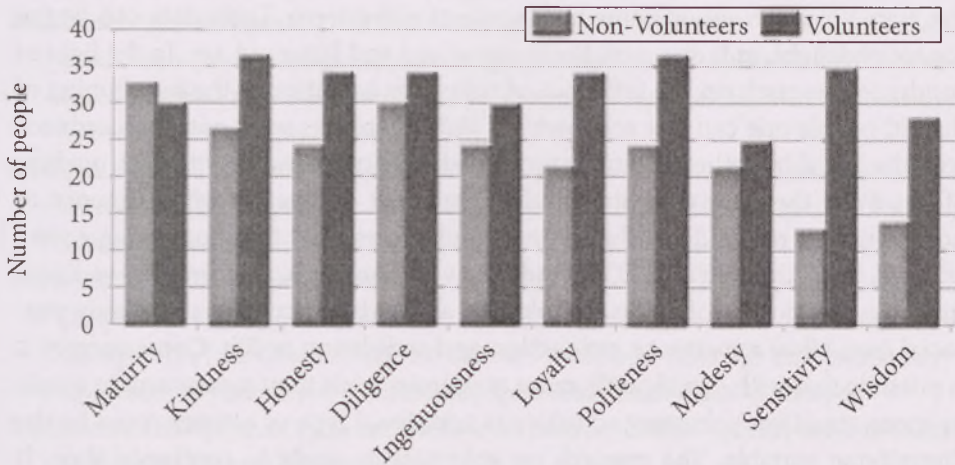


Fig. 5 Features ascribed to oneself by persons tested in Volunteer and Non-Volunteer group (part two)

Features that dominated in Volunteers' self-descriptions were kindness, politeness, discretion, honesty, and loyalty. Other features frequently declared by the respondents were firmness, ambition, resourcefulness, confidence, and prudence.

Non-Volunteers most frequently described themselves as active, discreet, and mature. Frequently they perceived themselves as ambitious, prudent, and diligent. The features they chose the least frequently were tenderness, firmness, resourcefulness, sensitivity, and wisdom.

DISCUSSING THE RESULTS

Theoretical and empirical studies allowed for creating an interesting image of voluntary activity among people in late stage of adulthood. Unfortunately, establishing unambiguous conclusion of constructed hypotheses about the correlation between personality traits included in the Five Factor Model and taking up volunteer activities by the students of the Universities of the Third Age turned out to be impossible. Tendencies observed during the research, although in accordance with initial assumptions, did not demonstrate statistic gravity.

The research has proved that elderly people from the Volunteer as well as from the Non-Volunteer group show high sense of self-esteem. These data can be the source of delight, as it disproofs the image of sad and bitter old age. In the light of conducted research on the influence of voluntary activities on the functioning of the old people one can just acknowledge that the results were not in accordance with the initial hypothesis, namely pro-social activity correlates with high quality-of-life. Why there were no statistically significant differences with reference to non-volunteer respondents then? One should remember that both groups were selected from the circle of U3A students, who remain active, and as we know from the psychology of aging and old age, all kinds of activeness, not only pro-social one, allow experience satisfaction and well-being in life. Consequently, it is possible that with significantly more numerous trials then measurement would be more sensitive. Voluntary activities as additional type of activity could be the diversifying variable. The research on voluntarism ought to continued then. It is worth to take into consideration broadening the measurement by the control group including elderly people who do not participate in the classes offered by U3A, and are not involved in pro-social activities.

Quality analysis of the results obtained in the Voluntary Questionnaire turns the attention to the motivation of the respondents that is mostly based

on their wish to be needed and useful, their wish to help others and one's own self-development. Those motives have also been described in the literature on the subject. Apart from that, for numerous respondents voluntary service has constituted a source of mutual benefits not only established ad hoc profits of the people who use this help.

Another feature worth noticing is the selection of personal character traits desired in a volunteer. Among the respondents who have taken up voluntary activities those traits corresponded with the ones used in self-descriptions. In the control group, in turn, there were significant discrepancies between the desired features of a volunteer and one's own features. One can conclude then that students who make up their minds to become volunteers strongly identify themselves with this role. This tendency is absent among non-volunteers. This sphere can serve as the field for further research.

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