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Life passions of seniors in the context of personal resource management

Pasje życiowe seniorów w kontekście zarządzania zasobami osobistymi

Słowa kluczowe: pasja, rozwój, senior, aktywność rekreacyjna, zarządzanie zasobami osobistymi.

Streszczenie: Rozwój człowieka trwa przez całe życie. Istnieje jednak stereotypowe myślenie o osobach starszych jako o tych, które w momencie zakończenia kariery zawodowej przerywają jakąkolwiek aktywność. Artykuł skupia się na pasjach i hobby seniorów – sposobie, w jaki są one odkrywane i rozwijane, aby sprzyjać ciągłemu rozwojowi osobistemu, poprawiać jakość życia, a przede wszystkim nadawać sens życiu. Aby potwierdzić, że pasje można rozwijać również w starszym wieku, przeprowadzono badanie wśród 129 seniorów, wykorzystując wywiad jakościowy. Zidentyfikowane rodzaje pasji i hobby, a także przypisywane im znaczenia zostały opisane w części empirycznej tekstu. Wnioski potwierdzają, że rozwijanie pasji i hobby nadaje sens życiu seniorów i pomaga im czuć się spełnionym i zadowolonym ze swojego życia i osiągnięć.

Key words: passion, development, senior, leisure activity, personal resource management.

Abstract: Human development continues throughout life. However, there is a stereotypical thinking about older persons as those who stop any activity the moment they end their professional careers. This article focuses on seniors' passions and hobbies of seniors — the way in which they are discovered and developed to foster continuous personal growth, improve the quality of life and, above all, give meaning to life. To confirm that passions can also be developed in old age, a survey of 129 seniors was conducted using a qualitative interview. The types of passions and hobbies identified and the meanings attributed to them are described in the empirical part of the text. The findings confirm that developing passions and hobbies gives meaning to seniors' lives and helps them feel fulfilled and satisfied with their achievements.

Introduction

For seniors, life satisfaction and the sense of living a quality life is determined by numerous factors. One of them is leisure activity, pursuing important, short- and long-term life goals associated with self-fulfilment and fulfilling one's dreams,

desires and goals regarding personal development. Even though, activity — narrowed down in this text to pursuing one's passions — is only one of many determinants of satisfactory life, it has a significant impact on the quality of life, perceived health condition, psychological wellbeing (cf. Jagielska, 2020) and the sense of living a meaningful and fulfilled life (cf. Piķuła, 2016).

WHO describes the sense of quality of life and fulfilment as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept incorporating in a complex way the persons' physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and their relationships to salient features of the environment" (World Health Organization Quality of Life, 1995, p. 1405). Thus, it can be said that, as a multi-dimensional concept (Banka, 2005), which refers to the normative expectations in the context of objective living conditions and their consequences to mental life, the quality of life, is an extremely important category in the studies on different dimensions and indicators of the quality of life, including life passions, attitude toward personal development, realisation of goals and, through them, self-realisation (cf. Krok, 2009, p. 63). Therefore, the focus of this paper is not on all components of the quality of life but on those which refer to individual developmental, socio-emotional, spiritual and cultural aspects in the context of passions and hobbies of seniors. Thus, it was decided that the most adequate model of life quality, which was the starting point in the research design and completion of individual research tasks, is the quality of life model developed by the Centre for Health Promotion (University of Toronto), which describes the quality of life in three perspectives: Being, Belonging and Becoming (Dziurawicz-Kozłowska, 2002). In addition to its developmental aspects, this model is the only one that exposes the spiritual aspect of human life and development (visible e.g. in making sense of life, formulating life and development short- and long-term goals, and burnout prevention). Life passions and development have been located in this particular aspect. In addition, the spiritual aspect of developing life passions and hobbies is connected with the sense of meaning in life, with making sense of life, giving it a positive value through activity, change and personal development. This is compliant with the dynamic aspect of the sense of meaning in life, which assumes that in order to feel that their life is meaningful, people engage in activities focused on experiencing it and it is expressed in a tension resulting from lack of such activities (cf. Klamut, 2012, p. 139, Frankl, 1978, Popielski, 1993). It is also in line with the static aspect (the outcome of actions resulting from the first approach), because through change and development an individual believes that their life has a meaning and results from the satisfaction felt thanks to general positive evaluation of their own actions and references (attitudes) (cf. Klamut, 2012, p. 140, Frankl, 1978, 1984). Making sense of life is connected with a good quality of life (cf. Piķuła, 2015, Jagielska, 2019, Łukasik, Piķuła, Jagielska, 2018a, 2018b, 2020 et al.), the sense of satisfaction with life, one's

own achievements and actions. The lack of it motivates to activity and change. Satisfaction with life, understood as a “positive and negative feelings and attitudes towards own personal achievements” (Boniecka, Liberska, 2012, p. 107), will depend on all the above mentioned factors and motivators that trigger satisfaction (appreciation, respect, achievements, growth and development opportunities). According to a research conducted by T. Myjak (who focused on work but the results can be generalised and referred to passion and hobby development during retirement as a substitute of professional activity, which brings growth, satisfaction and fulfilment), factors that determine satisfaction include: self-realization meaning the space for personal development, using one’s own talents and qualifications; the sense of being useful and proper social relationships (Myjak, 2011, pp. 33–36).

The goal of the paper is to present life passions and hobbies of seniors as leisure activities in the context of making sense of life, recognising its good quality and understanding one’s own personal development.

Seniors’ leisure activities and lifestyles

Life activities of older persons are integrated with the concept of lifestyle. According to Siciński (1985), lifestyle means a set of everyday behaviours typical for a group or an individual, or in other words, a characteristic “way of being”, that distinguishes a group or an individual from other groups or individuals. He claims, that behaviours, motivations and their results create a lifestyle as a whole, however, they are behaviours that “are diverse in their scope and form (or rather: sequences of these behaviours oriented on specific goals, that is, “activities”, “actions”), motivations behind these behaviours (meanings and values assigned to them) and some functions of things that are the results, goals or instruments of these behaviours (due to their role, they too have some “meanings” assigned to them)” (Siciński, 1985, pp. 47–48). In 1990s, Olga Czerniawska studied lifestyles in the context of activity of senior citizens. She identified the following six styles:

- Passive style: typical for seniors who separate themselves from others, stay home and withdraw from life. It is often associated with chronic somatic illnesses and low mood;
- Physically active style: typical for individuals who engage in different forms of physical activity, including gardening (owners of allotment gardens);
- Socially active style: typical for individuals engaged in initiatives of different associations, who work actively for others. This helps them to feel needed and useful;
- Domestic style: focused on household, typical for seniors who are active while staying home (thus, limiting their interpersonal relations) or engage in family life only (participate in family life, help run the house, engage as grandparents);
- Devotional style: manifested as engagement in different religious initiatives, active participation in local church and church organisations;

- Educational style: involves active participation in different forms of learning, including initiatives of the universities of the third age (Czerniawska, 1998, pp. 19–24).

In her publication, Czerniawska refers also to the lifestyle typology proposed by M.R. Pare:

- Withdrawal style: it is characterised by lack of engagement in life, breaking off contacts with others and social death.
- Family style: manifested as full participation in family life, even at the cost of neglecting other activities.
- Fighting style: typical for individuals who are engaged in advocating for the rights of older persons, improvement of their social status and better quality of their lives.
- Participation in social life: this style is based on social activity and voluntary work of seniors (cf. Czerniawska, 1998, p. 25).

The above listed typologies can be useful for the discussion presented herein as seniors who took part in the research belong to the generation whose members actually transitioned from professional activity to retirement when these characteristics were being developed. Thus, presentation of these typologies is justified with the nature of the research objects — seniors whose personalities were shaped by certain socio-cultural, educational, professional, social or economic experiences which are important determinants of their attitudes towards leisure activity in retirement. Some of the lifestyles mentioned above involve passivity, withdrawal or loneliness. This may mean reluctance towards activity, development, other people and self.

The character of one's lifestyle and activities may be the result of this person's positive or negative adaptation to old age. The positive forms include: voluntary activities, intensification of meetings with friends, focus on developing passions and hobbies, participation in U3A's classes or initiatives launched by day community centres, writing memoirs or diaries. These activities are built on higher values, senior's creativity focused on others, on relationships with them and on self-development; they are associated with making sense of life. The negative adaptation forms include: isolation, withdrawal from social life, closing within one's own world/home, creating one's own reality and living solely in the past. The negative forms are most often chosen when seniors cease to feel that their life is meaningful or as a result of a negative life balance.

Thus, the factors which decide about adopting certain lifestyle include those which are, among others, the result of continuity and dynamics of human life filled with numerous physiological, biological, physical, social and psychological events. As noticed by Czerniawska (1998, p. 17), old age is an individual fate determined by a unique course and quality of one's life and health condition (experiences of different ailments and illnesses).

Activity and development of seniors in the context of the sense of meaning in life

Passion- and hobby-oriented leisure activity of seniors is one of the key determinants of their individual development. Whether an activity is connected with development depends on four key conditions: 1) having and updating the vision of self as a person living in the rapidly changing world and the vision of self as a human, a person engaged in certain activities (passions, hobbies); 2) openness to new things and rational reception thereof (involves also openness to new ideas and values that underlay one's life philosophy, guarantees conscious fight with biases and stereotypes regarding oneself); 3) courage to ask questions and search for answers; 4) courage to make new decisions (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 1994, p. 60).

Contemporary human sciences associate human development (at every stage of life) with the concept of "lifelong development". According to Tabor, all psychological theories applied to define development have some shared characteristics, such as developmental changes as part of the process, the fact that development takes place in different areas and is determined by specific development indicators or that completion of development tasks ensures progress (cf. Tabor, 2008, p. 11). The researcher thinks that it should be considered in the context of one's individual activity (Tabor, 2008, p. 13), that is, developmental activity aiming at self-improvement and self-development. Kazimierz Obuchowski says that development refers to the inner focus on perception and realisation of self "in the categories of personal, remote tasks" (Obuchowski, 1993, p. 31). A person who is aware of their own development, implements the "self project" through formulating adequate specific, individual goals which are then pursued through certain activities, has both the project of "personal tasks and implementation activities". The latter are the result of that person's engagement in pursuing passions or hobbies and, consequently, development (Łukasik, 2022). The fact that active attitude towards development is integrated with the sense of meaning in life is extremely important. It makes life meaningful through activity, utility, creativity etc. and thanks to it retired life gains new meaning, other than during professional activity. Through being active, seniors as individuals re-discover themselves in other roles and other life context. The meaning of life, understood as a set of more or less conscious opinions and ideas about the future life duties, materialises itself in a specific structure of goals and opportunities to meet these goals. Obuchowski identifies three types of life goals: general and long-term, specific and incorporated in action (Obuchowski, 2000). From the perspective of searching for meaning in life, it is important that people have long-term and remote goals, and passions or hobbies enable them to set such objectives. They should be set because specific goals do not ensure the sense of meaning due to quick gratification which, once received, may result in a feeling of meaningless. Similarly, goals incorporated in action focus on the method, the method used rather than the condition of final acts. The meaning in life, oriented on remote and feasible tasks, engages the senior's abilities, provides more opportunities to relate to various events, problems and complications that

occur on the way to completion (Dolińska- Zygmont, 1990, p. 17). Therefore, one can say that the sense of meaning in life depends on having a valuable concept of life, which is "realistic (adjusted to one's individual capabilities) and has adequate form: it must be general enough and not too specific so it can be realised using various methods" (Ibidem) including through pursuing one's passions, hobbies and interests.

Methodological assumptions

The goal of the study was to recognise and identify passions and hobbies of seniors in the context of making life meaningful and experiencing its quality, as well as understanding one's individual development. The main research problem was formulated as follows: *What are passions and hobbies of seniors?*

The research was conducted using the method of qualitative interview with specific instructions. The interviews were performed between January and July 2023 among 129 seniors from towns and cities located in South-East Poland (convenience sampling), including: persons aged 60–69 years: 43 women and 10 men; persons aged 70–79 years: 49 women and 15 men; persons aged 80 years and more: 10 women and 3 men. For the purpose of this paper, a simple data analysis was performed to identify the dominant categories of passions and hobbies of the respondents and typical activities within each category.

Seniors' passions in the light of results of original research

Developing passions and hobbies is particularly important for older people. It not only facilitates development but also enables active time with people who share similar interests. Table 1 below lists typical passions and hobbies of seniors. The data are presented by age groups.

The analyses indicate that seniors prefer active lifestyle regardless of age. According to Olga Czerniawska's classification, seniors opt for physical and domestic activity of artistic and educational character, what results directly from their passions and hobbies. It is worth emphasising that the adopted age criterion and passions and hobbies assigned to it can be considered only as confirming the stage in life, as age not relevant for passions and hobbies declared by the respondents. Seniors engage in physical activities: dance, walks, nordic walking, swimming, cycling, mushroom hunting, fishing and, save for illnesses that affect some of the respondents, there is nothing else that prevents them from being active in these areas. The shared characteristics of these respondents is that they like to be active, spend time with others and enjoy their everyday experiences. For the majority of them, active life is the result of their passions and hobbies. Most of these activities is the continuation of passions and hobbies developed in the times of professional activity or a return to the interests or dreams of their youth abandoned due to lack of time when making career and raising a family. That is why seniors love to solve crossword

Table 1. Passions and hobbies of seniors

	Women	Men
60–69 years	Solving crossword puzzles, word puzzles, sudoku; growing flowers, floristics, Ikebana, farming, spending time with family, watching movies, romantic movies, reading books, newspapers and magazines, walks, crafts, nordic walking, cooking, vegetarian cooking, baking, crocheting, knitting, watching TV series, gardening, cycling, skiing, trekking, rallies, swimming (swimming pool), gymnastics, dance, politics, singing, trips, visiting new places, traveling, sports, painting, writing song lyrics, memory exercise, cinema, animals (dogs, cats, horses, wild birds), Polish history (interwar period), history of art, Krakow history, philosophy, psychology, regional music, natural medicine, healthy diet, volunteer activity, lay judge, acting/theatre, singing in a choir, sewing, board games, card games, current affairs programs, DIY	Sports, nature, animals, movies, war movies, nordic walking, trips, walks, dance, driving, cycling, fishing, singing, politics, solving crossword puzzles, mushroom hunting, watching TV, gardening, automotive, woodwork, farming, pigeon breeding
70–79 years	Reading books (psychological, novels, travel, crime), reading magazines, growing flowers or ornamental shrubs, gardening, orchard cultivation, animal breeding, crocheting, knitting, cooking, baking, movies (nature), watching TV series, watching TV, dance, sports, trips, traveling, tourism, visiting new places, walking, nordic walking, cycling, swimming (swimming pool), politics, social meetings with friends, theatre, cinema, floristics, cuisine, farming, decorating salads, decorating party tables, solving crossword puzzles, solving riddles, picking mushrooms, TV game shows, DIY, decoupage, making crepe flowers, working with youth, working with children, board games, learning foreign languages, aerobics, engagement in NGOs activities, life, traditions and culture of other people (ethnic and culture groups), concerts, classic music, opera, operetta, movie music, cross-stitching	Cinema, watching (good) movies, singing, walks, watching TV, politics, fishing, nordic walking, sports, swimming, cycling, beekeeping, DIY, photography, gardening, solving crossword puzzles, music, concerts, chamber music, jazz, opera, regional music, cooking, baking, learning foreign languages, dance, rescue service, reading press, sudoku, mushroom hunting, history, arts, law, army, theatre, literature, trekking, renovating and collecting old cars, motorcycles, tractors, bikes; regionalism, exploring local traditions
80–89 years	Solving crossword puzzles, knitting, crocheting, gardening, floristics, sewing, growing flowers, traveling, reading books (travel, cookery), walks, gymnastics, riddles, baking, cooking, growing flowers or vegetables	Gardening, cooking, sudoku, army, sports, orcharding, renovating old motorcycles and cars

Source: Authors' own research.

puzzles, riddles and sudoku, play board or card games, which helps them exercise their memory, strategic thinking and decision making. They also like to expand their knowledge through reading books, listening to lectures, participation in webinars (about art, culture, music, travels, other countries, cuisines etc.) and develop their artistic skills e.g. crocheting, knitting, sewing, embroidering, floristics, decoration, decoupage, photography, writing, singing etc. Many seniors cultivate their gardens, not only to get vegetables or fruit, but also to grow different species of flowers and decorative plants. They engage in this activity and enjoy it, improve their knowledge about gardening and happily share it with others, showing the results of their passion. Both women and men spend a lot of time on developing their culinary interests: cooking specialties from different cuisines and baking. Men also engage in DIY activities, renovate old cars, machines etc., breed pigeons or bees. Of course, various activities associated with hobbies include also passive ones like reading books (according to one's interests, from historical novels, through psychological books, to recipe books or travel journals) or watching movies (like in the case of literature, the profile and topics differ individually and depend on one's passions). One can notice that hobbies and passions of the interviewed seniors match the leisure activity categories identified by O. Czerniawska (1998). The positive aspect is that these are physical, artistic and social activities, however, only a few of them are connected with participation in higher culture or development of passions using online resources. This may mean that mentality of contemporary seniors is, culturally and socially, heavily embedded in the 1980s/1990s. Their experiences from those times have the deepest impact on their present way of living and, despite numerous social and technological changes, their present functioning is still based on their past experiences. It is not wrong but only means that gerontologists and educators are going to face new challenges when preparing activity offers for people who will become seniors in 20–30 years from now, as they will be completely different than present senior generation. Thus, the offer should include that what is typical today and that what is still unknown. It should prepare caregivers and educators to work with senior citizens in the areas of leisure activity (and within it, activities associated with developing passions and hobbies, which may be the same but their form and implementation may be totally different).

From the perspective of the analyses conducted, it is also important to further specify the meanings and values that seniors assign to their passions and hobbies. According to the majority of the respondents, they "allow us to develop our thinking, especially in my age, when memory becomes so fragile" (K, 79, teacher). Thus, they have educational, therapeutic and psychological value. Moreover, they give meaning and purpose to life, prevent loneliness, mental diseases and self-destruction. Here is what the interviewed seniors said: "Except of my family which is, of course, the priority, one should have their own independence. It is possible thanks to passions. If we wake up thinking that we have certain things to do and we know they bring us joy, then we know that we are alive and have a purpose" (K, 61,

office worker); development of passions "reduces the chances of depression" (K, 69, white collar worker), thanks to them "I feel at peace, I can rest" (K, 61, pensioner). In addition, developing passions and hobbies helps the respondents understand the changing world, discover new things that have been unavailable. Thus, "by developing my passions and hobbies, I keep being active, I want to live. I enrich my knowledge, sometimes I discover things I've had no idea about. I encourage others to awake their passions and hobbies, and be curious about the world around us" (K, 74, teacher). For seniors, developing passions and hobbies is their "window to the world" (K, 70, farmer).

Seniors who actively develop their passions and hobbies are individuals with positive attitude towards life, who see the purpose and meaning in it. Their passions allow them to pursue new goals and make sense of life. Activities they engage in help them meet their key life needs such as the need for development, recognition, belonging. Thanks to it, they feel that the quality of their life is improving, they focus less on the disadvantages of old age (illnesses, decreasing psycho-physical and cognitive abilities etc.) and more on reaching their goals and using the benefits and advantages of life.

Summary

The common (stereotypical) opinion is that old age means disability, helplessness and end of life. Through development of passions and hobbies, engagement and social visibility, seniors' activity is an excellent way to overcome this negative image of old age (Łukasik, Jagielska 2016; Łukasik, 2019; Jagielska, Pikuła, 2019). Focus on development, the need to act in order to become better, more excellent in new areas, or caring about self and own comfort in life by fulfilling one's dreams, using one's own potential and learning new skills, is the best way to maintain (psychical) wellbeing and ensure the sense of fulfilment, satisfaction with life and comfort. This is emphasised by the interviewed seniors who, by taking the first step towards meeting their dreams and passions, not only "opened their window to the world" but also overcame different weaknesses, difficulties and disabilities. They are still present but have not become the focus in their lives. Motivation to act and the desire to grow have become an excellent tool to manage their own potential, based on their own resources and with the support from other people, institutions and organisations dedicated to seniors. Developing, discovering and nurturing their passions gives seniors new life and allows them to evaluate their circumstances differently (cf. Ibidem). It becomes the change agent not only in terms of their own potential but also motivates others through peer mentoring or developmental tutoring.

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