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The 2nd International Scientific Conference of the Visegrad Group Countries Elderly People in Cultural Communication Cracow, 10–11 June 2019

II Międzynarodowa Konferencja Naukowa Państw Grupy Wyszehradzkiej Osoby starze w przekazie kulturowym – Kraków, 10–11 czerwca 2019

The 2nd International Scientific Conference of the Visegrad Group Countries “Elderly people in cultural communication” was held on 10–11th June 2019. The conference is organized periodically by the Department of Social Gerontology of the Institute of Social Affairs at the Pedagogical University of Cracow. The first edition of the Conference took place on June 13, 2017 and concerned the elderly in the social-media space. The second edition of the Conference focuses on the issues of seniors in the cultural message.

The invited scientists and practitioners from the Visegrad Group countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland), who handle

different dimensions of culture with regard to the elderly discussed the issue of older people in the cultural message, resulting from the interest in the way of creating the image of seniors by contemporary culture, the need to pay attention to the elderly in contemporary culture and seniors as recipients of culture. Undoubtedly, the contemporary image of old age, and thus of the elderly, is created by many diverse factors. The perception of the oldest generation affects the attitudes towards seniors, their quality of life, their ability to satisfy higher-order needs, which in turn closely corresponds to the social aspect of health and the ethos of old age prevalent in a given socio-cultural circle.

The conference was opened by Piotr Ćwik, the Governor of Małopolska; professor Kazimierz Karolczak, the Rector of the Pedagogical University of Cracow; professor Ireneusz Światała, the Dean of the Pedagogical Faculty of the above-mentioned University, and professor Mirosław Grewiński, the President of the Polish Society of Social Policy. Adrienne Körmendy, Consul General of the Republic of Hungary in Cracow, was also a special guest of this conference. Guests from Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia attended the conference.

Professor Joanna M. Łukasik gave a lecture entitled “Everyday life and the experience of socio-cultural changes in contemporary man”. Dr. Magdolna Nemes from the University of Debrecen discussed elderly care in Hungary. The lecture entitled “Older people and culture in the Czech Republic” was conducted by Dr. Paweł Nowatkowski, and the lecture entitled “Selected areas of generational practices of Polish seniors: (post) socialist practices of modernity and youth culture” was delivered by professor Beata Trzop, professor at the University of Zielona Góra.

Łukasz Salwarowski, Editor-in-Chief of the Senior Voice and President of the MANKO Association, who spoke about the international activities of the Association, including the European Senior Voice, the European Senior Charter and the international game for Seniors “Flying Reporters”, also had his speech. He discussed the plans for action towards senior citizens of the Visegrad Group countries, as well as the latest project called “Voice of Senior Poles Abroad”. Following the closing remarks the guests were invited to the reception hosted by professor Adrienne Körmendy, Consul General of the Republic of Hungary in Cracow.

The scientific discussions were focused on the following issues:

- recognition of the image of old age and the elderly in the cultural message on the international arena;
- defining the role of the older people in the cultural message;
- discussion on the importance of seniors as “carriers” of cultural values;
- definition of social consequences of the dominant image of old age in the countries of the Visegrad Group;
- development of local and international areas requiring scientific exploration and further research, as well as the development of education-related tasks regarding the creation of a positive image of old age and the elderly.

The Participants have reached the common understanding that a lot of similarities occur between the countries (due to the historical background) and the elderly face the same problems. In all the above-mentioned countries emigration constitutes a serious issue, with numerous citizens having taken up jobs in the Western European countries or in the USA, which means they cannot look after their elderly relatives such as parents, uncles/aunts or grandparents. Also, the middle aged are very busy at work or even worse, they are jobless themselves. That generation has young or teenage children which means an other burden for them. All in all, the middle aged are supposed to look after their children and their parents, and work full-time at the same time.

It poses a great challenge for the social security system and the social network to organize proper care for the elderly. As an other issue, a lot of older people are affected by loneliness, neglect and lose contact with the outside world. The Internet, which is available, can ease these problems, although several people are still reluctant to use technology. It is believed that social workers and social pedagogues can help overcome the difficulties and persuade the elderly not to be afraid of the latest technology. It can also be seen that electronic devices can aid the elderly in everyday life. Technology can monitor them non-stop and inform medical services in case they have an accident at home or need urgent medical help. Electronic devices can mean a safer and easier life for the elderly. On the other hand, it is a comfort for the family members that their loved ones are constantly looked after and can be treated properly

when necessary. Moreover, there are also older people who keep in touch with family members or old friends via Facebook but they have to be aware of the dangers of different social sites, advertisements and social media in general.

Some elderly are happy to join clubs such as yoga, Nordic walking or hiking, which is good for their stamina and health.

The situation at the elderly care homes constitutes yet another issue; there are public and private ones in the Visegrad countries. There is a long waiting list to get a place in a public home, so many families go for the private ones even though these can be quite expensive. It is also increasingly popular to find someone who moves to the house where an elderly lady/man/couple live(s). Their job is to look after the elderly until their death. In general, women from disadvantaged background or from Transylvania take up such a position to support their own family financially.

To sum up, the conference was an opportunity to retrospectively create summaries and set new goals for the future of the elderly in the Visegrad countries.