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SELECTED INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS PROMOTING AND ACTIVATING PEACE OF A PERSON IN 'AUTUMN OF LIFE'

WYBRANE INSTYTUCJE I ORGANIZACJE PROMUJĄCE I AKTYWIUJĄCE POKÓJ CZŁOWIEKA „JESIENI ŻYCIA”

Streszczenie: Instytucje i organizacje promujące aktywizację osób starszych odgrywają kluczową rolę w ich zdrowiu psychicznym, emocjonalnym i społecznym, pomagając osiągnąć spokój ducha w okresie „jesieni życia”. Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku oferują seniorom możliwość kontynuowania edukacji, rozwijania pasji i zdobywania nowej wiedzy, co pobudza umysł i wzmacnia poczucie wartości. Kluby seniora natomiast pełnią rolę miejsc integracji i wsparcia. Spotkania w takim gronie pomagają w nawiązywaniu nowych relacji i przeciwdziałają poczuciu izolacji. Różne stowarzyszenia i organizacje działające na rzecz seniorów, jak lokalne grupy wsparcia czy organizacje pozarządowe, organizują inicjatywy społeczne, prozdrowotne oraz wolontariat. Dzięki temu seniorzy angażują się w życie społeczne, czują się potrzebni i spełnieni, co znacząco wpływa na ich wewnętrzny spokój. Wszystkie te instytucje przyczyniają się do budowania silniejszej wspólnoty, w której seniorzy odnajdują wsparcie, rozwój i poczucie przynależności, co pomaga im lepiej radzić sobie z wyzwaniami starości i cieszyć się spokojem ducha.

Słowa kluczowe: senior, „jesień życia”, instytucje, pokój, aktywizacja

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Abstract: Institutions and organisations promoting activating the elderly play a crucial role in their mental, emotional and social life assisting them to achieve their relaxation in the period of their 'autumn of life.' Third Age Universities offer the elderly the possibility to continue their education, to develop their passion and to expand their knowledge, which triggers their mind and supports their values. Older people clubs, however, serve as the places for integration and support. Participating in the activities there facilitates making new relations and counteract the feeling of loneliness. Various associations and organisations working for the benefit of the elderly, such as some local support groups or non-governmental organisations, induce some social, health-promoting initiatives as well as voluntary service. Engaging in the social life, the elderly feel needed and fulfilled, which positively influences their *internal peace*. All the institutions contribute to the foundation of a stronger community in which the seniors find the feelings of support, development and belonging, which in turn helps them deal with the challenges of the older age and enjoy their *peace of mind*.

Key words: senior, 'autumn of life', institutions, peace, activisation

Introduction

The term **PEACE** connotes a lot of ideas and definitions. Most frequently it is related to a series of an individual's events bringing joy, satisfaction, understanding, fulfilment of dreams and expectations, spiritual and mental calmness, safety, a life full of pleasant recollections. Even in a colloquial speech we tend to express that one or another event in life destroyed one's peace both in their soul and heart. Such a situation can happen in any phase of life, including the last phase defined, already by Ciceron, as the 'autumn of life.' (Ciceron, 1996).

I would like to present some specific forms of an 'autumn of life' person's PEACE – a person who struggles with not only physical, health issues but also mental, spiritual and social hardship. It is them that trigger the becoming the various kinds of fear, sorrow, fear and anxiety. It might as well be the fright against the incoming life and, as the seniors often put themselves, a happy *death*. They often experience the internal fight against solitude and loneliness, longing and being abandoned by their family members ('an empty nest' syndrome,) excess of free time, meaninglessness of life, and others.

How awful it is to be a senior! - complains Ptahhotep, the vizier of Pharaoh Isesi, 4,000 years ago. *A senior gets weaker day by day, his sight deteriorates, his ears fail to hear, gets weaker and is unable to recollect what happened yesterday.* He finishes his complaint

with the words: *Old age is the biggest disaster a man can experience* (Minois, 1995, Bois, 1996).

It all induces a great MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL ANXIETY and a SENIOR's face expresses sorrow, depression, grief, helplessness, readiness to stay open to an another person, lack of courage in searching for some helping activities. It is the most difficult period and the most difficult struggle of an every day and night, a struggle so specific in which quite frequently a PERSON IN 'AUTUMN OF LIFE' – due to the happening events - is left in their solitude. What gets distracted is their further life.

It triggers some multiple queries, including: how to live the ultimate phase of life – 'the autumn of life' so that, depending on the current needs and possibilities, a senior can experience the joy and spiritual PEACE coming from the helping activities of various institutions and organisations in action?

I hope that having learnt the material included in the speech and in the presented literature of the analysed issue, a reader will be able to find the response to the question above. Among numerous institutions and organisations which realise the specific PEACE to a person in the 'autumn of life,' the author chose to present some profound analysis of the Senior's Clubs, Third Age Universities, Catholic Action, some associations, societies and organisations.

Senior's clubs

They are the specific meeting places for the people 'in their autumn of life.' It is there that there is a chance to draw some new, additional social contacts and also to spend (a lot of) free time in a pleasant manner. In these places the people 'in their autumn of life' experience the peace of their mind, develop their cultural and educational needs and interests. Making use of their activeness potential – their internal potential – is one of the numerous ways of reaching some peace and joy as well as their existential need. It can function as the reverse to their feeling of loneliness, social isolation and the sensation of being unwanted, and also it can support their intellectual and creative possibilities.

Senior's clubs originated after World War II (Szaroła, 2006, p. 10). In the beginning the clubs were organised by some volunteers working in some groups supporting the elderly, women's voluntary service and by members of various religious organisations. The first clubs opened in Great Britain and the 1950s witnessed their expansion especially in the Western Europe. In the 1960s such clubs opened in some socialistic countries, including Poland (Gretkowski, 2020). According to A.A. Zych, the first senior's club in Poland originated in

Poznań, in the district of The Old City in 1924 (Zych, 2007, p. 82). These senior's clubs were managed by Polish Social Welfare Committee (PSWC) and they solely offered meeting the need of taking care. Currently the senior's clubs are run by various institutions, including non-governmental organisations. The patronage over some senior's clubs in conducted by Polish Union of Retirees, Disability Pensioners and the Disabled (PURDP&D) as well as residential communities (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2005, p. 169).

The Senior's Clubs in Poland are organised in two primary types as: **company clubs** situated in the vicinity of companies and **local clubs** organised in various clubs, residential areas and cultural centres.

As Z. Szarota underlines, what is especially important to the people 'in their autumn of life' is simply experiencing some PEACE which they undergo while meeting the need of safety, belonging, utility, recognition and sustaining their status, independence and mutual contacts. What is necessary to build PEACE and the proper adaptation is the need of personal life satisfaction, preserving the feeling of continuity and identity regardless of the physiological, social and mental changes happening in a single individual (Szarota, 2006, p. 10).

The fundamental priority for senior's clubs is creating the conditions for a pleasant and peaceful way of spending some free time, for meeting the more sophisticated needs and for arousing some new interests (Muchnicka-Djakow, 1984, p.43). The clubs are to facilitate making and keeping the social contacts, creating social bonds, and eventually counter-fighting the feeling of emptiness, boredom, solitude and loneliness.

The clubs organise talks, readings, periodical lectures, courses which are associated with various fields of knowledge, culture and practice, meetings with interesting people, social evenings, performances, touring trips, picnics, classes in dancing and motion.

The clubs offer therapeutical and preventive gymnastics, promote individual or team-based reading of magazines and books, encourage to do the crosswords and to held conversations and talks. They organise various events and celebrations with reference to national or international (bank) holidays, name days and birthdays of the club's members. The club-goers actively participate in all types of the club activities basing on their personal possibilities, motivation and skills. Due to the club-goers' variety of interests there are numerous sections: artistical, musical, literary, theatrical, tourist, cabaret, a choir – to mention a few. Additionally, the club members help one another by providing some practical or financial assistance, i.e. taking care of the lonely and the ill pensioners (Gretkowski, 2018).

The activity of a club of people 'in their autumn of life' can be bountiful and diverse. It solely depends on its members (Gretkowski, 2014, pp. 63-91). According to J. Kargul, similarly to other cultural-educational institutions, the senior's clubs fulfil four fundamental functions:

1. Compensational function which is related to covering the time void which (has) appeared after the loss of professional activeness, by substituting the broken bonds with former work colleagues (Habior, 2000, pp. 70-71).
2. Psycho-therapeutical function *which is expressed by counter-fighting the sensation of stress experienced by the elderly who are aware of ageing and also by creating some situations stimulating the elderly to some cultural activeness which, in turn, allows steaming off some internal tensions and levelling the emotional attitudes, which is a condition of someone's well-being* (Habior, 2000, pp. 70-71).
3. Integrational function expressed in *having the elderly socialise with other social groups. It provides the feeling of belonging to the society and counteracts the feeling of solitude.*
4. Adaptational function - *assistance in adjusting an elderly person to old age. The author also expresses his opinion that the senior's clubs will be operating also in the future owing to the fact that the sponsoring institutions perceive the senior's clubs as important not only for this age category* (Habior, 2000, pp.70-71).

Iza Muchnicka-Djakow underlines that *proper organising of the elderly's free time enables to meet all of the above mentioned functions – each of them is equally important to achieve the happy and satisfactory life while being a pensioner* (Muchnicka-Djakow, 1984, p. 64). The senior's clubs also function as charity associations possessing legal personality. Their activity is (among others) to manage the elderly's cultural-caring activeness and education.

The senior's clubs strengthen the feeling of community, which helps to create new relations, to support the inter-social bonds and to counter-fight the feeling of loneliness. Frequent encounters among one's peers allow to exchange the experiences and to enjoy the jubilation of everyday, which calms one's mental life. Participating in some activities, like artistic workshops, handcraft or educational classes provides the elderly with the feeling of purpose and motivates them to the further development. A lot of the elderly people find satisfaction and peace while discovering new passions and interests. The club meetings frequently offer the possibility to discuss some problems and challenges related to age, which calms the tensions. A group of peers can better understand the same worries and a supportive group can help to deal with the changes happening in the process of ageing. The regular

exercise – yoga or breathing practice, as well as meeting the psychologists or the mental counsellors can facilitate the moment of reaching the internal balance. Such activities help to cope with the anxiety related to passing and deteriorating health. Thus, the senior's clubs not only support physically and socially but also emotionally and spiritually, which plays a key role in the process of achieving *the internal peace* in getting old.

Third Age University (TAU)

Another form of fulfilment, development and the same achieving PEACE by a person 'in their autumn of life' is being active (Szwarc, Dzięgielewska, 2007, p. 64). Such a form supports senior's education, further education and the developing of their interests. Integrally related to the education of adults, the continuing education presently plays a particular role in this generation's life, since it assists at overcoming the hardship associated with internalising some new, and for many people, difficult contents – the ones introduced to everyday life through constants changes, revaluation and the civilizational progress. It also helps with maintaining the social contacts, defeating loneliness, continuing one's life in the society and not out of the society or in its margin. It is also one of some forms to build the mental PEACE in a senior's everyday life (Gretkowski, 2014).

The educational role in the integration of people 'in their autumn of life' can be analysed from various perspectives: it disseminates the gerontological knowledge among the younger generations, it prepares the adults or even adolescents to the old age, it serves as the inter-generational integration with the purpose of the cultural continuation. It can also be limited to educational and integrational activeness (Gretkowski, 2014).

Numerous institutions acting for the benefit of the elderly deal with activating people 'in their autumn of life.' Among them the most distinguished are the Third Age Universities acting since 1975 and offering diverse forms of education and integration to the people 'in their autumn of life' (Nowicka, 2006, p.284). Having retired, the seniors need not only reduce their life to chores at home but they search some new ways of activeness thanks to which they reach PEACE in their everyday life.

Similar to other states, the increased population of seniors in Poland caused by extending the lifespan triggers the generation of the people 'in their autumn of life' and also the whole society *the call for action for the benefit of the healthy, optimist and socially utilitarian old age. One of such form of action are Third Age Universities. These unique universities make it possible to expand one's knowledge along with practising fitness, they induce the elderly to the social activation for the advantage of an individual and the society*

alike, they facilitate making new friends and they share the concept of brotherhood among all the people (Szatur-Jaworska, 2006, p.172).

What is the biggest victory is the victory of a person 'in their autumn of life' against loneliness, alienation, surplus of free time, lack of contact with peers (the internal struggle.) A significant help in reaching the victory, and at the same time experiencing the internal PEACE can be an active enrolment and participation at Third Age Universities whose main role, since their origin, has been *creating some diverse forms of institutionalised assistance for the benefit of the elderly so that they would be able to resolve the crisis associating the process of ageing by themselves* (Szatur-Jaworska, 2006, p.83).

According to A. A. Zych, the Third Age University is *an educational institution or an open educational centre dedicated most of all to the elderly and the one which offers various courses, lectures, seminars in the term cycles; learning languages, working in sections and groups of interests as well as classes on health education, team fitness, motion, recreation and touring. It is generally organised by operating universities or associations of the elderly in cooperation with some institutions of higher education* (Zych, 2007, p.195).

M. Susłowska defines TAU as *an amazing phenomenon* and claims that it is a form of educating the elderly which *is becoming more and more common. Its organisational forms happen to be diverse – from various types of some courses within educating adults (Scandinavian states) to the elderly students' participation in university lectures along with the youth (Germany.) The TAUs existing in Poland also have some diverse forms* (Susłowska, 1985, pp.352-356).

O. Czerniawska in the magazine *Education of Adults* (in Polish: *Oświata Dorosłych*) underlines that TAUs, being university institutions, should focus on research, especially the ones related to the process of ageing and the old age. Their purpose should be to learn the process of ageing and prepare some gerontologic and educational programmes for seniors. She also mentions that TAU not only increased the social dimension of the institutions and services dedicated to assist the elderly but also it helped to create a different perspective of the elderly and their possibilities to be educated (Czerniawska, 1982, pp.329-333).

TAUs function in multiple directions. Apart from the above mentioned purposes, they aim at some more detailed targets to which we can include:

- Healthy lifestyle education and implementation of gerontologic prevention.
- Running fitness, rehabilitation and tourist classes.

- Organising the local life as well as various, additional, interest-related classes, such as, vocal band, cabaret, painting, artistic weaving, learning languages and spending time together (Czerniawska, 1982, p.172). It can be claimed that next to the personal sensation of PEACE, The Third Age Universities also play an important social role. They realise the seniors' cognitive needs, the feeling of satisfaction coming from belonging to a peer group, seniors' proper fitness, they complete the personal gaps in education and knowledge, they develop one's personality, new interests, they shape the family bonds. They offer various forms of activeness to the elderly, such as learning languages, university lectures on diverse issues, literary meetings, seminars to mention only a few.

Presenting the mission of the Third Age Universities, O. Czerniawska puts it that *TAUs wish the old age to be the quality time, filled with the things worth living for, things in which an individual can engage so much that they are able to change their attitude to life and other people if it turns our worth doing. TAU does not wish to only imitate knowledge, does not want to be a 'fake'-institution, only complementing, not demanding any intellectual, mental or physical effort. TAU wishes to support the dialogue – that is the meetings of people and cultures, past and present time. It may seem to sound too pompous but the old age is such a phase in which time devoted to what does not engage you profoundly or is superficial, is the time irreversibly lost. It brings emptiness and dilemmas. Therefore, wishing to support the elderly, TAU needs to be careful not to be subjected to processes of commercialism nor an easy tasks* (Szatur-Jaworska, 2006, p.173).

The message which is conveyed by TAUs is simple – LIFE DOES NOT FINISH WHEN YOU RETIRE. Since the very moment you can live the full of your life: you can learn, develop your interests, try to understand the ever-changing reality, meet new people, make friends...and enjoy the EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL PEACE...

Catholic Action

Another group in which a PERSON 'in their autumn of life' can find some invaluable assistance at reaching the personal **PEACE** is Catholic Action - known for many years for its actions. It originated on the grounds of some catholic organisations working actively within (Catholic) Church since 18th century (most dominantly in France, Belgium, Italy and Germany.) Their goal was to provide a joint response of the clergy and the believers to the secular trends displacing the Christian values out of the contemporary society's life (Dore, 1988, p.2).

The origin of Catholic Action is related to Pius IX, the pope. It must be underlined that the term *Catholic Action* was firstly used by Pius X, the pope, in *Motu proprio* on December 18th, 1903 and subsequently in the encyclical *Il fermo proposito* on June, 11th, 1905. It inspired the origin of some various laity organisations and provided them with some prerogatives for action (Senior's Encyclopaedia, 1986, pp.227-232).

The real Father of Catholic Action can be regarded Pius XI, the pope, known as *the Pope of Catholic Action* who observing some threats threatening Church in 1920s decided to mobilise the secular members of Church in order to fight off the anticlericalism and secularity of everyday life (Pius XI, 1931, Machay, 1937, p.131). He presented his opinions in the encyclical *Ubi arcano Dei* on December, 23rd, 1922 and in his letter *Quae nobil* on November 13th, 1928 addressed to the Cardinale A. Bertram. The main purpose of this organisation was to rejuvenate all domains of human life in accordance with the rules of Gospel.

Pius XI, the pope, hoped to achieve the triple realisation of his tasks in Catholic Action, which are the following:

1. Individual – aiming at perfecting an individual. Within this proselytization there is, among others, proselytization of prayer, proselytization of (holy) word, proselytization of encouragement and defence, proselytization of an example and proselytization of spirit of sacrifice.
2. Family – dealing with family protection and implementing the Christian values in the family.
3. Social – preparation for the triumph of faith, Christ's education and laws in nations' social life (Pius XI, 1931, p.132).

In such a perspective, the subjects of Catholic Actions were to be some specific organisations and the key issue – forming life in accordance with faith, first among the members of Church and then among the non-believers. The proceedings of Catholic Action were to be adjusted to various situations and human possibilities (including seniors.) The activities of Catholic Action has been presented in numerous elaborations.

Catholic Action in Poland was in possession of its own *Statute* which, as the only one after the Italian, was approved by Pius X, the pope, on November 27th, 1930 (Constitutional Statute of Catholic Action). In order to realise the statutory indications, on November 24th, 1930 cardinal A. Hlond established the Chief Institute of Catholic Action in Poznań, and it consisted of the chief assistant, the chairman, the managing director and a secretary. The first managing director of this Institute was the bishop of Silesia – St. Adamski, the chairman – A.Boniński. The position of the chief assistant was assigned to W. Dymek. St Adalbert was

chosen as the Patron of the Catholic Action and the Patronal Holiday was to be the Celebration of Christ the King. Since 1931 the Headquarters of Catholic Action started publishing their official magazine, a monthly *Catholic Movement*.

Because the type and structure of the religious-social organisations in various dioceses were different, no uniform criteria were established for the whole country as to belonging of some societies to Catholic Action. It was an ordinary bishop of a particular diocese that decided individually stating whether there is an organisational and statutory relation with the church authorities. It was also the ordinary bishop that presented the register of the organisations belonging to Catholic Action in his diocese (Zdaniewicz, Strzeszewski, Bender, Turowski, 1981, p.424).

Catholic Action of the people 'in their autumn of life' refers to an old tradition whose main goal of its actions is to broaden the Christian formation and to organise the direct cooperation of the secular believers with the church hierarchs in running church's apostolic mission. Their goals are realised through:

- Deepening the religious, moral, intellectual and cultural life directed at apostolic tasks.
- Diffusing the social life with evangelic values.
- Supporting the proper side in public issues related to Church (in accordance with Catholic Social Teaching).
- Reacting to threats to Christian faith and morality.
- Educating Catholic activists and preparing them for their activeness in social, economical, cultural and political life (by Statute of CA).

In all of the above a PERSON in THEIR AUTUMN OF LIFE can participate and by realising the defined tasks, they feel needed not only within his family but also in a bigger community. It is one of the contemporary and actual forms of constructing PEACE on Earth.

Societies, unions, associations

Recently we have been witnessing a fairly positive phenomenon of the people's 'in their autumn of life' readiness to organise as societies, social groups, associations or some diverse unions. Most frequently these are institutions of social life which have the legal personality. Most important ones are: associations, clubs, societies, circles or unions. They all have in common the people's collective character aiming at achieving the joint targets and business results. They have their own organisational structure and their own members who are

accepted in accordance with the rules defined in the *Statute* of rules (Kamiński, 1959, p.15).

It is quite frequently noted that they are not only organisations solely for seniors but they constitute a wider group to which some adults – but seniors-to-be – belong. The fact of the adults belonging to such a group seem to facilitate their preparation for ageing in various ways.

The above mentioned organisations offer the possibility to decide on issues related locally, a certain community, a single person but also they allow a lot of to lead an active life and regardless of the passing time still feel needed. At present the number of associations is expanding and is taking some various forms of their goals realisation. What needs to be mentioned is the associations category: professional (Chief Technical Organisation, The Union of Retirees and Disabled Pensioners of 'Solidarity',) health-promoting (Polish Alzheimer Society,) veteran, graduate, local, interest-related (Allotment Gardeners Association,) religious (Catholic Action,) charitable (Caritas) (Dzięgielewska, 2000, pp.143-144). The presented communities are most often for Catholics and their aim is above all to broaden their religious life. The most popular ones include: processional assistance, *Association of Living Rosary, Association of Living Roses, Community of Our Lady in Rosary, Brotherhood of Rosary, Brotherhood of Mary Worshippers (Knighthood of the Immaculate, Lady Mary's Assistants, Community of Mary's Immaculacy, Third Order,)* Jesus Worshippers (Brotherhood of Jesus,) Apostolate of Divine Mercy, Brotherhood of Worshippers of Divine Mercy, Brotherhood of the Lord's Passion, Brotherhood of Perpetual Help, Consecrated Widows, Worshippers of Saints (St Ann's Brotherhood, St Gertrude's Brotherhood, St Joseph's Brotherhood, St Anthony's Brotherhood,) Apostolate of Prayer, Family of Radio 'Maryja', Christian Mothers' Community, Catholic Action. The existing religious groups present the indicator of Polish traditional Catholicism and their 'en masse' is significant to Polish religiousness. It is worth noting that a high percentage of people 'in their autumn of life', women in particular, participate in this type of meeting, which can indicate such needs (Dzięgielewska, 2000, p.145).

An association which requires to be mentioned and which can play an enormous role in life of a PERSON 'IN THEIR AUTUMN OF LIFE' is Polish Union of Retirees, Disability Pensioners and the Disabled (PURDP&D). This union is represented by a significantly numerous group. It is an organisation of social, non-government and independent character with lasting tradition. It operates within its provincial and regional branches existing

throughout the whole Poland, which makes it nationally the biggest retiree-disabled pensioners organisation. Its main objectives are the following:

- Presenting theirs and their members' standpoint and will when dealing with national authorities, the president, Polish parliament in terms of provisions for pensioners and other regulations with reference to retirees' and pensioners' living conditions.
- Appearing in public media (radio, tv, newspapers) as the spokesperson of Polish seniors' most important issues.
- Cooperation with the bodies of national administration, local government and social organisations.
- Participating in organising care to the lonely, the sick, the disabled and eradicating the barriers hindering the disabled.
- Providing the financial benefits and organising material assistance in some unfortunate situations.
- Providing some (i.e. legal) advice to their members.
- Searching for sponsors to support PURDP&D financially.
- Running the touring activities and pilgrimages nationally and internationally.
- Issuing certificates for lower fares to use when travelling with Polish Railways.
- Organising the cultural activities in local centres, senior's clubs and other interest-related teams(Biuletyn, 2002 s. 7-8).

Conclusion

The presented analysis of the selected institutions and organisations, associations, societies, unions reflects the enormous need of their existence and actions. A person in 'the autumn of life' immensely benefits a lot of good and joy from them and thus, the very PEACE. Their practical actions are what is the best response to the query: Can a person in 'the autumn of life' experience joy and spiritual PEACE? Is it possible...?

The presented analysis entitles us to claim that it is possible under the very condition that 'the autumn of life – the old age is not going to be *just waiting for death in front of a telly or warming the church pews. Resting its elbows on a windowsill, it consumes the leftovers of the outside life. Forgotten, drawn to the margins of awareness, typically attributed with disability and backwardness, it is going to lock itself within the walls of an empty flat and suspiciously observe the world through a peephole* (Krzyżowski, Warsaw 2005, p. 35).

The list of abbreviations:

- PDA - Płock Diocesan Archive
- CA - Catholic Action
- CUL - Catholic University in Lublin
- CST - Catholic Social Teaching
- CIAC - Chief Institute of Catholic Action
- PPI - Płock Publishing Institute
- PSWC - Polish Social Welfare Committee
- PURDP&D - Polish Union of Retirees, Disability Pensioners and the Disabled
- TAU - Third Age University
- AP - Academic Publishing

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