

Seniors 'education as an element of the healthy life style

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Abstract

Social contacts among coevals as well as with young generation, long life education and health are very important for healthy life style. Crucial role in this context in the Czech Republic play University of Third Age (U3A). In the academic year 2015 / 2016 more than 50 thousands of seniors attended U3A in the Czech Republic. Our research focuses on the analysis of the educational offer for seniors in the Czech Republic public universities. Aims of the seniors 'education. 2) Situation of seniors 'education nowadays. 3) Financing of U3A. 4) Analysis of the seniors 'education research. The state of the educational programmes for U3A in the Czech Republic was analysed as a quantitative research, questionnaire technique, Seniors'education as a part of long life education is very important for healthy life style, mental balance of seniors.

Key words: healthy life style, seniors' education, seniors 'expectations, University of Third Age

Streszczenie

Niezbędnymi założeniami zdrowego stylu życia są kontakty społeczne, czy to wśród rówieśników lub z młodszą generacją, całościowe kształcenie się i zdrowie. yKluczową rolę odgrywają w tym temacie w Republice Czeskiej tzw. uniwersytety trzeciego wieku (U3W). W roku akademickim 2015-2016 odwiedzalność tych placówek wyniosła ponad 50 tysięcy seniorów. Celem naszego badania jest przeanalizowanie gwarantowanego kształcenia seniorów na uczelniach wyższych w Republice Czeskiej. Wyniki badań zostały ułożone następująco: 1) Korzystanie z technologii informacyjnych. 2) Adaptacje prowadzące do powstania integracyjnego środowiska edukacyjnego. 3) Zaangażowanie młodzieży w edukację seniorów. 4) Aktywna funkcja seniorów w procesie kształcenia. Badanie koncentruje się również na kwestii finansowania U3W.

Słowa kluczowe: zdrowy styl życia, edukacja seniorów, oczekiwania seniorów, Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku

Introduction

On 31 December 2016, the Czech Republic had 10 579 th. inhabitants, out of whom 1 989 th. are seniors aged 65+ (18.8 %).¹

A university of the third age (hereinafter as U3A) is the most known and spread educational possibility/activity for the senior age group. The objective of U3A is to guarantee seniors their right for learning and education at current scientific level. It is a way of acquiring new findings, knowledge as well as experience. It is also a possibility to establish social contacts with their peers. During studies, seniors meet students and postgraduate students, there are inter-generational relations.

History of the Czech U3A starts at 1986 (former Czechoslovakia). Their constitution was connected to Czechoslovak Red Cross and Czechoslovak Gerontological Society. The first phase of the development of U3A covers period 1987 - 2000. The first academic U3V was established in Prague at the First Medical Faculty of the Charles University. The courses

¹ Czech Statistical Office - Citizens

were focused on healthy life style, it means courses concentrated on medicine and nursing. [Kutnohorská, Telnarová, 2009].

1 Objectives / conception of senior education

The Czech Government approved the “National Action Plan for Positive Aging for the Period 2013-2017” (NAP), which states that although the Czech Republic has a well-established U3A system, the demand for the offered education still exceeds the offer. This type of senior education primarily focuses on interest education. Despite the fact that its outputs are not acceptable on the labour market, they have a positive benefit in personal development of seniors as well as increase their active participation in society. (Action Plan, 2012, p. 11) This NAP defined a strategic objective: Increasing the ratio of seniors engaged in interest education by means of U3A with respect to local accessibility. It also states: To update municipalities and regions on the benefits of U3A by dissemination and best-practice examples. [Action Plan 2012, p. 15, Národní akční plán podporující pozitivní stárnutí pro období 2013-2017. Online]

1.1 The U3A Association

Universities of the Third Age are united in the U3A Association. [Asociace univerzit třetího věku. Online]

Objectives of the U3V Association:

- Guarantee of the offered university education at a U3A.
- Observing the ethical part of education.
- Strengthening of the U3A importance in public awareness.
- Accessibility of senior education at universities.
- Keeping high quality standards in all activities – requirements on knowledge, skills, competences, outputs.

2 Present state of senior educational programmes

The present state of senior educational programmes was evaluated based on a research carried out in November and December 2017.

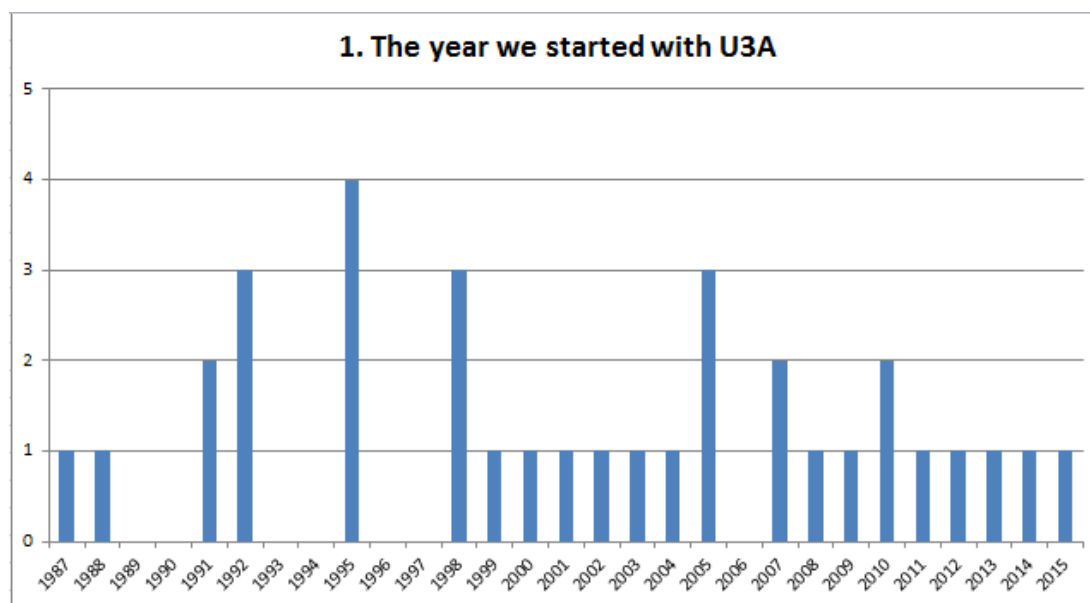
2.1 Research methodology

The state of the educational programmes for U3A in the Czech Republic was analysed as a quantitative research, questionnaire technique, which included 11 questions (4 dichotomic, 3 trichotomic, 2 enumerative, 2 open questions). The research was carried out in the period from 9 November 2017 to 5 December 2017.

In the Czech Republic, there are 23 universities that joined the U3A. We had 42 subjects that replied because U3A is organised either centrally, e.g. Tomas Bata University in Zlín, or at faculties, e.g. Technical University of Ostrava, Charles University, or University of Ostrava. We addressed 42 faculties of universities in the Czech Republic and we had 34 subjects that replied, i.e. 81% (see Appendix 2), some of them replied only partially. U3A in the Czech Republic does not have a uniform organisation at universities.

2.2 Analysis of senior educational programmes in the Czech Republic

U3A of some subjects that took part in the research started their education in 1987. Their great boom was in years 1992, 1998, 2005, and the biggest in 1995. Information technologies have been used since 1990 by 27 subjects. The greatest increase in the use of information technologies was in 2008. The most used is a PC, followed by the Internet, notebook, tablet, smartphone, data projector, interactive board, smartboard, reader, and GPS.



Graph n.1: Enlargement of U3A from the beginning, year 1987 till 2015

Students are engaged in the education by 25 subjects (73%) as lecturers, assistants when necessary, advisors, or other roles: preparation of U3A excursions, workshop organisation, excursions co-organisers, organisational and administrative workers.

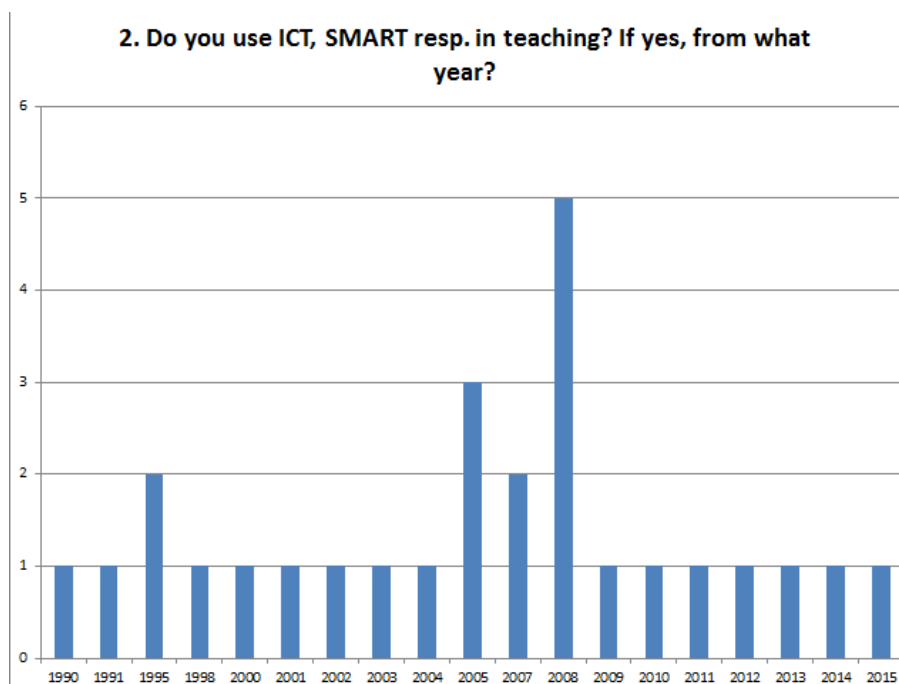
Postgraduate students are more engaged than students - as lecturers, assistants when necessary, advisors, or other roles. If students and postgraduate students are engaged in education, they are valued positively by their audience. In case that students and postgraduate students are engaged in U3A education, the following topics are favoured to them: Basics of work with a PC – computer literacy, internet, MS Office, computer graphics. Travelling – particularities of foreign countries. Legal literacy. Topics based on professional interest of the

students and postgraduate students, i.e. they present the results of their seminar, bachelor projects. The topics also include postgraduate students' scientific research and which directly relate to and are the subject of the education in the course. Mobile applications, file management, tablets and other devices, the internet. News in the field, recent events. Experimental education. Health topics. Visual arts.

U3A students are engaged in education less than students or postgraduate students, primarily as volunteers or paid lecturers. If U3S students are lecturers, they all use information technologies. 14 out of 34 respondents (41%) answered that U3A students organise educational activities themselves, 5 (35.7%) regularly and 9 (64.3%) occasionally. Concerning meetings of U3A students in an association or club which offer further educational activities, there are big reserves because 11 (32.4%) answered yes, 20 (58.8%) no, and 3 (8.8%) did not answer.

The open question asking about interesting or inspiring facts of a given institution for other subjects revealed, for example:

- Seniors are more grateful and attentive students than our regular students.
- Part of lectures on history of technology, personal management and UNESCO are visits of museums and conservation monuments.
- Possibility of studying the field of choir singing – seniors have already had lots of performances, positive feedback, great publicity.
- The participants actively engage in their free time – they search for topics, suggestions and information, which they then give to the lecturer, they personally promote the course and attract new students.
- The seniors take part in U3A webpage development, prepare presentations for a DOD, or help with testing of SW user interface for specific users.
- The seniors run their own journal on web pages – a blog of U3A students and graduates, they organise various events within the “club” – section of education, culture, outdoor.
- Summer school as a supplementary activity. Moodle is used in education, virtual classroom – seniors complete various study materials and assessment activities, they can communicate.



Graph n. 2: Start (year) of using information technology

2.3 Senior education at the University of Ostrava within the Virtual University of the Third Age

The Virtual University of the Third Age (hereinafter as VirtU3A) was established in 2008 as an output of project Gruntvig called SENIOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING INTERNET PLATFORM (Project number – 141981–LLP–1–2008–1–CZ–GRUNDTVIG–GMP). This project initialised a system of education, which was later developed and improved. It was financially supported by Development projects of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). Every year it significantly grew (i.e. enlarging the offer of educational activities and increasing the number of interested seniors), but it primarily improved pedagogical and didactical methods.

These days, we are able to offer three forms of studies: presence, combined, and distance and 6-10 courses from various areas in one semester. Each semester included two courses of Information and Communication Technology and two courses of English with courses from other areas. Here is a list of some topics: Memory training. Philosophy of space. Quest (not only) after great Czech composers. Selected chapters from social pathology. Czech poetry of the 20th century. Jakub Jan Ryba – a remarkable personality of the Czech history, not only musical. Bohuslav Martinů and his key to home. Food in the eyes of a chemists. Practical dendrology. Games to develop thinking. Prague of Charles IV. European music culture. Graphology. Silesia during WWII. Jewish and Christian roots of our civilisation. Women in the Middle Ages. Reasoning using formal logic. Genealogy. Criminology. Financial literacy for the third age. Phenomenon of migration in contemporary European context. History and present of nursing care. 1000 years of the Middle-Age art. Czech-Silesian relationships in history. Age of cathedrals. Digital photography. Ethical issues of the present time. Science around us. And many others

Every year we organise outdoor education. It concerns a four-day excursion with lecturers and experts on a topic which is in the focus of the education.

The presence studies are held once a week 2-4 lessons according to the type of the course. Distance studies is solely organised in a form of eLearning. Combined studies represent 5 – 7 lectures of experts, primarily academics, which is then followed by studies in a virtual classroom. A virtual classroom contains the explanatory part supplied with literature and other sources as well as practicing and evaluation part and space for discussion. The explanatory part offers the seniors presentations from lectures, video records (we use the MediaSite technology), other educational materials prepared by the lecturers, links to recommended literature and others, primarily internet sources. The practicing and evaluation parts offer surveys, questionnaires, tests, assignments, databases, vocabularies, and other activities which the lecturer considers useful for the lesson. The discussion forum serves not only for the lecturers and organisers for regular updates on content, form and organisational matters, but primarily for informal communication both between the lecturer and seniors and between the seniors themselves.

The virtual classroom is available at <<http://setip.osu.cz>>.

Since 2008, we have offered 80 different semester courses. The courses are usually attended by 200 seniors. A high percentage of seniors register 5 or more courses. We have contracts with c. 50 lecturers. It primarily concerns academics from the University of Ostrava, but they also come from other Czech universities, Academy of Science, museums, galleries, archives, etc. the most active seniors are those with more than 50+ passed courses. The seniors are also engaged in active organisation of educational activities. They have founded a community interest society *University senior club* <<http://www.uks.estranky.cz>>. Within the club, they organise lectures, excursions, and other activities.

2.4 Statistics of the U3A performance in the Czech Republic

Statistics of the U3A performance is a summary of performance of individual state public universities in the Czech Republic, it includes 23 universities.

Table 1: Statistics of the U3A performance in 2010-2016²

| Academic year | Number of courses Total in CR | Number of active studying lessons | Number of participants |
|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2010 - 2011 | 911 | 26 133 | 33 607 |
| 2011 - 2012 | 1 036 | 29 282 | 36 673 |
| 2012 - 2013 | 1 020 | 32 190 | 38 802 |
| 2013 - 2014 | 1 163 | 37 168 | 43 110 |
| 2014 - 2015 | 1 306 | 41 641 | 47 694 |
| 2015 - 2016 | 1 392 | 45 529 | 51 826 |

2.4.1 Analysis of senior educational programme at the University of Ostrava

Table 2: Statistics of the U3A performance at the University of Ostrava in 2010-2016³

| Academic year | Number of courses Total in University of Ostrava | Number of active studying lessons | Number of participants |
|---------------|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2010 - 2011 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2011 - 2012 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2012 - 2013 | 15 | 692 | 805 |
| 2013 - 2014 | 17 | 734 | 885 |
| 2014 - 2015 | 20 | 862 | 1 098 |
| 2015 - 2016 | 26 | 759 | 1 325 |

2.4.2 Funding U3V v ČR

U3A funding in the Czech Republic takes grounds in a document approved by the GA of the U3A Association on 10th September 2015 as a proposal to the 2nd Amendment to the Rules of granting benefits and subsidies to public universities by the MEYS, which specifies funding of programmes of senior lifelong learning. It contains 5 Articles: Article 1) Force of the Amendment. Article 2) Conditions on granting and using funds. Article 3) Application for granting funds. Article 4) Application assessment. Article 5) Legal force.

² Own source

³ Own source

3 Expectations of seniors

3.1 Summary of analysis “expectations of seniors”

We are focusing on a summary of analysis “expectations of seniors” and active role (organisers, lecturers, etc.) of seniors in senior education.

Concerning sex, the participants are mostly women (86 %). Most of the participants are aged 70-75 (41 %), followed by aged 75-80 (26 %), and aged 65-70 (21 %). The age borderline of the U3A participants is related to the retirement age. Some participants, primarily intellectually working, work as retired even over the age of 70.

In 2009, we carried out research “Quality of life of seniors”, where we were finding out the offer of the U3A and the age of the U3A students. Compared to this research, we can state that the age of U3A students has risen. In 2009, the most numerous group was aged 60-65, almost a half of the students – 48.98 %. It was the group of retiring people. The second most numerous group was age 65-70. Their reasons were apparently the same as of the former one. The third most numerous group was aged over 75. Those were students who did not have the possibility of being involved in the working process although they still wanted to be socially active and learn something. They did not have to look after their grandchildren either. A very numerous group was aged 50-60, which represented a transition between the active age and the retirement age. The least numerous group was aged 50-55. It concerned mostly actively working people. [Kutnohorská, Telnarová, 2009]

Most of the respondents fall into the group of secondary-school graduates (63 %) followed by university graduates (31 %). Secondary-school respondents broaden their knowledge and interests frequently conditioned by the fact that they could not study at a university their field of interest or at all during the past regime. U3A respondents/students mostly live in big cities (72 %) followed by towns up to 100 th. inhabitants (17 %), the smallest group lives in villages (11 %). The question about the possibility of meeting other seniors outside U3A lecturers was answered by 97% of the respondents/students “yes”. More than 50 % of the seniors replied that they miss “nothing”. The question if U3A respondents/students feel excluded from the society, only few answered that they miss contact with young people. 94 % answered that they miss “nothing”. 35 % of respondents have experience with the help of students. Students were helpful, for example, in courses of computers, health, history, or art. 65 % of U3A participants do not have any experience with students. We can see here big reserves and possibilities for intergenerational exchange. According to the U3A participants/students’ opinions, students could be engaged as lecturers, teachers, participants of intergenerational dialogue, or help with information technology. Only a small part of the respondents (approx. 20 %) can imagine their active participation the education.

Work with the Internet and a PC is mastered well by 70 % of the respondents, 30 % with difficulties or not at all. The question about their interest in improving their work with the Internet and a PC, 75 % of the U3A respondents/students answered positively, 25 % negatively. They would like to improve (according to the order on the answer scale) in: work with photographs, everything, work with videos, creation and editing web pages, work with multimedia, presentations, work with e-mail, creation of tables, work with maps, work with the Internet, and work with Word in general.

According to the scale, the participants are most interested in courses (based on experience from their past courses): natural and cultural monuments with excursion, geography, medicine – health – security, economy – finances, physics – mathematics – natural sciences, psychology – sociology – other social sciences, visual art – music – artistic profession, history – philosophy, information technology: computers – internet –

smartphones, media – communication, sports, games, recreation, dance, theatre, film, politics, law, languages, environment, agriculture – gardening – animal care, memory practicing, others: tourism, textile production, lectures of doctors.

If we compare this offer with the above-mentioned research in 2009, the offer has been narrowed, the preferences have changed. In 2009, the first place was taken by work with a computer, informatics, use of the Internet, mobile phones, new banking, mail services, and communication. There were also topics that are now gone: detergents for households, nuclear power stations and their safety, biotechnology. Topics which can be found in our research from 2017/2018 remain in long term. The interest in health topics is new.

The choice of a course is influenced by (according to the order stated by the participants):

- course interestingness,
- study form (lecturers, studies over the Internet, excursions),
- lecturer's personality,
- meeting new people – new social contacts,
- possibility of active participation in the U3A,
- previous experience,
- price,
- references on the lecturer.

The most common reasons for acquiring new knowledge are: interest in the selected topic, better memory, acquisition of new findings, being in contact with people, making new friends. The stated reasons for U3A studies primarily include social reasons – meeting new people, interest in information technology, which might be fuelled by the pressure of this time to be “modern”, the “possibility of intergenerational dialogue” placed among the first as well. The interest in the “possibility of having a thought about the history of family and own biographic story” was only average. We reckon that numerous respondents either know their family identity from previous courses or they are not aware of the importance of fulfilling the meaning of life.

3.2 Measures leading to inclusive educational environment based on experience of a given institution

We consider an inclusive educational environment primarily in removing barriers of senior education caused by their age, health condition, social and economic situation. It also concerns, among others, architectural and information barriers, barriers given by the financial situation of seniors, their difficult possibility of commuting, lowered communication ability given by, for example, health disabilities, etc.

We consider the following as an effective tool for removing barriers:

- Modification of lecturing rooms, including facilities, so that seniors with movement problems could easily take part in the education. The UO disposes of two lecture rooms reserved for the VirtU3A which are fully barrier-free. The rooms also have social facilities and space for refreshments.
- Modification of educational method to consider more frequent absence in the presence part of the education. This requirement is effectively solved by the virtual classroom. The virtual classroom contains all study materials for the seniors, including presence lecturers, as well as activities for the seniors to do at home. Those seniors who cannot take part in the presence part of the education due to their health condition can still be in contact with the teachers and classmates and they also have the possibility to study the subject matter from materials on the Internet – virtual classroom. All seniors attending the VirtU3A have access to the virtual classroom from their homes. We are helpful to solve possible technical issues in order to prevent information barrier.
- The fee for VirtU3A courses is symbolic, which means that there is no financial barrier. We can afford it due to the financial help of the MEYS, which subsidies U3A

activities in the Czech Republic. The received subsidy enables to realise educational activities, thus the fee is really symbolic and it has rather a motivational role.

- The seniors appreciate communication with the surroundings. Of course, face-to-face communication is irreplaceable. However, there are situations when a senior cannot attend the school for a longer period. This is looked after by various discussion groups in the virtual classroom. The seniors can not only take part in existing groups, but they can also create new discussion topics. Sometimes, it is difficult to engage the seniors in discussions. It can be caused by their mentality, which hampers it. Thus, it is important to regularly address the seniors with news, updates, and to activate their attention. This is a task for the teachers as well as the organisers of the educational activities as well.
- Regular meetings at school serve to presence educational activities: lecturers, seminars, etc. Nevertheless, in order to remove communication and social barriers, it is necessary to organise informal meetings as well. At the UO, we organise joint meetings twice a year, usually with a short lecture followed by an informal discussion and a cultural programme. We have positive experience with outdoor education, which means a four-day excursion related to the topic of a selected course.
- The seniors like to meet young people. A system of regular joint activities of seniors and the youth is not, unfortunately, developed so we do not organise these activities regularly. Therefore, we promise that the ISEV project will help us partially eliminate this imperfection.

Conclusion

University of Third Age are significant element of the healthy life style of seniors. One of the contributions of U3A activities is the fact that seniors can create social contacts with coevals and with young generation as well. The quality of the life of seniors after they retired is very important also for whole society. Human being creates certain stereotypes in the situation he/she does not have day to day working activities. In the quality of life definition according to the World Health Organization (WHO) the fillings of own situation in the cultural context, relationship with the aims, expectations and interests is crucial point that forms ones satisfaction.

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