



## Implementation of the Project “Including Disabled Senior Citizens in Creative Activities in 2013-2015”

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**Abstract:** *This paper made an attempt to indicate the findings of the author's research from the experiences of the implementation of the project "Including disabled senior citizens in creative activities in 2013-2015". The issues of disabled senior citizens have been an object of interest over the recent years though it still has not had a proper place in science and practice. In the situation of a painful lack of initiatives, the Foundation for Propagation of Disability Art and Culture of the in Warsaw, as the only institution for promoting creative activity of the disabled in Poland, undertook a number of activities in order to include this social group in the world of culture and art. It appears that participation in creative initiatives has a very positive effect on the quality of the social functioning of disabled senior citizens in their isolation from their own families.*

**Keywords:** adaptation, creative activities, liveliness, sense of life, creativity

In the social environment at present, the issue of the efficiency of including the disabled elderly in creative activities, is still solved is a level which is insufficient for European expectations. For instance, there are still very few proposals sufficient for cherishing and strengthening even the family pattern of cultural and artistic stimulation of this group of people, especially in the conditions of their staying in an agency of round-the-clock care (e.g. nursing homes, hospices) (Ploch, 2014b:16-36). After all, it is common knowledge that within this pattern the above mentioned problem should be solved in the general scale, so it is in a standard manner. One should expect here a proposal of cherishing initiation of the disabled elderly creative and artistic participation, counteracting social exclusion through putting them in specified locations of creative space, and at the

same time, giving them the status of a legitimate member of the culture and art community. As a consequence, it would be, as it were, a justified basis for stimulating the system of cultural identification in initiating the process of anticipatory socialization and social and cultural adaptation towards this group, according to the universally expected pattern of customary and legal standards (Kanios, 2008; Czechowska-Bieluga & Kanios, 2010, 2014; Kantowicz, 2013; Kantowicz & Orzechowska, 2012; Kromolicka, 2005; Żukiewicz, 2002).

As ordered by the Foundation for Propagation of Artistic Culture of the Disabled in Warsaw, a team of educators and therapists undertook to create a project allowing interested disabled senior citizens to join actively in occasionally organized cultural initiatives in the social environment. This initiative was preceded by test research thanks to which the team was able to determine the level of interest and the most preferred and popular in this group possible forms of creative stimulation.

It is worth stressing that, bearing in mind the comprehensive development towards activity of creative inclusion as regards the disabled elderly participation in culture, the a welfare worker, as a leader, has a possibility to withdraw from direct operations for creating artificial conditions enriching developmental impulses, the right which they should immediately take advantage due to a strong tendency of occurrence of elements of the segregated approach and exclusion), instead of creating a space leading to transformation of systems of socially inclusive creative development, the theory of art, creative stimulation, art therapy as well as other special and unconventional forms and techniques. It should be a space in which each individual should be provided with a chance of finding a proper climate for his or her personal supplement, artistic development, creative passion and experiences, regardless of difficulties caused by the register age and the type of disability (Błędowski, 2002; Błędowski & Nowakowska, 2010; Krzyszkowski, 2005; Kurzynowski & Mikulski, 2007; Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski & Dziegielewska, 2006). The immanent leading aim of creative inclusion, with a prominent collaboration of the leading educator, should be to allow participation of artistic circles and the whole community in the act of joint surrendering to the process of creative maturation of a disabled individual, and noticing the appearing in culture and art valuable diversity in the categories of normality instead of a social problem (Ploch, 2009, 2010, 2014a).

The group of respondents selected at random included individuals staying in social welfare homes and at other permanent addresses, e.g. in family homes, in the area of the Mazovian province. The characterization of the group was presented in Table 1. As can be noticed, the group of respondents in the survey (N=59) consisted of 24 women (40.68%) and 35 men (59.32%), including 48 individuals (81.36%) living alone, 11 (18.64%) living with a partner or a nearest family member (brother, sister, cousin). 23 individuals (38.98%) were pensioners, 18 individuals (13.56%) were entitled for social benefit, 10 individuals (16.95%) were entitled for social assistance and 8 individuals (13.55%) are supported by their families. The characterization of the group as regards age was presented in Table 2. The respondents' age is in between 60-88 years (average - 71.3). Moreover, in both groups the researchers distinguished individuals who were not involved in creative activities (NZ) at all and involved in artistic, creative

and reproductive activity (Z). The study involved all individuals involved in creative activities (e.g. in community centres, community clubs, senior clubs, social assistance houses, artistic sections outside the permanent residence). The average period of membership in activist groups of creative activities was about 5.5 years (Table 3).

The types of motives for undertaking creative activity mentioned by the respondents included, among other things:

- ⇒ *spiritual motives* (possibility to learn and be close to the essence of creative activities and the influence on the level of one's mood, recognition by the environment, distinction from among others, respect, relaxation, creativity, creative inspiration);
- ⇒ *technical motives* (possibility to broaden one's familiarity with creative technologies in the environment of amateurish creative work, a deeper level of initiation, improving of the rate and the dynamics of one's own work, creative conceptions on the advanced level, creation of original works);
- ⇒ *psychological motives* (personal development, possibility to solve creative assignments, improvement of one's mood, recovering of one's sense of life, one's own fulfilment, power, courage, self-confidence and building of hope, satisfaction with essential needs - acceptance, safety as well as being understood, valued, needed);
- ⇒ *social motives* (a sense of belonging, community, finding new friends, strengthening the power of positive attitude to other people, openness to others, serving others in aesthetic education, good and useful way to spend one's free time).

Table 1. The characterization of the group

Item No.	The type of disability	Sex		Total	Family status		Professional status			
		F	M		living alone	with family	pension	social benefit	social assistance	supported by others
1	Sight defect	2	4	6	5	1	2	2	1	1
2	Hearing defect	3	5	8	6	2	3	3	1	1
3	Posttraumatic mental injury	2	3	5	4	1	2	2	1	-
4	Moderate degree of the disability	4	5	9	8	1	4	3	1	1
5	Considerable degree of disability	3	2	5	4	1	1	1	1	2
6	Multiple Disability	3	3	6	5	1	3	1	1	1
7	Autism	-	2	2	1	1	1	1	-	-
8	Alcohol problems	2	4	6	5	1	2	1	2	1
9	Cerebral palsy	2	3	5	4	1	2	2	1	-
10	Paralyses	3	4	7	6	1	3	2	1	1
Total (N)		24	35	59	48	11	23	18	10	8

Source: the author's study

Table 2. The average age of the group under research

Item No.	Sex Age	60-64	65-67	68-69	70-74	75-78	79-80	81-83	84-88	N
1	Female	4	5	2	3	5	2	1	2	24
2	Male	5	4	6	5	6	4	3	2	35
Total (N)		9	9	8	8	11	6	4	4	59

Source: the author's study

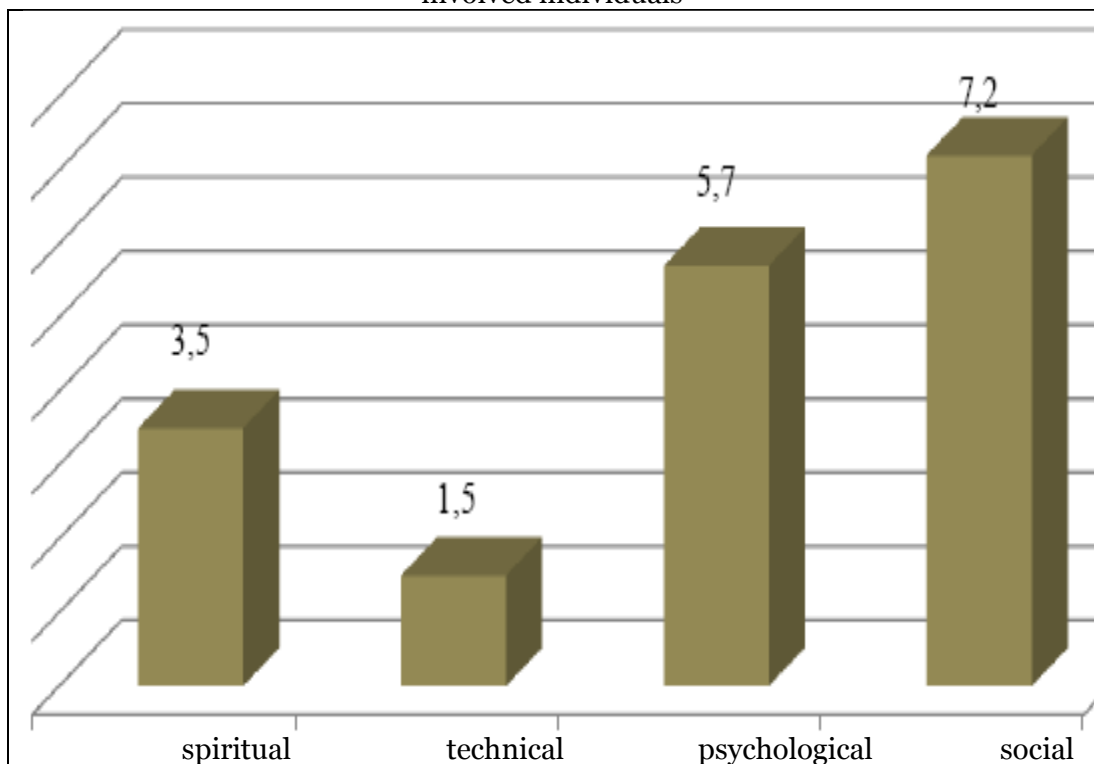
Table 3. The number of individuals non-involved and involved in creative activities

Sex	CREATIVELY INVOLVED		CREATIVELY NON-INVOLVED	
	N	%	N	%
Female	8	13,55	16	27,11
Male	7	11,86	28	47,45
Total (N)	15	25,41	44	74,56

Source: the author's study

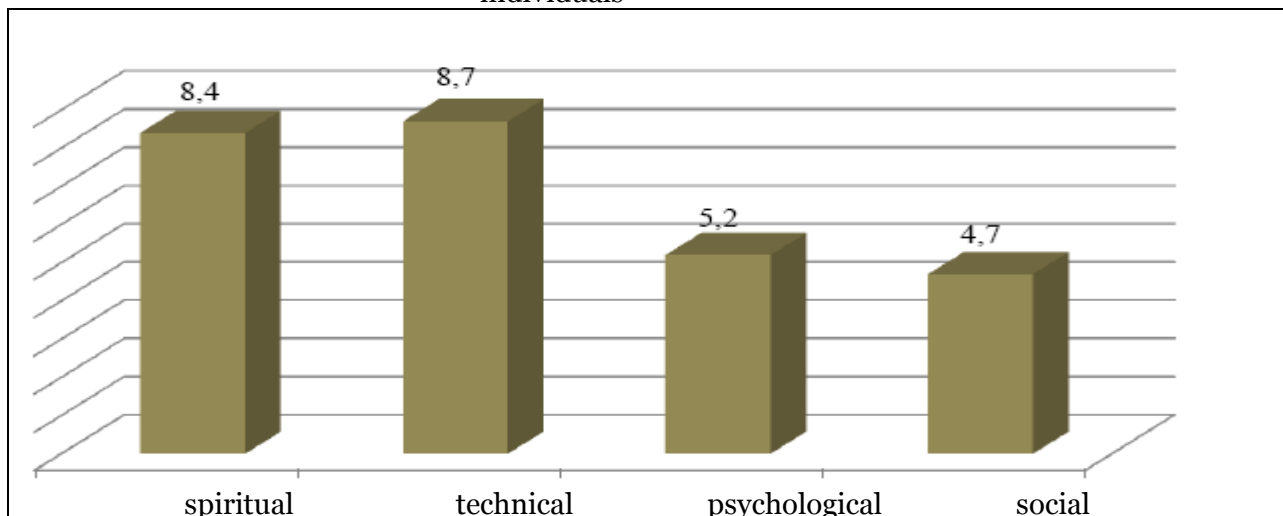
Most respondents are individuals who are not involved creatively (74,56%), including women (27,11%) and men (47,45%). It can be supposed that even on the basis of the currently obtained data, the infrequency of contact with art, a low level of acquired creative skills and too limited contact in creative activities of the respondents (from childhood to adulthood) are an essential reason for rejecting a possibility of creative development in later life. In this group of the elderly, psychological and social motives prevail over spiritual development and activeness in creative activities (Diagram 1), as opposed to the group of the elderly who are creatively involved, where spiritual motives and creative activity prevail over psychological and social ones (Diagram 2).

Diagram 1. Motives for participation in creative activities by creatively non-involved individuals



Source: the author's study

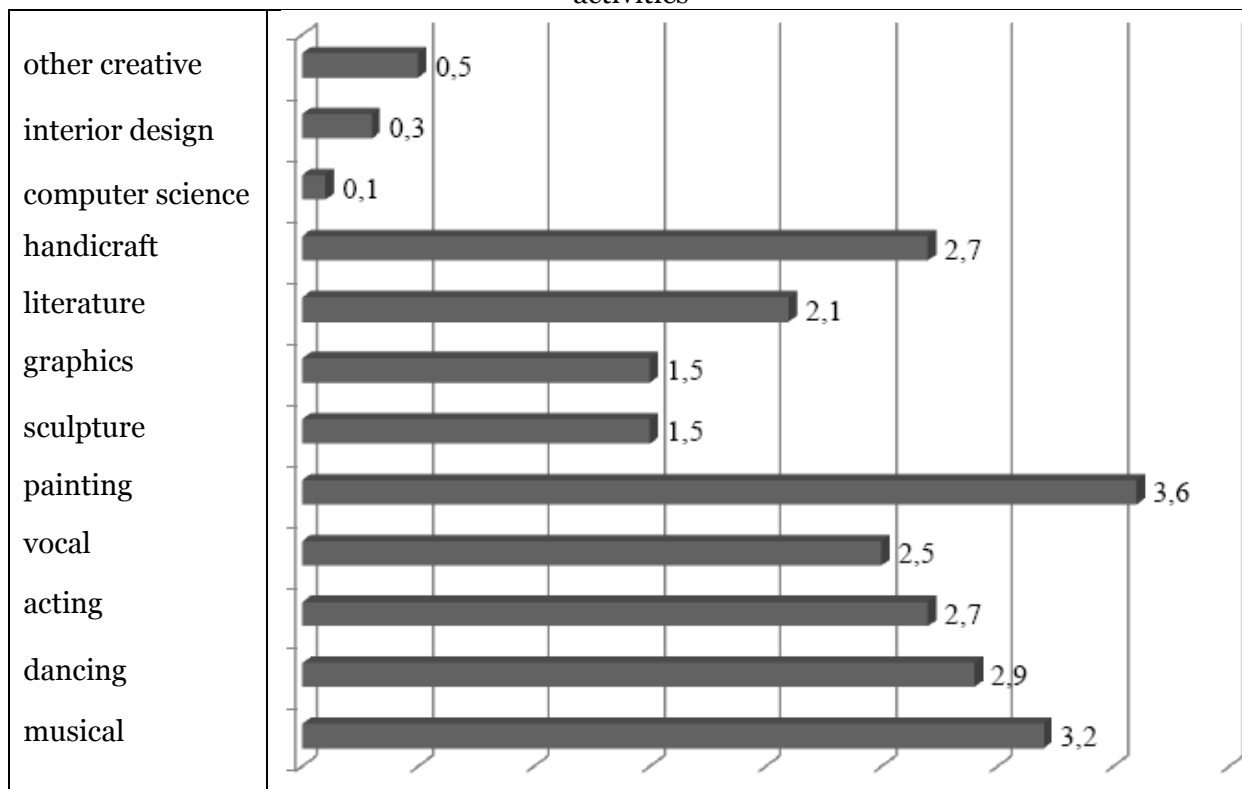
Diagram 2. Motives for participation in creative activities by creatively involved individuals



Source: the author's study

Creatively involved individuals in the research were proposed an opportunity to participate in different, yet accepted by them most, forms of creative work for 15 months, i.e. from December 2013 to February 2015. Most of the respondents declared their wish to participate in the proposed experiment (88.13%). The degree of their declarations due to the types of forms of activeness in creative activities (N=52) were presented in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3. The degree of the respondents' declarations to participate in creative activities



Source: the author's study

When choosing their preferred types of activity, most respondents declared the following activities: painting (15.38%), musical (13.46%) and dancing (11.53%). A quite interesting statistically degree was indicated regarding vocal, actor's, handicraft and literary activities.

The efficiency of the selected forms of creative activity had a direct influence on the character of emotions emerging during the activities. Table 4 presents a graphic illustration of the intensification of the sense of satisfaction with one's participation in creative activities and a current way of functioning of the investigated individuals.

Table 4. The sense of satisfaction in the group of participants of creative activities

Categories of the participants' declarations	N = 52									
	Very Satisfied		Quite Satisfied		Neutral		Not very Satisfied		Very Dissatisfied	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The way of leading the activities	29	55.76	17	32.69	5	9.61	1	1.92	-	-
The attractiveness of the activity workshop	28	53.84	16	30.76	6	11.53	1	1.92	1	1.92
Physical condition	30	57.69	15	28.84	3	5.76	2	3.84	2	3.84
Mood	25	48.07	16	30.76	4	7.69	5	9.61	2	3.84
Satisfaction	28	53.84	18	34.61	3	5.76	1	1.92	1	1.92
Social functioning in the group	31	59.61	14	26.92	5	9.61	1	1.92	1	1.92
Recognition from among others	16	30.76	19	36.53	10	19.23	4	7.69	3	5.76
Self-confidence	21	40.38	20	38.46	8	15.38	2	3.84	1	1.92
Joie de vivre	30	57.69	18	34.61	1	1.92	1	1.92	2	3.84
Openness to others	18	34.61	14	26.92	11	21.15	7	13.46	2	3.84
Increasing one's motivation for life and creative activities	27	51.92	20	38.46	2	3.84	1	1.92	1	1.92

Source: the author's study

## Discussion

The obtained findings indicate numerous essential and very beneficial changes which result from disabled senior citizens' participation in creative activities in the environment of living and functioning in social welfare homes, daily residence houses, sections of leisure centres and others initiated by public benefit organizations. Apparently, participation in this type of activities affects the manner of functioning of their personality, gaining lots of beneficial sources of support, encouragement, hope, faith and a sense of security, with which in their current life most they often struggle on an everyday basis. The presented section of the findings from the implemented project suggests that in the strategy of social work special attention should be paid not only to medical and neuropsychological aspects but also an array of geriatric issues, and so

activities aimed against stagnation, withdrawal and expectation of death, focused on maintaining the psychomotor and cognitive efficiency in this group for as long as possible, but also on psychological (psychotherapeutic) and social aspects, aimed at counteracting acts of psychical breakdown (depression) and disadvantageous changes which take place in personalities affected with disability and influenced by losing the nearest environment first gradually and then entirely. These individuals require constant health care and a wide psychological and social support, especially when they live away from their nearest individuals, families and friends.

An important element in the series of the proposed creative activities seems to be a necessity to elaborate a suitable and unconventional attitude of individuals involved in direct care over these individuals. In this instance creative activity should be included in a range of mutual relationships between all individuals gathered 'around' a disabled person, i.e. the staff, friends and families, etc. Coordinating different forms of creative stimulation by leading carers should have most often a character of free conduct yet skilfully intensifying actions of an individual, and then groups, by means of especially selected methods which are inspiring, stimulating, and directing. The partnership of individuals leading such activities should not depend exclusively on information about charges, it should also aim at conscious stimulation of creative dispositions and ways of creative preservation of individuals. Individuals leading such activities should be characterized with kindness, a natural attitude, freedom in leading activities, empathy and the relation based on partnership. Working with a group of participants should create an opportunity to intensify therapeutic results thanks to systematic exchange of experience about the course of the activities and the level of doing the exercises by charges, critical attitude towards to common and individual experiences through experiencing even the smallest individual and collective successes of every person individually. This work should be accompanied by constant communication, if it is only possible, with the charges' family homes.

The project "Including disabled senior citizens in creative activities" can be an attractive and multidimensional proposal to develop creative predispositions, improve the general physical condition and the mood, increase satisfaction, improve the social functioning in the group, strengthen self-confidence, joie de vivre, openness to others and first of all, increase motivation for enriching the content of the participants' lives on an everyday basis. It is so because active participation in the project for developing creative activities on the one hand allows recognizing differentiation of each individual taking part in the context of individual environmental experiences; on the other hand, it leads to differentiation of the direction of their development and the degree of the efficiency of the basic systems of functioning. These, by contrast, as can be noticed on the basis of the obtained findings, lead directly to differentiation of the content, the structure and a reciprocal system of regulatory dynamisms as well as differentiation of maturity in creative activities and the way of functioning of the personal "I". Obviously, the fact of participation itself cannot guarantee to all participants an equal final result concerning a sense of satisfaction, however, the wealth and the complexity of the personal structure, the multitude of initiated possible interindividual

relations and an alternative of creative work cause that comprehensive enrichment of personal features occurs successively and has its positive translation in a further phase of independent functioning of disabled senior citizens.

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