Are Slovak Universities Prepared to Create the Department of Geragogy and Train Future Geragogues?

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Abstract:
Introduction: The authors of this paper base their research on the following assumption: the development of both geragogic education (older adult education) and profession is conditioned by the existence of a study program of geragogy provided by departments of geragogy created at universities (as public institutions of higher education). The fact remains that a qualified training of geragogues is absent in the Slovak conditions.
Purpose: When compiling a graduate profile, inclusive of a list of competences that a geragogue should possess, a range of specific local circumstances needs to be taken into consideration. Subsequently, it is necessary to define a position of a geragogue. Geragogue is a professional working in the field of senior education, just like a pedagogue or an adult educator work in their fields. It is also important to identify and accentuate the philosophical and social context in which these professionals are confronted with the demands of today's society, in a form of a society based on knowledge, questions of the ongoing social changes and defining the meaning of life.
Results: The task of creating the department and program of geragogy is formulated as a social demand of the time, debunking the current myth of the crisis of universities. In history, a university was a vital place where the values serving social integration emerged. It was also a practice field for the educators to train so they could spread these values and transform them into social skills.
Conclusion: In the conclusion, the authors propose key areas of undergraduate training of geragogues, including the definition of

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institutional anchoring, with the goal to contribute to ongoing professional discussion and to creation of the department and the program of geragogy.

Key words: geragogy, adult education, senior, study program and department, university

Introduction

When establishing the main goal of their paper, the authors started with the following assumption: the development of both geragogic education (older adult education) and profession is conditioned by the existence of a study program of geragogy available at universities (as public institutions of higher education) and which will also address the key competences of a geragogue while taking into account the needs of a senior population. According to Novosad (1994), the basic drive behind the perpetuation of sciences lies in a quest for scientific knowledge that is a multifaceted phenomenon and as such, it also concerns a system of education. The Slovak system of education has undergone significant changes over the past fifty years, ranging from establishing new institutions, study programs, educational sciences, defining professional competences of pedagogues, andragogues and geragogues to the compilation of graduate profiles. Following the analysis of andragogical classifications, especially those of Palán and Langer (2009), who divide the disciplines into basic and applied, we can see that they include gerontopedagogics (in our definition geragogy) in the applied disciplines. Mapping scientific field of geragogy increases in accordance with the increase of the demographic curve of senior population. Vacinová (2011) lists the authors who greatly contributed to the development of gerontopedagogy - geragogy. They are Lívečka (1979), Petřková (1999), Jesenský (2000), and Mühlpachr (2004). Koťa et al. (2007) provide another classification of andragogical scientific disciplines and includes gerontology in the basic andragogical disciplines, removing it from the group of applied (or fringe) disciplines.

1 Prerequisites for the development of gerontological education (education of seniors)

Based on the assumption that science is a set of systematic, methodical, and rational discernment of objective reality, we can say that the subject of geragogy is the education of seniors in the context of formal and informal education settings provided by educational institutions for seniors[1]. Considering the education of seniors, we agree with Čornaničová (2007) that specialized, wider

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[1] These institutions undoubtedly include also the University of the Third Age (hereinafter referred to as the U3A) and the Academy of the Third Age (hereinafter referred to as the A3A) aimed at education of seniors.

organized education of seniors appeared in the 1970s as a new phenomenon of educational and training practice[2]. Thus, education becomes a symbol of a new, active, goal-oriented, and informed approach of a senior to his or her life that takes place against the background of the constitution of geragogy as an independent scientific discipline. It is a certain challenge and perhaps even some demand of Pan-European nature (based on the requirement of lifelong education and active aging) of qualified theorists to develop a theoretical platform and practical application of geragogy. In the words of Švec (1998), science develops only if there are scientific discourses and polemics about the same phenomena and results, and if science responds to the demands of society. Sciences should respond to different social trends, such as a complex of demographic, economic, and social factors that have initiated and will initiate structural changes within society as well as in the European context, which has placed these systems under the pressure of adaptation and modernization in the spirit of postmodernism. Such disputes and demands also affect geragogy. Today, the main goal is to engage in a professional dialogue issues concerning the establishment of geragogy in the scientific community taking into account already implemented scientific research and activities, respecting a certain chronology of the development of science. Following this process is beneficial for a few reasons. First, it helps to lay theoretical foundations for the formulation of the terminology, subject, goal, content, and methods of a new concept of the basics of geragogy in the context of theory and practice. Second, it opens certain possibilities for professional training of geragogues and for the further development of geragogy. Having in mind that the form methodological self-reflection of social sciences is changing, we must say that self-reflections aimed at finding links between the subject, theory and methodology have been forced out by self-reflections focused on relationships between the formulation and the solution of certain problems on one hand, and specific methods and theories on the other hand, whilst taking into account historical, cultural, and social situation of social knowledge. Thus, the determinant role establishes processes that are rightly referred to as scientification of social life (such as the increase in the number of seniors in society), where the known and consciously regulated phenomena are traditionally placed against those that are spontaneous, vital and out of our control. Their relationship is not only of the alternate nature (either-or); both the known and consciously regulated are of higher value and are considered to be more productive and historically more promising. Keller (2012) asserts that the differences in methodological positions can be deduced also from the multifaceted heritage of thought especially from philosophy, history, and anthropology, to which individual sciences and their paradigms are closely or more loosely linked. The result is the duality of approaches. Duality of

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[2] However, the first U3A in Slovakia was established at the Comenius University in 1990 and the network of U3A has gradually expanded.

objectivist and subjectivist approaches can be traced throughout the whole history of sociological thought. This duality has later transferred in the education of seniors and geragogy, and it is manifested in the differences in the concepts of individual investigators, but coexists in the works of the same authors too. Understanding this duality allows them to get to a higher form of knowledge and to a study of different phenomena.

2   The criteria for constituting a new science

Průcha (2009) and Švec (1998) determine certain criteria as the conditions for constituting and establishing a new science. For Průcha (2009) these criteria include the production of scientific literature, production of scientific periodicals, and the existence of study departments at universities. Švec (1998) provides other criteria and emphasizes that geragogy cannot be established as a separate scientific discipline unless it has clearly defined subject of its research, research methods, place in the system of social sciences, its relation to other sciences, the core set of standardized terms and corresponding terminology, key paradigms concerning acceptance of interpretations of current scientific practice that include laws, theory, application, and instrumentation.

Definition of the term and subject of the research of every science is the basic attribute of its consolidation. Several experts and international institutions have attempted to determine the subject of geragogy. Livečka (1979, p. 26, as cited in Čornaničová, 2007) defines geragogy (he uses a tem gerontopedagogy) as a "theory of education for old age and in old age." Pöggeler (1976), Petřková (1994), Wolf et al. (1982) and others define the subject of geragogy along similar lines. Čípová (2011) points to an effective educational focus in geragogy through the definition of geragogy as a theoretical-empirical pedagogical discipline dealing with educational aspects in the third age of life. In the context of education, geragogy follows from andragogy. Határ (2009, p. 39) goes even further and states that "we perceive geragogy as a scientific area (discipline) of educology and gerontology that deals with the theory, methodology, and profession of education aimed at elderly people. It is carried out through goal and age-specific offers of adult education". Terminologický a výkladový slovník (Glossary of Terms and Definitions) (Hotár et al., 2000, p. 147) defines geragogy as an emerging scientific discipline within the differentiated and specialized sciences of education, according to the age phasing of the education process of a person. It focuses on examination and systemization of knowledge related to the preparation for old age and ageing in pre-senior education, on actual education of seniors, and on trans-generational education focused on senior and intergenerational issues. Čornaničová (2007) confirms this establishing and constituting process and says that the term geragogy cannot be regarded as generally accepted within the terminology of sciences of education in domestic or foreign literature. The very inconsistency surrounding even the

name of this scientific discipline confirms the direction towards its separation as an independent scientific discipline. The subject of geragogy is the study and systematization of knowledge related to the widely understood education in relation to the senior age of a person. In terms of generation and target orientation of its educational activities, the subject of geragogy can be divided into three areas: actual senior education, pre-senior education and pro-senior education. In terms of specialization aspects of andragogy, the subject of geragogy includes: culture and public awareness education in relation to senior age, socially oriented educational programs for seniors, and professionally oriented educational activities for seniors. Švec (1998) critically addressed the terminological justification of the name and subject of geragogy and he states that "geragogy cannot be referred to as a scientific discipline as of now. It does not meet and will not meet any time soon the criteria set for mature scientific disciplines." Despite this, Švec opines, geragogy is a part of gerontology as a system of sciences about the ageing process, about the specifics of old age and about life of seniors.

The second condition for the process of constitution and establishment of geragogy is the definition of its research methods. Prusáková (2005), Čornaničová (2007), Határ (2009), Balogová (2010) and others have addressed that issue in the past. Specific methods of geragogy that have their own integrated procedures and theoretical backgrounds were proposed. At the same time, what we observe is an interdisciplinary perspective in the rational application of methods used in other scientific disciplines. The choice of proper methodology used in the area of research or education is closely linked with functions that geragogy should serve. These include roles, purpose and activities in which geragogy become meaningful (Čornaničová, 2007). The broad spectrum of geragogy functions includes cognitive, cultural, educational, socio-informative, activating-stimulating and prognostic functions. In the narrower sense, there is also a methodical aspect of the education of seniors in specialized institutions and organizations, in a specific educational program, course or training through projecting objectives, content, rules, methods, organizational forms, means, defining participants and determining ways of assessing educational activities.

The third condition is that geragogy should be included in the system of social sciences and should have a clearly defined relationship to other sciences. Švec (1998) created the General Classification of Sciences and Educational Sciences (Všeobecná klasifikácia vied a vied o výchove). In this context, it can be said that geragogy is in a process of building its theoretical apparatus so it can meet the parameters of the theoretical-empirical level and become a science with all of its attributes. Discussions on its methodological inclusion will undoubtedly be the subject of many studies. In spite of that, we can clearly say that geragogy already has its important place in the human and social science group today.

At the same time, geragogy has very close relations to sciences on which it is based, such as andragogy (in specific instances it relies on androdidactics) or social, cultural and professional andragogy. Equally important is the cooperation with social pedagy, social work, philosophy, psychology and medicine. Határ (2009) points to the place of andragogy and geragogy in the system of scientific and study programs. He agrees with Švec (1998) that in order to determine the place of both these scientific disciplines in the system of sciences it is necessary to start with the hierarchical classification of educational science that sufficiently reflects the reality of the educational system. From the methodological and systemic perspectives, Švec considers both sciences as autonomous, belonging to the system of human sciences.

An important condition of constituting geragogy is defining the basic terms apparatus, i.e. relevant terminology. In this area too, we can find terms and categories that have a unique status in geragogy. This prompts a fruitful scientific discussion about the effectiveness of using individual terms. An example of this debate is the term senior. When defining the term senior, taking into account the personality development stages, the stage of senior includes both the pre-senior and senior period. In the field of educational activities, the term senior was adopted as a general term referring to a whole population group, which is the focus of geragogic activities. According to Čornaničová (2007) the term senior began to be used in the education practice spontaneously and replaced other terminological definitions that emerged in the fields of medicine, psychology, sociology and other scientific disciplines and which describes a person of older and old age. These terms are also commonly used in an agenda pertaining to retirement and pension schemes in administration. In geriatrics, the term geront is commonly used. It often evokes an image of an old, sick person who is not self-sufficient anymore. In psychological literature, the term senescent was adopted. Some authors use this term to define only the first developmental stage of old age. Legislature uses the term pensioner or applicant (for a pension). The year 1999 was declared by the UN as the International Year of Elders and in this relation the term old was replaced with the term older in conjunction with the substantive person or people. We use the terms "senior" or "older person" to denote both developmental stages, the pre-senior stage as well as the senior stage. When dividing the senior age, it is necessary to differentiate between early, i.e. the third age and later, i.e. the fourth age of old age. Geragogy therefore studies the target groups of senior and pre-senior education as internally highly differentiated and specific groups of seniors. The participants of these processes are perceived as individuals in terms of a complexity of certain psychophysiological characteristics, but also as personalities with specific social roles, value orientations and statuses, i.e. as individualities (Čornaničová, 2007). The European year 2012, as the year of Intergenerational Solidarity and Active Ageing, introduces new more ethical terminology, for example abolishing the term post-productive age of seniors

since many seniors are more active (professionally or in their leisure time) than their younger counterparts. The key terms geragogic theory and practice are education and training of seniors, further education, life-long education/learning and self-education. Life-long learning includes formal, non-formal and informal learning and involves blending and complementing of these forms of learning throughout the whole life. All above-mentioned forms of learning are applicable to seniors.

Finally, another important condition of establishment of geragogy is the existence of basic paradigms. If we accept the definition of paradigm as a system of basic scientific knowledge and methods that guide research in any given field of knowledge in a certain historical period, then we can express the opinion that geragogy and its research can already present a number of research processes that have prepared conditions for the creation of basic paradigms. A paradigm defined as a pattern, a model or an example represents a certain way of thinking, or a basic theoretical-empirical view and attitude orientation that determines what will be examined in the given scientific field, or how will the examined phenomena be interpreted. Thus, the paradigm reflects objective reality and shows the direction of development for the future. If we were to transform this theoretical definition of paradigm into practice, then we can say that the need to develop a competence paradigm is the most pressing issue in geragogy today. We can say that while respecting the post-modern context. Yet another requirement in the process of consolidation of geragogy is being met.

Geragogy has been developing its horizontal as well as vertical level and it should continue to do so. The horizontal level can be seen in the development of micro, mezzo and macro levels, where geragogy addresses the questions of education of individuals, groups and whole communities. The vertical line of development can be seen in the development on a practical, academic level, whereby the demand for a scientific level is also emerging. In terms of specifying geragogic education (education of seniors), it is necessary to emphasize that a senior as an individual, who is primarily a biological entity, happens to be in between the social and natural sciences, from philosophy, psychology, medicine to pedagogy. At the same time, society helps an individual with integration of his or her life experiences and thus creating a healthy, stable, and a self-confident personality. Numerous researches today clearly declare the space for educating seniors, whether in a philosophical-psychological context or in a medical-psychological context. However, in the foreground, there is always a great potential for development. Based on social progress and personal engagement of an individual, it is now possible to create old age better also through plasticity (Gruss, 2009). This plasticity has been reflected not only in the ever-increasing life expectancy, but also in the fact that today's younger elderly are in much better condition than their peers in the past

generations[3]. Early old age has become more accepted. Therefore, the promotion of educational institutions such as the University of the Third Age or the Academy of the Third Age, together with an offer of specializations for senior education, is the natural culmination of efforts of a knowledge-based society.

3 Qualified training of geragogues - geragogue as a specific profession

The requirement for quality knowledge, skills and competences of a geragogue relates mainly to the aspects on an individual, interpersonal level, but also on a broader organizational and socio-political level. Authors like Belz and Siegrist (2001), Kosová (2006), Švec (1998), Vašutová (2004) and others attempted to define pedagogical competencies. Veteška (2010) and Čípová (2011) similarly defined competencies of an andragogue, but the definition of geragogic competencies is absent. The need to establish geragogy and define the competencies of a geragogue with all the attributes of a profession is a challenging task. Kosová (2006) poses questions of whether we can equip geragogues with a high level of professionalism, whether they will be able to feel and represent professional identity and whether they will know in what it means to be professionals. There are occupations in a form of crafts, semi-professions and professions. To meet the requirements of a profession is not that simple when geragogy is concerned. Professions represent occupational patterns that have a highly developed sets of standards derived from their specific roles in society. Thus, the profession creates a social status of a person in the context of features that are typical for him or her such as:

- strong ideal of serving the society - performing profession for the benefit of society;
- professional identity - professional autonomy and socialization, creating professional associations, professional standards and code of ethics;
- autonomy in decision-making of the professional - independent expert assessment of client's needs;
- demanding expert skills that only members of the profession possess;
- mastering theories of formalized knowledge in the context of high-level long-term training, etc.

Considering the above-mentioned features of the profession, the question arises as to which of them is a geragogue able to acquire. At present, we can only speak of those that are linked to person's individual competences and own reflexivity. Others that are linked to the wider community context cannot be evaluated. The very notion of professional identity as acknowledgement of the

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[3] For instance, today's septuagenarians are physically and mentally comparable to sexagenarians thirty years ago (Gruss, 2009).

nature of one's professionalism and the place of his or her profession in the system of social categories and relationships is characterized by a high level of self-acknowledgement, autonomy and self-control of performance by the professional community and a high degree of affiliation to the profession. All of these characteristics can be applied in today's conditions with difficulties. Thus, in practice we can only satisfy the requirement concerning the assessment of educational needs of the client - senior while respecting the requirements of specific education of this group and applying specific goals, approaches and methods.

Čípová (2011) agrees with this view and describes what the personality and competences of a geragogue, as an educator of seniors, should be. A geragogue takes on the role of a motivator, facilitator and adviser, who creates a learning climate that corresponds with the needs of senior participants and also activates and motivates them to engage in the learning process. Optimal learning conditions are characterized by a high internal orientation of participants (cognitive, motivational and emotional prerequisites of the participants), participants' level of competences (autonomy) and partnership. Personal competences of a geragogue are known and taken mainly from the adult educator's competencies. However, they lack a broader extent of establishment. The condition of empathetic communication, patience, openness, spontaneity, the ability to adapt quickly to requirements in the educational process and the ability to self-reflect can strongly motivate the senior's personality. With regard to psychological-didactical competences, the author expects the competences: of a social, psychosocial, communication and metacommunication nature.

Based on Belz and Siegrit (2001), it is required to perform the key competences, such as social competences, competences in relation to own personality and competences related to methodology. Muller (2003) and Lombardo (2000) (as cited in Veteška, 2010) offered a different model with the requirement of a broad spectrum in the field of individual development (as cited in Veteška, 2010). Veteška and Tureckiová (2008) offered the most accurate definition of competences required in education. They combine the individual areas of competences with educational goals and require professional competences, personal competences and social competences. The key competences required from a geragogue in relation to the educational process aimed at seniors are: the ability to communicate and cooperate, the ability to solve problems and be creative, the ability to work independently and deliver results, the ability to take on responsibility, ability to think and learn, and the ability to justify and evaluate. This broad concept of key competences of a geragogue is important since the senior educational process is very specific. For instance, seniors use a high degree of pragmatism in their learning, they tend to use methods of critical thinking (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, comparison), but, on the other hand they use flexible and value reference systems less. Their cognitive and emotional processes like memory, thinking, perception, etc. work in a

different way. In the didactic context, it is necessary to use methodological procedures that would stimulate the motivation of older learners, reflect the individuality of seniors as well as their specific learning styles and overall lifestyles. Besides that, the methods used in older adult education must allow the feedback in the educational process and the application of acquired knowledge in practice. Seniors must be viewed as active participants in the educational process, which means being actively involved in content, forms, methods, and dynamics of the educational process.

Despite the presented reflections on the place and competences of a geragogue in the field of senior education, it is necessary to state that today we cannot talk about a clearly defined profession of a geragogue. That is despite the fact that there are educational institutions, such as universities and academies of the Third Age. Their number and existence is not managed under any official program of the Ministry of Education of the SR (the Ministry provides only recommendation concerning the establishment and operation of universities of the Third Age within universities as a part of life-long learning). There is no clearly stated requirement for a profession of a geragogue. Just the contrary, there are many obstacles to the realization of this expert profession. The obstacles concern legislation or in pre-gradual higher education training. The change of this situation depends largely on changes in legislation and on changes of attitude towards senior education, which needs to be seen not as a possibility, but as a requirement. If these obstacles could be overcome, then a process of establishing the profession of a geragogue can commence. Then successful professional competences of a geragogue will be created from an international and political context, from a legal and methodological context, from value orientation, from key competences and skills, from the application of ethics, from examples of good practice and from the chaos of constituting of the science and profession of geragogy. Despite what has been said, new social conditions of postmodernism require from geragogues in positions of older adult educators and managers be engaged in continuous education and learning, active assessment of personal values emerging in every interaction. They need to be able to understand senior's abilities and reflect the way a senior sees his or her world. It is not only the expert knowledge that is expected from the geragogue. His or her instructional skills (pedagogical, socio-emotional, expressive and technical), managerial skills (application of methods and techniques, management styles, group leadership and an unwritten curriculum) that create space for an effective education of seniors and for search of the meaning of life are equally important. To study natural world means to capture what is most important to all the ways of human life, what we all have in common, what relates to our existence: our prospects, physical existence and finality. Our role is not to avoid the impacts of globalization, but to face the problems that globalization brings. We must do so individually and collectively and take action to face these issues positively in hopes that we can make a positive difference in

response to personal and social problems and promote equal opportunities for education and self-realization potential of everybody - including seniors. Geragogy can play an important role in the "humanization" of society in which the human dimension is disappearing under the pressure of a rapidly evolving world that has been torn by conflicts, discrimination and oppression driven by the pursuit of power and wealth. This often happens at the expense of other important aspects of life, such as compassion, a sense of humanity and spiritual satisfaction. Geragogy can play only a small, yet significant and valuable role.

4   Target groups of geragogic education

The specificities of senior education are that it is necessary to create an integrated program of life-long education focused on professional training and cooperation of primary, secondary and higher education schools. Although there are good universities and research centres in Slovakia, they are often isolated, have minimal influence and lack participation in major European projects. Therefore, it is necessary to create a space for development, promote the transfer of knowledge into real practice, and support excellence. We also need to create a space for education of seniors knowing that education in every sense plays an important role in a life of both the individual and society. Education is an important factor of employment, but it also plays an important part in social integration of a person, so that he or she do not feel isolated and lonely but they know how to adapt to social changes. Education has also political significance, since educated people react differently to political changes, democracy, global issues, they have a different perspective, different knowledge, they are more resistant to demagogy and populism, half-truths, manipulations, nationalism, xenophobia and fanaticism. Education is also a significant cultural factor, through which it is possible to promote ethical and legal standards, build understanding and respect which in turn improves interpersonal relationships. Education helps to preserve and develop cultural heritage that every nation needs to pass on to future generations especially through life-long and further education aimed at all classes of the population, not excluding seniors.

When developing target programs of the geragogy study department, we can include pre-senior education, senior education and pro-senior education as part of generational target education activities. They are implemented as part of the short-term, mid-term and long-term preparation for ageing and old age using selected forms of education in old age, which include: Universities of the Third Age, Academies of the Third Age, Virtual Universities of the Third Age, Intergenerational education and Daily centres. Other programs include: Senior Centres, Educational programs 50+, 60+, 70+; Cultural-Educational Activities, Summer Camps and Summer schools, Thematic tours, etc.

Mead and Bateson offer significant inspiration for the education process of seniors in their concept of "deutero-learning" - "learning to learn". In the process

of teaching and learning they ascribe the primary and decisive role to the social context and methods of transferring knowledge rather than to the content itself. Mead (as cited in Bauman, 2004) concluded that the social structure of the society and the methods of learning, transferring knowledge from mothers to daughters, from fathers to sons, from uncles to nephews..., are more important than the content of education itself, through which individuals are learning to think, as well as the method, in which the overall set of different knowledge and skills is shared and used. "Proto-teaching" is the opposite of deutero-learning. It is the process of primary learning, or the learning of first level, when contents and results can be monitored and recorded, or even scheduled and planned. However, deutero-learning is a hidden, unconscious process and it is especially during this process, when learners acquire knowledge important for their lives ... without it, the results of learning would be rigid minds unable to adapt to different situations ... Bateson (as cited in Bauman, 2004) sums his theory by claiming that deutero-learning, "learning to learn", is an essential addition to the whole proto-teaching, because without deutero-learning, the results of "first degree learning" would be rigid minds, incapable to adapt to different situations, they were not prepared for in advance. Later Bateson concludes the concept of second degree learning with the concept of "third degree learning - tertiary learning". Here, the taught person acquires skills to modify the set of alternatives, with which he or she learned to work during deutero-learning. The reason to adapt this concept is "a feeling of general crisis". Our time excels in deconstructing frameworks and demolishing patterns, suddenly and without warning. Under these circumstances, tertiary education gains sovereign adaptation value and becomes almost the key component of "necessary equipment for life". Life in this postmodern era (referred to as late modernity, reflexive modernity or surmodernity by others) helps the argument. This postmodern time puts great demands on people of its time in a form of immediate destruction of existing patterns which must be replaced with new ones at once. It can be said that life success and rationality of postmodern men and women depends on how fast they are able to get rid of old habits and how fast they are able to learn new ones. According to Bauman (2004), "in tertiary learning there is the habit of working without habits".

The postmodern world places emphasis on tertiary education, however neither the actors themselves, nor the educational institutions are prepared for it. The existing education builds on established structures (it is clear, who is the student, the teacher and what is the content of education). We must accept the existence of education without a structure, where even the democratic society itself can be perceived as a "giant pedagogical institution" (Castoriadis, as cited in Bauman, 2004). And so in this context we experience a general feeling of crisis, and a crisis of universities. In history, a university was a vital place where the values serving social integration emerged. It was also a practice field for the educators to train so they could spread these values and transform them into social skills.

None of this is true today. Technological advancement reduces the life-span of knowledge for which we are awarded university diploma. Short-term professional education provided by non-university settings has been used today more often.

This process university crisis can be changed by the process of excellence of universities and their departments, and by a variety of educational programs that would respect the requirements of our times, would quickly react to socio-cultural changes and demands of potential learners. With that in mind, let us answer the question: What is the role of university education? The answer is: university education should also instil tolerance towards diversity and otherness, strengthen courage to accept responsibility for own choices, practice the ability to change frameworks and encourage freedom to accept anxiety over uncertainty that brings freedom with joy from the new and unknown.

5 Response of the international socio-political environment to demographic trends

In recent years, the socio-political space of international structures is reacting to demographic changes, which are affected mainly by population growth and an increasing age of population (see also Simándi, 2018; Goriup & Lahe, 2018). This demographic trend introduces new problems in relation to socio-political measures, which would ensure tools for questions of old age, ageing and quality of life of this target group in the form of activities focused on their social, economic and cultural specifics.

The discussion on support in this area in the context of international socio-political sphere started more intensely in 1993. That year was declared the European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations. However, this issue was not a one-off in the centre of international political attention and political representations dealt with it also in 1999, which was declared the International Year of Older Persons. 2012 was thus far the last year that was linked to previous ones and was devoted to issues of ageing and risks this phenomenon entails in the life of a person. The European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations aimed to integrate this selected target group into social life and strengthen solidarity between generations that should have been implemented not only in the international field, but also on regional and local level, using a decentralization model, focused on active measures in the field of economic, cultural and social life of seniors and improvement of processes of intergenerational communication.

In addition to the EU, the World Health Organization also dealt with the concept of active ageing and defined this phenomenon as: "the process of optimization of opportunities for health, participation and safety, with the aim of promoting quality of life in the aging process" (Active 2002). The Vienna European Centre for Social Policy and Research continued in this issue and created the so-called

Active Ageing Index. This measurable indicator consisting of four domains (employment, participation on life of society, independent, healthy and safe life, capacity and support conditions for active aging) was based on the assumption that by increasing the average lifespan, people will participate on the formal labour marked longer, just like in other unpaid productive activities, and they will be able to live independently and autonomously" (Zaidi, Lelkes, & Hofmarcher, 2012, as cited in Repková, 2015).

The European model, in terms of rights and obligations of its signatories, is transposed also into national legislatures. In the Slovak Republic, the concept that covers this area (Europe 2020) is reflected in the document National Program of Active Aging for 2014 - 2020 approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic approved in 2013. Slovakia committed to accept the principles in the creation of public policy supporting active aging, such as the principles of dignity, equal treatment, gender equality, solidarity, self-realization, participation, etc. The reflection of international socio-political environment is an equally important indicator in the implementation of measures that have made the senior issue one of the basic priorities that should be (and must be) addressed.

Conclusion

As the creators of content, setting, form and method of senior education we should acknowledge the great responsibility that comes with the creation of senior education. Nevertheless, we would like to argue that if these considerations are true, there is the task to create the theory of formative process with an open goal that will be set by the learner, in our case the senior. In creating programs for seniors, respecting the theory of Baltes and Mead, it is possible to create strategies leading to promotion of mental equilibrium proposed by Švancar (as cited in Kalvach et al., 2004), who provides seniors with a program entitled Five points of optimal adaptation, which are 1. prospect, 2. flexibility, 3. foresight, 4. understanding others, 5. joy. Two thousand years ago, Marcus Tulius Cicero stated that feasting, revels, sexual pleasure and gladiator matches are not for the elderly. They can, however, get much pleasure from nature, arts and learning about the world. Research confirms this statement, because seniors say that learning brings them much happiness and joy. It is the joy of contact with other people, joy of own creativity and also the creativity of the team.

Majority of today's seniors enter the new millennium with a strong sense of danger. They are increasingly concerned about the situation of a human in an accelerated period of consumer hypertrophy. For the senior to succeed in this process, he or she should be sufficiently equipped to be able to accept social changes. A modification of Baltes' deutero-learning to the level of tertiary learning can be of great help. The Senior creates content, forms and methods of

learning independently. According to Hiemstr (2002, as cited in Rabušicová, 2006) there are three forces behind the need of life-long learning. The first is the speed and permanence of technological, economical, and social changes, which, if not anticipated in school systems, will lead to a "shock from the future". Secondly, there is a speed, at which our knowledge, with which we enter the labour market, becomes obsolete, Knowledge and technologies keep changing every 15 years and we are all in danger of being only half competent to do our job in this period, for which we were originally trained. Therefore, an adult should be repeatedly engaged in educational activities. The third force is a significant change in value orientation which has been recorded by European societies since the 1970s. This change lies in significant individualization of lifestyles, self-actualization, knowledge that a full-fledged life is possible only with maximization of individual potentials.

These fundamental philosophical-methodological concepts have contributed to the establishment of geragogy as a separate field, to the definition of basic requirements for a geragogue training, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of the educated - who is a long-time active senior. Despite this constitutional shift, it remains a challenge for the professional public to continue to seek the most fitting definition of geragogy, to add goals, methods and content to the educational process in a symmetric atmosphere of a geragogue and a senior, in the context of social events. What is also needed is a clear definition of competences that a geragogue must possess in order to work with seniors. Defining criteria for a geragogue's pre-graduate training must not be omitted either.

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