



Case Study Briefing

“Active Regardless of Age”: Government Programme for Older Peoples’ Social Activity



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1. Overview

This summary presents the results of research about the Government Program for the Elderly Social Activity, (ASOS) taken up by the University of Wrocław team as the example of the innovative social investment implemented in Poland at local level. This research was conducted in the framework of the InnoSI project no 649189. The aim of the research was to identify and evaluate social investment reform in the area of senioral policy in Poland. The analysis of the programme is based on selected example “Aktywni bez względu na wiek” project implemented by the Towarzystwo Edukacyjne Wiedza Powszechna in 2015.

2. Key policy implications

Main message from the ASOS programme analysis

- The ASOS programme has had contribution in the improvement the Polish seniors’ quality of life by their social activation and better integration with the local society
- The programme has generated several direct advantages, not only for the elderly people as the target group but also for the local communities and local economy, where the intervention is implemented
- The implementation of the ASOS programme is supportive for development of the ‘silver economy’- population ageing phenomenon is the opportunity for economic growth and new work places creation
- The ASOS programme is a driving force for taking up the intersectoral cooperation and partnership between social, public and private sectors

3. Context

The analysed project “Aktywni bez względu na wiek” was implemented from 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2015 in Gdańsk by the non-governmental organisation Towarzystwo Edukacyjne Wiedza Powszechna. The project was co-financed by the Polish government programme ASOS for elderly people in the framework of senioral policy in Poland. Although the ASOS programme is the central government initiative, its implementation depends on local context, which is determined by the social, economic and cultural conditions.

The project “Aktywni bez względu na wiek” focused on the social activation of Gdansk seniors aged 60+, at risk of social exclusion, being in a difficult economic situation and with limited ability of using the educational offer of the University of the Third Age in Gdansk. As the result of the project seniors collected new knowledge and learnt new skills that would enable them to more efficiently function in a changing world and maintain good physical, mental and intellectual condition.

The impact evaluation made by University of Wrocław research team showed not only the positive and intended changes in the beneficiaries’ physical, mental and social wellbeing and their social integration by activation in the local community but also several positive outcomes which were produced as unintended changes made by ASOS programme, for example: new job opportunities for educational services deliverers or savings for national health care system.

It fulfils the criterion of social investment because it generates several direct advantages, not only for the elderly people as the target group of the programme, but also for the local communities and local economy, where the intervention was implemented. The most important argument is that social activation of elderly people has changed their position and traditional role in the society. They have been perceived as the active members of local community- volunteers who are able to support other social groups affected by social difficulties, like children from trouble families or older seniors who need health and care services.

Better understanding the psychological and social needs of elderly people by families and local community have been observed. The ASOS programme is also used to learn the elderly people new useful and practical skills (foreign languages, using computer and internet), which make possible for them being more independent and self- reliant.

This social investment has also innovative character. Firstly, it has been a supportive solution for development of the ‘silver economy’. New educational and other social services, which are offered for seniors by the ASOS programme, create new market of products and services, which is the response for elderly people needs and expectations. This process has changed the traditional understanding of population ageing as the social and economic problem towards the new interpretation of this phenomenon, as the opportunity for economic growth and new work places creation. Second, because the ASOS Programme is a driving force for taking up the intersectoral cooperation. The partnership between social, public and private sectors in delivering services is not new solution but in this context it is based on using the unique resources, which are delivered, by different type of actors. The Towarzystwo Edukacyjne Wiedza Powszechna cooperated with Municipal Family Support Centre, Local Association of Pensioners and Annuitants, teachers, psychologists, personal coaches and lawyer.

4. Sources of evidence

The research team used the following sources of evidence:

1. Existing scientific sources about senior policy in Poland contains: scientific monographs, papers in scientific journals and in some part 'grey literature'
2. Key governmental documents about ASOS programme, quantitative and statistical data about aging processes in Poland, previous evaluations and reports about elderly people' needs and senior policy in Poland
3. Qualitative data from project's documentation: evaluation report elaborated by the Towarzystwo Edukacyjne Wiedza Powszechna and final report from the project implementation
4. Interviews with different groups of project's stakeholders:
 - seniors - 6 interviews
 - service deliverers - 4 interviews (language teacher, psychologist, kinesigeriatrictherapist, cultural animator)
 - project coordinator- 1 interview semi-structured
 - seniors families' members- 2 interviews
5. Group discussion (focus) with 5 beneficiaries of the project.

5. Main findings

- The project beneficiaries established new social contacts because by participating in the project they met people who shared their interests and problems

One of the project beneficiaries Elzbieta describes how she moved to Gdansk in 2013 and had no friends. Through the Internet she found out about the range of classes available and in these classes she has been able to meet “*wonderful people*”. As a result, both her fitness and mental wellbeing has been improved.

- The seniors took up the voluntary activities because by participating in the project, they realised that they could help other people
- The seniors improved their language, computer and manual skills by participating in the courses and trainings offered in the project because the educational offer was adjusted to their intellectual abilities and educational needs

Jerzy and Barbara explain that many in the group did not expect to learn much at their age, but they did and they surprised themselves. As Jerzy explains, he didn't “*suppose that at this age [he could] still learn and expand [his] knowledge*”.

- The improvement of mental wellbeing of the beneficiaries participated in the project was possible because they received individual psychological support which helped them to deal with their personal problems
- The improvement of physical wellbeing of the beneficiaries participated in the project was possible because they seniors were keen on being healthier and the physical training offered in the project was adjusted to their individual physical abilities
- The Towarzystwo Edukacyjne Wiedza Powszechna developed the new educational services in the project by effective cooperation with private actors as the service deliverers and using the resources of several public and social institutions which determine the effective implementation of the project

The results of the research show that although the ASOS Programme is the central government initiative, its implementation depends on local context, which is determined by the social, economic and cultural conditions. The main ones were: strong individual motivations of the beneficiaries participating in the projects, the correct identification the needs and expectations of the project beneficiaries and the preparation of educational services which were the proper responses for seniors' requirements, the cooperation between the social actor TEWP responsible for project implementation and services deliverers who represent private sector sensitive and flexible for seniors' needs which can be commercialised and met by market, using enhanced cooperation with public institutions and other social actors in order to acquire different types of resources, important for correct project implementation.

6. Impact & Implications

The ASOS is a social investment because it generates several direct advantages, not only for the elderly people as the target group of the programme, but also for the local communities and local economy, where the intervention is implemented. The most important argument is that social activation of elderly people has changed their position and traditional role in the society. They are perceived as the active members of local community- volunteers who are able to support other social groups affected by social difficulties, like children from trouble families or older seniors who need health and care services. The results of the research show that better understanding the psychological and social needs of elderly people by families and local community have been observed. It supports the deeper integration of the seniors with the local community, which is especially important in the light of ageing Polish population processes. The ASOS programme is also used to learn the elderly people new useful and practical skills (foreign languages, using computer and internet), which make possible for them being more independent and self-reliant. Other stakeholders were also affected by the influence of the project, but to a lesser degree. The intervention resulted not only in intended changes but also in unintended as well and what is worth mentioning that the intervention did not cause any negative changes.

The added results of the ASOS intervention, which have got intended and unintended character, refer to all project stakeholders. Although some of them were not anticipated in the process of the ASOS programme elaboration and implementation they were generated as the result of ASOS intervention. These unintended changes are significant not only for the project stakeholders but also for the public sphere development, inter-sectoral cooperation and local silver economy development. The silver economy is defined as “the economic opportunities arising from the public and consumer expenditure related to population ageing and the specific needs of the population over 50. The educational needs of elderly people stimulated the new educational services creation. It also produced new job opportunities for service deliverers working in the “Aktywni bez względu na wiek” project. They were employed by the TEWP for delivering courses and trainings for elderly people and they declared that in the near future they were going to continue professional engagement in the work with elderly people and delivering services for this age group. The last unintended outcome noted in the project by the University of Wrocław research team was probable savings in the national health care system. It is difficult to measure what amount of funds would be saved if the seniors participating in the projects were limited their visits in the physician’s office. The Polish health care system is financed from public funds and the National Health Fund pays every medical consultation. If beneficiaries declared that due to the project their physical and mental wellbeing have improved and they reduced the number of meeting with the doctors, we assume that it led to the reduction of public expenditure for health care of elderly people.

The SROI gave insight into an economic effectiveness of the ASOS Programme and showed that though the “Aktywni bez względu na wiek” project it does not fulfil the economic criterion of social investment. However many arguments, especially based on impact evaluation results, support in fact such interventions in the frames of active ageing policy are indeed social investment.

7. Further information

For further information on InnoSI: Innovation in Social Investment: approaches to social investment from the scientific perspective, visit our website at <http://innosi.eu/>

To view the Community Reporting videos with personal experiences of the case study please follow the links below

<https://communityreporter.net/story/story-gdansk-keeping-healthy-and-active>

<https://communityreporter.net/story/active-regardless-age-aktywni-bez-wzgledu-na-wiek-spoleczenstwo-localne>

<https://communityreporter.net/story/active-regardless-age-zaspa>

<https://communityreporter.net/story/active-regardless-age-volunteering>

<https://communityreporter.net/story/stay-active-after-60-story-gdansk-0>

<https://communityreporter.net/story/society-active-regardless-age-towarzystwo-aktywni-bez-wzgledu-na-wiek>

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