

Case study

Received: 10.10.2023

Accepted: 23.10.2023

Published: 31.12.2023

Sources of financing for the publication: Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0054.4337

Authors Contribution

(A) Study Design (projekt badania)

**(B) Data Collection (zbieranie danych)**

(C) Statistical Analysis (analiza statystyczna)

(D) Data Interpretation (interpretacja danych)

**(E) Manuscript Preparation (redagowanie opracowania)**

**(F) Literature Search (badania literaturowe)**

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**THE CITY OF STARACHOWICE AS A PLACE FOSTERING  
THE FOUNDATION OF INSTITUTIONS ACTIVATING  
SENIORS – A LOOK AT THE ACTIVITIES  
OF THE MORE THAN FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD STARACHOWICE  
UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE**

**INTRODUCTION**

Universities of the Third Age have been fulfilling several basic functions for many decades. They focus on activities focusing on the social activation of their senior students. In some regions this activation is needed more, in others less or only selected elements are taken into consideration. This paper is the attempt to show

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the readers what role the University of the Third Age in Starachowice played fifteen years ago and what role it plays these days.

### **STARACHOWICE IN THE PERIOD OF POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION – JUSTIFICATION OF THE NEED TO CREATE AN INSTITUTION WHICH WOULD BE ABLE TO MANAGE AND GUIDE THE “UNLEASHED SOCIAL POWERS”**

Starachowice is the city that is almost 400 years old. Since the moment of its location, it had been called Wierzbnik for several centuries. However, in the 20th century, when the factory settlement of Starachowice was taken over by the Wierzchnik city, the city name was changed to Starachowice. In the interwar period, Starachowice became an important center of the military industry, because in the 1920s the factory of artillery equipment and ammunition, commonly known as the Starachowice Plant, was constructed there. Numerous iron ore mines were located in the immediate vicinity, from where the ore was transported by the narrow-gauge railway to the Starachowice steelworks. Militaria products were manufactured from the melted steel. The years of World War II ended the city's development period. The occupying German authorities continued the military production, forcing the population to work as slaves in the factory. After the war, this production was not undertaken. In 1948, the first Polish trucks, under the STAR brand, started to be manufactured. The Starachowice Plant was transformed into the Truck Factory named after Felix Dzierżyński. For years, the Truck Factory was the main city entity employing over 20,000 workers. Thanks to this factory, Starachowice was developing and expanding rapidly again. New higher standard housing estates were built. The city became an important automotive center. For the next half of the century, the most popular Polish trucks were produced there. They represented the only brand that was associated with the city and country. They were also known around the world (Brzeziński, 2016, <https://starachowice.eu/galerie/95-turystyka/622-historia> [access on 22/07/23]).

The year 1989 in Poland was one of the most important dates in the country's history – the fall of the communism, the first partially free elections (June 4 and 18) and the beginning of the political transformation i.e. “the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. It concerned the change of the political system and the creation of market economy conditions providing the functioning of all economic entities, i.e. enterprises, budgetary units and households” (Nasiłowski, 1995, p. 17).

Undoubtedly, the process of the political transformation, which began in Poland in 1989, created an opportunity for effective economic and social development. Unfortunately, in addition to successes, there were also many failures and irregularities in the transformation process. It meant that the period of political changes turned

out to be an extremely difficult time for many people. Residents of small towns, where the significant industrial potential was concentrated and where traditional industry branches dominated, felt it particularly severely. Political transformation and the introduction of the free market economy involved these cities and their inhabitants in a very difficult, sometimes even tragic, economic situation.

Starachowice is undoubtedly one of the cities, which the period of political transformation was difficult for. In the post-war period, the city started to develop dynamically, providing its inhabitants (mainly thanks to the Truck Factory, which during its best years employed nearly 20,000 workers, i.e. nearly 1/3 of the city's population) with conditions of good life quality, housing, education, access to culture, entertainment and finally, the sense of pride connected with the production known in many corners of the world. However, after 1989, the situation began to deteriorate significantly. Due to the transformation, several thousand of people lost their jobs in Starachowice. For the next upcoming years Starachowice became the city affected by deep, structural unemployment. Serious social problems turned into pathologies ([https://starachowice.eu/images/kamil\\_stanos/norweski/ankieta/charakterystyka\\_i\\_diagnoza\\_miasta\\_prl.pdf](https://starachowice.eu/images/kamil_stanos/norweski/ankieta/charakterystyka_i_diagnoza_miasta_prl.pdf)).

In November 1991, 11,000 people were deprived of the opportunity to earn money. To make matters worse, in December and in accordance with the provisions of the Act on Employment and Unemployment, several thousand residents of Starachowice lost the right to obtain benefits or allowances. The city authorities asked the Council of Ministers for an extension of the benefit payment period. The majority of the city's inhabitants expressed the opinion that the city was dying. Cultural desertification was a manifestation of such an agonizing state. Two cultural community centers were closed down at that time. The Community Secondary School was founded in the former Factory Community Cultural Center – ZDK “Drzewiarz”. In turn, the Factory Community Cultural Center, previously maintained by the Truck Factory – FSC, was taken over by the Solidarity Club, which was to bear the financial costs of maintaining the building and support its members with a 5% discount. After several years of vegetation and destruction of the entrusted facility, it was closed down. Inevitably, numerous artistic groups ceased to exist, including the well-known “Starachowianie” Song and Dance Ensemble as well as the brass band. In April, the only cinema in the city was closed either. The oldest International Press and Book Clubs – MPiK Club in the Kielce region terminated its activities as well (Kowalski, 2013, p. 310).

The degradation of the “STAR” Truck Factory was undoubtedly a fundamental economic and social problem for the city and neighboring communes (its negative consequences also affected local and national cooperators). The factory problems had extremely drastic effects on the local economy, due to the fact that the factory was the main employment provider in the sub-region at that time. The frustrating situation on the local labor market was also intensified by the deteriorating eco-

conomic condition of other state and cooperative sectors plants operating in the city and in the surrounding areas (Zawicki, 2002, p. 97).

It should be noted that in 1998 the unemployment in the Starachowice district amounted 18.8% and it was the highest rate in the entire Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (45th place in the whole country). In comparison to the neighboring districts of Ostrowiec and Skarżysko, the Starachowice district experienced a very high percentage of unemployed people living in the countryside. In the opinion of the District Labor Office in Starachowice, the guarantee of a significant reduction in the unemployment rate on the local labor market was to be primarily a sustainable increase in the economic situation in the region and country. However, the possibility of creating new workplaces in the Starachowice district was unpromising at that time. It was evidenced by the results of the survey conducted among the sub-region employers by the District Labor Office in Starachowice in 1999. The employment of 181 new employees was declared by only 35% of plants. The significant financial support of the Labor Fund was expected (Ibid., p. 98).

The intense transformations of the past decade resulted in emerging new problems as well as deepening old social ones like: unemployment, homelessness, poverty and alcoholism. People, who could not cope with the stress of unemployment, started to be addicted to alcohol and they experienced mental break downs (Grudniewski, 2017, p. 214).

The memorable year of 1989 also brought noticeable social stratification, the effects of which the city authorities tried to eliminate. Then the city president, with the support of the local press, came up with the appeal to provide assistance for the poorest families and elderly people. The manifesto was as follows: "To help the poorest families and elderly people, the city authorities decided to organize the campaign of free meals and a collection of second hand clothes and items, which can ensure a minimum fraction of their biological survival. Counting on the financial support for such a noble cause, the voluntary financial donations should be transferred to the bank account [...]. Let's remember! Our solidarity will help the weaker survive!" At the same time, another issue occurred. It was the above-mentioned problem of homelessness (in 1990, the local sobering-up center provided a space, where several beds ready to accommodate the homeless, were prepared) (Ibid., p. 222).

The recordings of the Polish Film Chronicle – PKF is worth mentioning. In September 1991 the PKF film presented the story of both the protest of Starachowice workers and the city situation after the implementation of the so called shock therapy. It was also possible to get to know about the role the factory played for this big agglomeration and for its numerous citizens, who were the factory former employees. The workplaces reduction and new staff management methods caused that many people found themselves in a difficult financial situation. One of the women said that due to the changes, she, like many other people, had become "redundant". Former factory workers were shown during their daily duties like

shopping or doing the housework. The film producers showed the city that was in its decline due to increasing unemployment rate. The cinema reduced the number of screenings to a minimum, because there were no viewers. The situation was similar with clothing shops. The Starachowice inhabitants could not afford buying new staff. Pawning jewelry and other valuable items became a usual practice. The film also presented medical doctors talking about the deteriorating health condition of workers. The increasing level of stress caused by work redundancies and the uncertain economic situation directly affected the health condition of employees. The psychiatric out-patient clinic recorded the increase in cases of illnesses not only among the factory workers, but also among their family members who were afraid of what tomorrow would bring (Stoykow, 2019, p. 68).

Therefore, it was clear that the state's "withdrawal" and the transition to the free market economy was the *sui generis* transformation shock, which has still been present in the minds of many residents to this day. As a result of these socio-economic transformations, the city lost the opportunity to grow and provide the effective employment. It happened due to the collapse of traditional industry, a sharp change in the economic situation connected with manufactured products and services, degradation of the natural environment or the degradation of infrastructure related to these processes, including housing, a large outflow of population [RESOLUTION NO VII/17/2016 OF THE CITY COUNCIL IN STARACHOWICE of June 24, 2016 on the designation of a degraded area and the designation of revitalization area in the Starachowice Commune].

Juliusz Ćwieluch, a journalist from Starachowice, recalls: "The beginning of the 1990s was ruthless for the city. Truck production was declining. People were made redundant basically every month. Sometimes the work dismisses reached the number of a thousand people. In the Silesia region, such approach towards people would result in burning Warsaw. The Starachowice factory was dying quietly together with the city. I left such a city in order to study. With me most of the people from my class. There were probably only three people left in Starachowice. There were thirty-three of us in the school class" (Ćwieluch, *Starachowice experiment*, <https://wyborcza.pl/AkcjeSpecjalne/7,157247,20277215,eksperyment-starachowicki.html>, accessed 22.06.2023).

Of course, the 1990s provided the opportunities for the development of private entrepreneurship. It was the period of economic migration options due to the popularization of higher education. As the journalists of "Gazeta Starachowicka" aptly wrote, "At the end of the last century, the generation born at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s was entering the working age. The political and economic transformations gave them a gift – the prospect of maintaining their jobs. If young people knew foreign languages, they were able to obtain professional practice while studying. Financial independence was fashionable thanks to occasional jobs in

various companies, including foreign ones, which were located in large agglomerations with academic centers. The start of this approach contributed to the fact that it was possible to choose from numerous job offers. The demand for young entrepreneurs persisted for some time. No wonder that few of my friends from Starachowice decided to pursue a professional career in our city. People spread across Poland, from Warsaw, through Krakow, Poznań, Wrocław to Gdańsk. They were working in offices, uniformed services, banking, branches of foreign concerns, in hospitals – wherever they wanted” (<https://www.starachowicka.pl/pl/archiwum/szczesciarze,854.html>, accessed 22.07.2023).

However, it should be noted, that the above-mentioned processes, although they should be assessed rather positively, partially contributed to deepening the city’s problems like: the most educated people left, development opportunities were concentrated in the largest urban centers, Starachowice became the periphery. Certainly, the attempts to prevent all negative phenomena that had appeared during the political transformation period were made. Starachowice and the Starachowice region, which were developing based on the existence of one industrial factory, were not be able to function without taking extraordinary remedial measures. It happened due to the significant limitation of this region industry role on the domestic market – a drastic drop in production and employment.

The importance of the Special Economic Zone – SSE, should not be either downplayed or overestimated. However, it ought to be basically stated that cities located along the northern border of the region such as Skarżysko-Kamienna, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski or Starachowice, paid a high price for the change of the political system. The changes resulting from the economic and political transformations did not take into account the needs of the Polish region, which was highly industrialized and dependent on one large industrial plant. This lack of attention directed towards these areas forgotten by the post-transformation authorities resulted in high unemployment and pauperization of large groups of the population. Consequently, the sense of injustice was noticeable through the confrontation with the hopes provided by the year 1989 [<https://starachowicki.eu/arttykul/ps-111706-deputy-prime-minister-w-sprawa-akcji-stara-962524> accessed 7.07.2023]. Of course, some groups of people quickly found their opportunities in the new reality. They were taking advantage of the possibilities provided by the free market and the capitalistic political system. Basically, it should be said that the period of political transformation was a bad time for Starachowice. The best summary of the above considerations can be provided by Michał Banach’s statement. This popular Polish theater, television and film actor was born in Starachowice. He founded the MTM FM Starachowice Radio station, he was the former director of the “Trójka” Radio station and the production director of the Polish Radio station. In his sentimental interview devoted to his hometown and childhood places close to his heart, Michał Banach said: “First of all, it was the facto-

ry. It was my second family home. Factory guards knew me. I was entering this place without a pass. I participated in trainings during which the STAR truck drivers were preparing for the Paris-Dakar Race. Poznań Trade Fairs with my mother. This was the period of the finest development of the factory, for me it was fantastic childhood. 20 thousand people from the city and region were working in the Truck Factory. I remember dozens of buses standing in the car park near the stadium, taking employees home. It was our pride. And it is a great pity that history turned out this way. Today I perfectly understand what my father once felt. Years later I remember, when my father retired, I took him on a tour to show him the factory. My father cried for half of the tour. He cried when he looked at what he had managed to create for 25 years. It was all razed to the ground. Then he told me not to take him on such a trip again... He couldn't agree with what had happened" (Sajór, 2013, p. 202).

Nowadays, people live in the era of sitting judgments about other people and about the time that have passed, but it is worth remembering about the Truck Factory employees. As Paweł Chmielnicki, the son of the chief designer of the Starachowice Truck Factory in the years 1965-1969, the director of the Experimental Plant and then the Research and Development Center of the Starachowice Truck Factory in the years 1969-1982, rightly concludes, these people were doing something real and important – good, modern cars. They did it for the country. They did it with their highest involvement and dedication that allowed overcoming any adversities, even those that resulted from the very essence of the hostile political system in which they had to function. They believed that their efforts were simply focused on building a better country. They wanted this place to be the cradle of the creative thought, so that the next generations no longer had to rely on foreign inventions or on other people's ideas. They wanted Poland to turn from a backward and poor country into a country that other nations would respect (Chmielnicki, Chmielnicki, 2013, p. 235).

## **THE ESSENCE OF MARIA MENDEL'S PEDAGOGY OF PLACE**

Pedagogy of place is the "theoretical perspective of education research. It describes the dialectical relationship of "man-space/place" as the significant element of the learning and development processes. It also provides the creation of human biographies/identities; social relations/social capital; communities/social movements" (<https://tezeusz.pl/pedagogika-miejsca-mendel-maria-1323024#> accessed 5.07.2023). The starting point of this trend was connected with the reflection on the cultural significance of a place. It was related to the "spatial turn" existing in social sciences and humanities since the mid-1990s. Around the same time, this way of perceiving the reality through the prism of space, also interested educational researchers. It can be assumed that the theory of space broadened the horizons

of many educators and they started to consider completely new types of social relationships – including, of course, those related to education (Iwasiów, 2018, p. 4).

The innovative theoretical perspective of pedagogy of place has established its place in the field of Polish educational sciences thanks to Maria Mendel – the researcher, author and editor of significant publications in this field. As the author wrote in her opus magnum – the issue of place has always aroused the interest of educators. This can be explained by the obvious interdependence between the pedagogical activity and its context. Education, which is undeniably an intervention, always takes place “somewhere” and has its own place. Therefore, it is an entry into the dialectical relationship between a learner and the world. It is also the metaphysics, the ontology taking place in conditions of reciprocity and transcendence [Mendel, 2006, p. 9]. *In brevis* – a place is a term of great importance for the humans, because everything that happens in human’s life has its place.

On one hand, pedagogy of place indicates the obligatory educational role of a place, which, in various ways, determines the processes taking place there. In a way it “forms” the learner/person, and, on the other hand, their ability to induce reflection, to stimulate activity and critical thinking (Copik, 2014, p. 182). M. Mendel treats a place as a potentially relevant category that can stimulate and support patterns of pedagogical thinking (Mendel, 2006, p. 22). M. Rutkowski thinks that the approach suggested by M. Mendel originates from the concept of a place understood in the physical, symbolic and emotional sense. According to M. Mendel, the pedagogical importance of a place results from the reciprocity inherent in its essence; from the two-way relationship in which the human shapes a place, but, on the other hand, the place also shapes the human, e.g. enabling, preventing limiting the agency (Rutkowski, 2019, p. 109). Such an entity shaping the previously uninhabited island was certainly the castaway Robinson Crusoe. Undoubtedly, this place formed the hero of the Defoe’s novel, who left the island as a “mature man, aware of the hard life” (Defoe, 1998, p. 330). Throughout his stay on the island he subjected himself to the place as much as possible.

M. Mendel says that places “are what people make them (*place makers*) and therefore, they should be understood as a cultural artifact of a primary nature. From the pedagogical point of view, this indicates the need to develop closer connections between education and the places where the educational process takes place. Places allow educators to fill them with specific meanings” (Mendel, 2006, p. 23).

Therefore the pedagogy of place indicates the existence of a close connection between education and places, which have become important educational instruments. Accepting the assumption that a place educates, it is possible to isolate the subjective character of a place; to identify it with upbringing and to talk about the place as the educating environment. Pedagogy of place refers to shaping an individual by means of space and place, both in the area of formal education at school

and during the informal education (Wojdyła, 2016, p. 17). It is worth highlighting the extremely important issue that not all people involved in education or architecture may be aware of. As M. Mendel writes, “we can make places what we want them to be, but they can also do the same to us” (Mendel, 2006, p. 61).

Regarding education: M. Rutkowski points out an interesting aspect in the context of organizing the school life. The status of the district, in which an educational institution is located, determines the educational potential of the area. Schools considered as those with a higher status can benefit from, for example, shopping malls as exhibition venues or other providers of cultural life. They may be valuable places for children, young people and parents. Unfortunately, schools known as those with a low status have limited opportunities [Rutkowski, 2019, p. 113]. This shows *expressis verbis* how important the place is. It is hard to disagree with J. Nowotniak, who states that “pedagogy of place constitutes the response to the contemporary concerns referring to school, where learners undertake actions and start functioning. It starts to be the materialized conviction that the existence of institutional education makes sense” (Nowotniak, 2018, p. 7). Undoubtedly, school or other institutions, where activities are undertaken, are not only connected with people but also with things and objects present there. Therefore, the pedagogy of place can expand the insight into situations, also taking into account the results of research conducted within the pedagogy of things (Śliwerski, 2020, p. 17).

M. Mendel assumes that pedagogical reflection referring to a place should be developed simultaneously with the philosophical thought, because, according to educators, a place can be considered as pedagogical and philosophical at the same time. The author’s further considerations indicate that within philosophical reflection it is possible to distinguish interesting formulas of the place category that are extremely close to pedagogical thinking, in particular to the issue of education and social animation (Mendel, 2006, p. 23).

The stream of pedagogical considerations concerning the issue of place is broad. It explains how the creative role of places, which provide changes, are acquired. Certainly, a place is not just the background of the life’s spectacle. A place characterizes changes; responds to every man’s activity; creates man the same way the man creates the place in the course of constant interventions and spectacular transformations. It can be said that places treat people with reciprocity [Ibidem]. In other words, a place is an important factor in people’s lives. It will always remain significant because everything has its place. Events take place somewhere, meanings are created somewhere. By means of places people understand reality and themselves. People are and always will be connected with places. It should be added that the pedagogy of place, especially the pedagogy of a common place (generally speaking, the space of constant exchanges of experiences and information between individuals, groups and institutions) is so important because nowadays

people live in enclaves that separate them, and, frankly speaking, these divisions are very deep.

**SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD OPERATIONS  
OF THE STARACHOWICE UNIVERSITY  
OF THE THIRD AGE FOR THE BENEFIT  
OF SENIORS' SOCIAL ACTIVATION  
IN AND OUTSIDE THE CITY**

Due to the transformations described above, in the early 2000s, Starachowice faced the specific situation. Many educated still professionally active people remained in the city. They did not want to leave this place but they planned to work for Starachowice recovery after the crisis. The need to found the University of the Third Age was mentioned many times by Mrs. Jadwiga Cwalina-Krajewska during the meetings of the Society of Starachowice Friends. She was acquainted with the activities of the University of the Third Age located in Płock, but that time this initiative had not been undertaken yet. In March 2007, proposals to create this type of the university in Starachowice were presented by the vice-president of the Świętokrzyskie University of the Third Age in Kielce, Mrs. Krystyna Kunderak, who was the long-term employee of the Provincial Public Library in Kielce. Finally, the University was established thanks to the significant help of librarians from Starachowice, who analyzed the age structure of people taking advantage of the library resources. They conducted surveys among these people, and it turned out that there was a great demand to create an educational institution for seniors in the city. The university was established on June 18, 2007 and since then it has been continuously implementing its statutory activities.

Currently, the University of the Third Age in Starachowice has 182 senior students participating in activities that, from the social activation point of view, are not only beneficial for them, but also for to the entire city community, including people of all social groups. The beginnings were difficult. The support from the city authorities was not provided. The city officials were struggling with much more serious difficulties during this period. There was no space, for the University headquarters where classes could have been held on a regular basis. Every time the University organizers had to look for the premises, for example in the local Cultural Center, schools or the City Hall, in order to run meetings, lectures, presentations, exhibitions, etc. Unfortunately, all of these generated additional costs. Communicating with the University senior students was also problematic because the opportunities to share information about organized events were poor. People responsible for managing intermediary institutions were also reluctant to help maintain the communication with the University senior students. It happened due

to the lack of cooperation agreements. It meant that the University activities were not properly formalized and the local authority representatives were not enthusiastic enough. They thought that the idea of the University of the Third Age was a temporal activity and after some time everything would be as usual. However, it turned out that the needs of people were so great and the motivation to act was so strong. Now the University of the Third Age is sixteen years old. It is able to meet the needs of many people, including not only the University senior students but also other people regardless of their age. It is possible to mention the endless list of the University of the Third Age projects. For the people interested in this issue, the Starachowice University of the Third Age website [<https://utw.starachowice.pl/>] is provided. It is guaranteed that it is worth reading and getting to know the materials concerning the Starachowice University functioning. The scope and range of the University activities included in the offer are very broad and they are as follows:

1) education, including the following sections: civic section, literature section, historical section, geographical and tourist section, wildlife section, psychological section, IT section and foreign languages section (English, German, Russian, Italian);

2) culture and art, including the following sections: theater section, vocal section with the support of the “Silver Notes” band and the “Kabaret z Różą” cabaret, art section, technical section, poetry section, photography section, book and film debating society;

3) Health and physical activity, including: music therapy, Zumba, aqua fitness, Yoga, gymnastics, swimming and hiking (<https://utw.starachowice.pl/index.php/dzialalnosc/sprawozdania>, accessed 22.06.2023).

In addition to those mentioned activities, the University also organizes events that are the added value. It involves the inhabitants of the city and surrounding areas to take part in: concerts, poetry meetings (University senior students’ own poems presentations), thematic performances, evening dance parties, cabaret shows and others.

## SUMMARY

The University of the Third Age in Starachowice has responded to the needs of the group of elderly people. Following the opinion of Professor Maria Mendel, it can be said that Starachowice, as the city with all its post-transformation problems, shaped the attitudes of people who created the city in the past and who create it these days. These people are involved in establishing organizations and institutions, which allow them to develop themselves and which contribute to the development of other local citizens. They do it with their multiplied power and energy. Thanks to the activities of the University of the Third Age, senior students in Starachowice are becom-

ing more and more active not only locally but also outside their place of residence. They cooperate with universities and with other Universities of the Third Age. They are members of the local government councils of seniors. They associate and act more and more dynamically for the benefit of their educational environment. The University of the Third Age in Starachowice is a great example of how the environment shapes man/people and these man/people do the same for the environment.

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## THE CITY OF STARACHOWICE AS A PLACE FOSTERING THE FOUNDATION OF INSTITUTIONS ACTIVATING SENIORS – A LOOK AT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MORE THAN FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD STARACHOWICE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

**Abstract:** The article provides the attempt to characterize the role that the University of the Third Age in Starachowice played at the time of its establishment. The role it plays these days for both senior students and other people has also been mentioned. The paper consists of three subchapters. The first provides the explanation of circumstances in which this institution was established, i.e. justification of the demand for its creation. The second provides the characteristics of Maria Mendel's "pedagogy of place" assumptions. The third provides the description of activities undertaken by the University of the Third Age, which supports the social activation of the senior students.

**Keywords:** University of the Third Age, senior students, social activation, pedagogy of place

## MIASTO STARACHOWICE MIEJSCEM SPRZYJAJĄCYM POWSTAWANIU INSTYTUCJI AKTYWIZUJĄCYCH SENIORÓW – SPOJRZENIE NA PONADPIĘTNASTOLETNIĄ DZIAŁALNOŚĆ UTW STARACHOWICE

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł jest próbą charakterystyki roli, jaką Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku w Starachowicach odegrał w chwili jego utworzenia i jaką odgrywa w obecnej chwili w obszarze społecznej aktywizacji swoich słuchaczy i innych osób zainteresowanych jego działalnością. Składa się z trzech podrozdziałów, z których pierwszy to wyjaśnienie okoliczności, w których powołano tę instytucję do funkcjonowania, to jest uzasadnienie potrzeby jej powstania. Drugi to charakterystyka założeń „pedagogiki miejsca” Marii Mendel, trzeci jest opisem działań podejmowanych w tytułowej instytucji sprzyjających społecznej aktywizacji seniorów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uniwersytet trzeciego wieku, senior, aktywizacja społeczna, pedagogika miejsca