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TALES2SHARE:

Promoting Lifelong Learning of Elderly Women Through the Upgrade of Adult Educators' Methodologies for Inclusive, Accessible and Participatory Communities

Innovative Forums Objectives, Discussion questions & Participants List

Author: INTERART

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Form for elderly women

Note: not all questions have to be asked.

	FORM	
		Answer column
DESCRIPTION & FORMAT	Way of recruitment of the participants	In cooperation with organizations from Bydgoszcz and Toruń offering various types of activities for seniors, including women 55+, a group of people was recruited who agreed to take part in the forum. Experience of exclusion (e.g. emigration or refugee experience) and openness to sharing/discussion were taken into account. Senior women with refugee experience (escaping the war in Ukraine) came to the meeting with a liaison worker from an organization providing them with support on ongoing basis, who strengthened the participants' sense of security, including linguistic security.
	Way of conduct	The meeting took place in an intimate group of five women who participated in it in person. After presenting the idea of the project using a Power Point presentation, the moderator asked each participant to introduce herself briefly and shortly describe their life experience, and she suggested addressing each other less formally, to which all the guests happily agreed. Then, a deeper conversation took place using a previously prepared questionnaire. All participants had the opportunity to speak and share their experiences. The meeting was recorded and participants signed an informed consent form for the use of the collected data. At the end, they were asked to complete a short survey consisting of six questions, mainly closed ones, and two descriptive ones.
	Number of participants	5 women 55 +
	Moderator	Anna Szmyd
	Date and location of the conduct	07.06.2024 ul. Toruńska 59, 85-023 Bydgoszcz, Poland
	Profile of participants (native, migrant, other) Be specific	**Danka**: Polish, a lifelong resident of Bydgoszcz, Poland, extremely satisfied with her life. **Tatiana**: Ukrainian, came to Poland in August 2022 from Zaporozhe (UKR),

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		fleeing the war with Russia. Electronics engineer by profession. **Janka**: Polish, comes from Lower Silesia, but has been living in Toruń since 1951. Microbiological technician by profession. **Brygida**: Polish, was born in Gdansk, but lived in Germany for 20 years, currently has been living in Bydgoszcz, Poland for several years. **Halina**: came to Toruń in 2022 from Tarnopol (UKR - after the outbreak of the war), with her daughter and granddaughter; paediatrician by profession.
ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS (not mandatory)	Why did you decide to join the innovative forum?	- desire to learn new things, experience new things; - interest in something new and previously unknown ; - a compelling, exciting proposition; - the desire to meet new people, especially women willing to exchange experiences; - the desire to share their story; - passion for creating something new; - intrigued by an innovative approach to the issue of exclusion.
	What you would like to have as take-aways from the innovative forum?	All participants value the opportunity to explore novel experiences and viewpoints, as well as forming new connections. They unanimously believe that the journey and the memories created throughout it hold more significance than the final destination, which is why they approach their adventures with an open mind and without set expectations.
	Do you have any expectations you would like to share before we start?	As above
EXPLORATION QUESTIONS	What does being "included" in society mean to you? What are the benefits and privileges that come with it?	- feeling valued, respected, and appreciated, being accepted; - feeling a sense of belonging and community, as well as having access to resources, support, and opportunities for personal growth and development; - having their voices heard and their needs and concerns addressed in a meaningful way;

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	- being included can lead to greater overall well-being, social connectedness, and a sense of empowerment; - having fun, feeling joy, being able to share that joy; - not feeling "trapped" inside their homes.
How would you describe the feeling of being "excluded" from society? What are the disadvantages and drawbacks that come with it?	- feelings of loneliness, unhappiness, fear, sadness, and worthlessness; - feeling marginalized, rejected, and unnoticed, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and lead to depression and anxiety; - lack of a sense of belonging and social bonds; - struggle to find support and build relationships with others, leading to decreased self-esteem and a lack of social support network; - physical and mental health issues; - the lack of social interaction and support can contribute to feelings of frustration and complaining, causing further isolation; - inability to participate in social, cultural, and political activities, thus inhibiting self-development and overall well-being; - limited access to resources and opportunities, preventing from fully engaging in society and achieving potential.
Can you share your experience of living in this community? What have been the biggest challenges you faced?	**Tatiana** initially had no plans to extend her stay in Poland, and for the first three months, she experienced a sense of isolation and loneliness. Despite only bringing one suitcase with her, she eventually came to understand the importance of one's perspective on life and began to connect with those around her. Renting an apartment and recognizing the insignificance of material possessions in comparison to personal growth and relationships, Tatiana underwent a transformation in her mindset. After 45 years, **Brygida** finally reunited with her siblings in Germany, whom she had been separated from during WWII. Her father had died in the war, and her

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	mother had remarried and had more children, leaving Brygida to be cared for by the Polish government. It was thanks to her current husband's intervention at a search office in Berlin that she was able to find her siblings. Her brother immediately recognized her and offered her assistance. She accepted and moved to Germany. Initially, she worked in a military unit performing cleaning duties while starting to learn German. She later became a waitress and continued to improve her language skills. Despite facing some unpleasantness from a fellow Polish woman at work, Brygida emphasizes the importance of mastering the local language for integrating into the community and handling day-to-day tasks. Upon returning to Poland, Brygida experienced significant weight loss due to the stress and longing for her family in Germany. **Danka** has never felt left out, the concept of exclusion is foreign to her. Her vibrant personality, cheerful nature, and love for people have always contributed to her positive experiences. She enjoys interacting with others and found joy in her work in the tourism industry. When she relocated to Malbork with her husband, she seamlessly integrated into the community and formed strong connections with his friends. **Janka** recalled a pivotal moment after their child was born, when her husband's behaviour and words made her believe he had a desire to "confine her in a cage". With the encouragement of a supportive friend, she began to assert her independence, boldly walking out and slamming the door behind her. Despite enduring years of oppressive behaviour from her husband, Janka remains with him, tolerating his loud outbursts and countless irritations. She recognizes that the only thing keeping her in the marriage are their children, symbolizing the tenuous thread that binds them together. If she allowed her husband to

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	rule over her, she would be completely excluded from her community, and isolated from friends and family. **Halina** explained that when the war broke out in Ukraine and her daughter's husband, a police officer, explained the women had to flee, she knew it was a dire situation. Halina with her daughter and granddaughter sought refuge in Poland with a family friend who is a doctor in Toruń. They initially stayed with him for two weeks before finding accommodations at a hotel and then moving to various locations. Her daughter works as an ophthalmologist in a hospital in Toruń, while Halina took on the responsibility of caring for her granddaughter. Motivated by her daughter's intensive efforts to learn Polish, Halina also started learning the language online, including taking a medical speech course. She expressed her desire to return to her profession as a paediatrician and utilized the Internet to attend various courses, meetings, and workshops, such as photography, painting, and beekeeping. Despite initially struggling with the language barrier, she continued to improve her language skills and found solace in helping coordinate rosary meetings for fellow Ukrainian refugees. In addition, Halina took on the role of caring for a Polish woman with Alzheimer's for a month, which not only enhanced her language abilities but also provided her with a sense of fulfilment. Despite missing Ukraine dearly, she remains dedicated to her new life in Poland and embraces opportunities for personal and professional growth.
Could you share your experience of being excluded, or being included in your current community?	**Tatiana** described her refugee experience, arriving from Ukraine with just one suitcase and feeling a sense of overwhelming loneliness. Despite this, she found strength within herself through art therapy, leading to an appreciation for the change in perspective on the world and spirituality. She deeply understands

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	the need to make connections wherever you are. **Danka** considers herself "lucky" as she has never faced exclusionary experiences. She attributes her success in feeling included to her openness and kindness towards others, enjoying being around people and working with them. **Brygida** shared her experience of being separated from her siblings during WWII, spending years in Germany until they were found. Despite taking up work there, initially she felt excluded due to her lack of knowledge of the German language. **Janka** faced exclusion in her marriage due to a mismatch with her husband, who tried to confine her at home and was jealous and grumpy. She found strength in passive opposition, ignoring his actions and words, eventually leaving the house, possibly even slamming the door. Despite this, she remains cheerful, open, and humorous, loving forming new connections. **Halina**, a paediatrician from Ukraine, fled to Poland with her daughter and granddaughter. She found strength in reaching out to people and gaining optimism through courses and workshops offered by various organizations and online resources. Integration organizations, such as the EMIC Foundation and Daily Residence Home for seniors, played a crucial role in assisting participants in their integration process. Learning the Polish language was emphasized as invaluable for those with refugee experience. Overall, all participants stressed the importance of language and forming relationships with others in their community as critical factors in their integration journey.

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How do you typically spend your time? Are there activities or programs you wish were available?	**Danka** engages in both mental and physical activities, such as walking or cycling with other seniors on Mondays, as well as being an avid reader with memberships at three libraries. She keeps a journal with interesting facts and events, and writes accounts of her walks then publishes them on social media. **Tatiana** enjoys various artistic hobbies like handicrafts and painting, has a passion for symphonic music and attending concerts, stays updated on news and offers online, and has an interest in astronomy and popular science topics. Professionally, she is an electronics engineer. **Janka** is known for her dramatic exits from her house, and singing at the Local Activity Centre on Mondays. She is deeply involved with her grandchildren, and she adores gardening, as well as attending the University of the Third Age for embroidery. With a career as a microbiological technician, she worked at the Potassium Soda Refinery for 35 years and now finds joy in conversation, walking, and smiling. **Brygida** has a harmonious relationship with her husband. She keeps them both active with outings, board games, and yoga at the Senior Club in Bydgoszcz. She values movement and refuses to stay idle, considering it unhealthy. Brygida also has a keen interest in spiritual practices like Tarot and clairsentience. **Halina** enjoys singing Ukrainian songs at the Local Activity Centre, exploring museums during trips around Torun, and meeting with writers. She particularly recalls meeting the author of a book about Polish castles in Ukraine.
What kind of support or resources would help you feel more included and engaged in the community?	- fluency in a foreign language – more free courses with wider accessibility; - support and generosity from those in our community; - engaging and diverse programs offered by organizations and institutions;

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		- active involvement in cultural activities and events.
	Have you had opportunities to share your background and experiences with others in the community? If so, how was it received?	**Halina** is intending to start a diary. **Danka** is an avid writer, though she doesn't write about her own experiences. Instead, she meticulously takes notes from the books she reads, filling up several notebooks over the years. **Brygida's** husband is a videographer and photographer, and she often helps him with his projects. Despite her involvement behind the scenes, she is not keen on sharing her personal story in front of a camera to a journalist, as she is hesitant to talk about herself.
	What would you recommend us to include in our training program?	
	What are some activities or programs that you think could help improve inclusion and engagement for women like yourself?	Halina fondly remembers the functioning of the Senior Club in Ukraine, the women's choir, meetings with writers, etc. The participants discussed their desire for accessible, local institutions that offer a variety of integrational services, providing refreshments and a welcoming atmosphere, to inspire and encourage customers, with friendly and knowledgeable staff who can help eliminate any language barriers that may arise.
EXPLORATION QUESTIONS	Have you ever participated in digital storytelling or similar activities? If yes, what was your experience like?	Tatiana, with a little technological help, creates captivating videos that showcase her handcrafted artistry and tell engaging stories set against picturesque backdrops. Additionally, she has left her mark on Ukraine by designing and painting stunning staircase murals.
	What kind of training or support would you need to feel confident in sharing your story digitally?	- a workshop session exploring the essence of storytelling, supplemented with illustrative examples; - hands-on technical training session focusing on the art of framing a compelling narrative; - group work preferred.
	What are your goals for the future in terms of personal development and community involvement?	1. To continue learning new skills and pursuing personal interests such as painting, writing, learning a new language, etc., and to continue

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		exploring new hobbies and interests that bring us joy and fulfilment. 2. To increase community involvement by volunteering at local charities or nonprofits that support causes we are passionate about. 3. To stay physically active by participating in group exercise classes or joining a walking group in our community. 4. To mentor younger women and share our knowledge and experiences with them. 5. To engage in lifelong learning opportunities such as attending workshops, lectures, or joining book clubs. 6. To advocate for issues that are important to us and make a positive impact in our community.
	If you could design a program for elderly women in your situation, what key elements would it include?	
	Do you have any comments or recommendations?	
	What is the story you wish to tell the world?	
Personal notes of the moderator After the conduct of the forum		

Conclusions of the moderator/facilitator:

(please write your conclusions here)

I can confidently say that the Forum was a resounding success. The gathering of 5 women 55+ with diverse backgrounds and experiences truly highlighted the importance of creating a space where all voices are valued and heard.

The stories shared by Tatiana and Halina shed light on the struggles faced by educated women who are grappling with language barriers, loneliness, and isolation in a foreign country. Despite

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their challenges, they found solace in community meetings, workshops, and online courses that helped them navigate their new surroundings.

It was particularly eye-opening to hear one participant express surprise at never experiencing exclusion. This realization sparked a thoughtful conversation about privilege and the various factors that can contribute to feelings of inclusion or exclusion.

The willingness of the participants to engage in workshops focusing on creative storytelling speaks volumes about their eagerness to connect and express themselves. Whether through painting, crafts, or writing, each woman found a medium to share her unique perspective and experiences.

Overall, the meeting exuded a sense of camaraderie and empowerment, resembling the supportive atmosphere of a women's circle. It was truly heartwarming to witness these women coming together, sharing their stories, and finding strength in each other's presence. Personally, I am more inspired than ever to continue fostering a safe and inclusive space for senior women to connect, learn, and grow together.

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