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# Teatr przy stole

## Imagination has no age!



Story co-creation as a form of integration, pastime, and cognitive function training for the elderly.



'Teatr przy stole' is a series of activating classes for the elderly. Participants create a story together (here sky is the limit for imagination) and do role-playing. The idea is based on the popular RPG format.

Story co-creation and work in a peer or cross-generational group is an excellent form of pastime, integration, and cognitive function training. It stimulates memory, creativity, concentration, perception, and language functions.

## **Who is the innovation is targeted at?**

The innovation is targeted at individuals aged 60+ who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- they want to take care of their cognitive health and train their mind to enjoy its performance for years to come,
- they notice that they experience memory or concentration problems,
- they seek social contacts and attractive ways to spend their free time,
- they need new forms of activity to make the decision about taking advantage of the offer proposed by facilities for seniors and mobilise themselves to leave home.

## **Who can implement the innovation?**

'Teatr przy stole' can be implemented by:

- facilities and institutions activating and supporting elderly individuals, e.g., senior and local activity centres, senior clubs, universities of the third age, as well as other institutions that are subordinate to welfare centres, community centres or libraries,



- social organisations supporting mature individuals,
- people who regularly play role-playing games (the so-called gaming masters/mistresses) and are willing to host meetings for the elderly.

## What problems does the innovation address?

'Teatr przy stole' is an attempt to find a practical solution to the following challenges:

- **Solitude at senior age, limited or no social relationships.** Participation in meetings, telling stories and experiencing emotions together have considerable impact on building social relationships, establishing new ones and promoting group integration.
- **Fear of deterioration or actual deterioration of cognitive function.** Life expectancy is increasing, and we face age-related conditions more often. They affect both the body and the mind. Numerous cognitive functions are stimulated by games, e.g., memory, thinking, creativity, attention. Gaining new knowledge and experience, making intellectual effort and engaging in social relationships are the key components of effective mental health prophylaxis.
- **Low self-esteem, no sense of agency.** Elderly individuals often have no space and opportunities to express themselves creatively or to build the world of fantasy and dreams. When creating a story, they become its authors – they have a direct impact on the flow of events. They decide on the course of a meeting, cooperation terms, and the theme of a story they are about to build.
- **Limited offer of activities for the elderly.** RPG sessions are usually associated with different age groups and are not available at facilities for seniors. It is a pity because they can serve not only as a pastime



and integrating activity but can also become a perfect form of cognitive health prevention. Furthermore, it can be a great alternative for those who have not seen proper classes for themselves so far.

■ **No space to share memories and drawing from youth experience.**

Elderly people like to come back to the years of their youth, but they rarely find listeners interested in such memories. The game provides them with an opportunity to have a sentimental journey into their past and to effectively utilise their experience and resources.



# How to implement the innovation at your end, step by step?

## Path for facilities and institutions

For the innovation implementation process to be efficient and relatively short, it is necessary to:

1. **Read the 'Guide to RPG with Adults Aged 60+'** available on [www.teatrprzystole.pl](http://www.teatrprzystole.pl), featuring:
  - information on what role-playing games are, and hints on how to invite elderly people to play together,



- rules of the game and recommendations set forth based on experience gathered during the innovation test,
  - class scenarios and a collection of inspirational materials that will make meetings interesting and engaging.
2. **Watch video materials available on the website**, featuring the description of each class scenario, examples of pastime activities for elderly individuals, and participants' feedback on how they benefited from taking part in classes.
  3. **Organise a group of seniors**. The group should not be made of more than 4–5 individuals. The guide includes an example of an announcement with an invitation to such classes. It should communicate the idea and benefits of participating in such meetings in a simple and clear way. It is a good idea to discuss expectations and needs of the group members as well as the meeting organisation principles.
  4. **Meet at a table and play**. It is important to appoint a person running the game whose role is to moderate the group, support its members, motivate them and possibly also to make sure that the game rules are respected. The moderator is called the game master or mistress – it can be a facility employee (for instance, an occupational therapist) or an elderly person who can take up this task after adequate training.  
  
Another option is to find a game master or mistress among those who play RPGs on a daily basis – they can be looked for in the local community or via a Facebook group we mention later in this text. Usually, it is a good idea to start from simpler forms of stimulating participants' imagination before moving on to creating a plot together (for instance, with illustrated game cards). For more information on the process of creating accessible pastime, see the guide.
  5. **Organise regular meetings and encourage others** to participate and create more groups. It seems a good idea to share opinions, stories on social media and in local press, and among the community.

## Path for those who play RPG on a daily basis (so-called game masters and mistresses)

For the innovation process to be efficient and possibly short, the following steps need to be taken:

1. **Read the 'Guide to RPG with Adults Aged 60+'** available on [www.teatrprzystole.pl](http://www.teatrprzystole.pl), featuring:
  - information on what role-playing games are, and hints on how to invite elderly people to play together,
  - rules of the game and recommendations set forth based on experience gathered during the innovation test,
  - class scenarios and a collection of inspirational materials that will make meetings interesting and engaging.
2. **Watch video materials available on the website**, featuring the description of each class scenario, examples of pastime activities for elderly individuals and participants' feedback on how they benefited from taking part in classes.
3. **Turn to one of local organisations or institutions** supporting the elderly and propose that you can run meetings with older individuals. The [www.teatrprzystole.pl](http://www.teatrprzystole.pl) website can be utilised to depict the idea of role-playing games and 'Teatr przy stole'.
4. **Organise a group of seniors in cooperation with this facility or institution.** The group should not be made of more than 4-5 individuals. The guide includes an example of an announcement with an invitation to such classes. It should communicate the idea and benefits of participating in such meetings in a simple and clear way. It is a good idea to discuss expectations and needs of the group members as well as the meeting organisation principles.



5. **Meet at a table and play.** The task of the master or mistress is to moderate the group, support its members, motivate them and possibly also to make sure that the game rules are respected.
6. **Organise regular meetings and encourage others** to participate and create more groups. It seems a good idea to share opinions, stories on social media and in local press, and among the community.



No matter which path applies to you, we encourage you to **join the official innovation group on Facebook** – 'Zagrajmy w RPG z osobami w wieku 60+/Let's play RPG with individuals aged 60+'. The group is meant for representatives of institutions and organisations and people from all over Poland that either run or plan to run classes featuring role playing games for seniors. You can share your experience there, ask questions, and consult others, but also find there game masters and mistresses (individuals who regularly play RPG), who can be offered cooperation (meeting moderation).



# What is particularly noteworthy?

Based on the innovation pilot experience as well as the knowledge and experience of people specialising in senior activation supporting the creation of the innovation, we encourage you to:

- **Select the right meeting venue.**

A quiet room that can be closed for the duration of the meeting will work best, as then nobody from the outside will distract participants and they themselves will not feel uncomfortable about being observed by possible audience.

- **Explore the needs of all players.**

It is necessary to ensure the sense of participants' safety and comfort and meet their needs resulting from different levels of physical fitness, personality traits (for instance, excessive shyness or just the opposite – the need to dominate) and the readiness to bring up controversial issues (or the lack of it). It is necessary to talk before classes about the needs of each individual, and to incorporate them into the process of organising and holding these meetings.

- **Agree on the game rules and mutual communication.**

It is essential to build friendly atmosphere conducive to openness, creativity and communication. To that end, it is a good idea to establish together with the participants the rules of the game. It is necessary to ensure the right communication language used by the moderator, e.g., avoiding RPG terminology or foreign words.

- **Focus on experience, emotions and good fun.**

The idea of RPG might be something foreign and abstract to the elderly. Hence, it seems a good idea to explain it to them in a simple and friendly manner. The game should not be based on pre-defined and inflexible rules – it is important for the moderator to follow the participants' ideas and support them.

# Does it work? How does the innovation help its beneficiaries?

The key changes that participants noticed themselves included:

- more openness and integration – sharing experience brings players closer to one another and helps build trust;
- personal development and creative pastime – seniors start perceiving themselves as creative individuals with great imagination, able to tell engaging stories;
- satisfaction and pride caused by the sense of agency;

**We created something new during these meetings – something that had not been there before and something that would not have been there if not for our participation. This is why we felt like creators, like artists.**

**game participant**

- improved wellbeing and mood – all seniors stressed that they had left meetings with positive energy; they appreciated excellent atmosphere and good fun, as well as the fact that it was an escape from daily routine and worries.

**Imagination has no age. Every person can be imaginative and has the need to create, have fun and rest.**

**Tomek 'Frejtag' Piątek, innovator**

## How much does it cost?

The organisation of a meeting for one group of seniors requires means for:

- materials for the session – either regular dice or story cubes can be useful, as well as metaphoric cards (e.g., Dixit), various photos (of places, people, emotions etc.), maps, building plans;
- refreshments for the participants – water, tea, or possibly also cookies or dried fruit and nuts (preferably sugar-free);
- remuneration for game masters or mistresses (these can either be employees of a given facility or someone from the outside);
- remuneration for a facility employee for the time devoted to getting trained and implementing the innovation;
- optionally also the cost of the venue at a facility organising the meeting.

The total cost of a single meeting is determined mostly by the remuneration for the host and the necessity to cover the cost of a venue lease and can range from PLN 150 to 500.



# Who are the authors of the innovation?

Introducing the authors of the innovation:



**Tomek „Frejtag” Piątek** – educator, animator, pedagogue. Since 2004, he has been engaged in pro-social activities. Initiator and organiser of numerous events and projects of social and cultural nature (e.g., concerts, film screenings, festivals, workshops, charity initiatives, meetings). He uses active methods based on mutual respect, integration, and taking advantage of meeting participants’ potential. Tomek feels comfortable working with both youths and the elderly. Currently, he is involved in projects on the verge of cultural animation and RPGs (methods: social media and short feature films), writing scripts, recording RPG sessions online, generating content within the ‘Gry Frejtaga’ platform. Author of the first Polish publication including RPGs as an animation method at institutions of culture and NGOs. For more information, visit [www.gryfrejtaga.pl](http://www.gryfrejtaga.pl).



**Joanna Luźnia** – culture study specialist, for the last 10 years professionally affiliated to Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej (The Center for Citizenship Education). In her work, she is particularly interested in such topics as free resources, copyrights, and accessibility. She developed and edited content, was responsible for the graphic layout and managed Internet tools. She developed her interests in the area of UX/UI and interface design. Finally, she decided to quit a full-time job to pursue her long-term dream of becoming



a surface pattern illustrator and designer (portfolio: [www.joannalusnia.pl](http://www.joannalusnia.pl)). She loves good stories, and this is why in 2019 she came back after many years to the world of role-playing games. She cooperates with Tomek Piątek and his 'Gry Frejtaga'. She actively works not only as a gamer but also as an editor of RPG materials and publications.

## Contact details and more information

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For more information, including two guides, namely 'Guide to RPG with Adults Aged 60+' and 'Model of cooperation between institutions and organisations with game masters', visit [www.teatrprzystole.pl](http://www.teatrprzystole.pl) and <https://inkubatorpomyslow.org.pl/innowacja/teatr-przy-stole/>.



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# Uncommon solutions to common problems

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