

Reviews

SAK, Petr – KOLESÁROVÁ, Karolína: Sociologie stáří a seniorů (Sociology of Old Age and Seniors.)

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Ageing population has become the most disputable issue of the present demography in almost all European countries. The size of the elderly population is discussed not only by scientists, researchers and politicians but also by media and general public. Demographic data give evidence that the world-wide, European and our national populations have been ageing and, of course, the number of senior citizens, who need health care and social assistance, is growing.

The main concern in the 19th century was to live into the old age, in the 20th century it was to provide care to those who lived into the old age, and the 21st century main concern is to make the old age meaningful. Leisure activities of seniors are in the interest of the modern society.

It is wrong if the old age is considered to be an age of idle relaxation. Being active and vigorous plays a key role in the process of ageing and is important for longevity. Taking part in social events actively supports seniors' zest for life.

Petr Sak and Karolina Kolesarova analyse the results of a large empirical research and they try to conclude and design a theoretic network enabling an empirical research interpretation. The results are presented by the authors in more than fifty graphs concluding that the old age that comes early between sixty and seventy years of age encompasses a potential of culmination of life. This potential is determined by social, psychic characteristics of seniors at this age. The authors state that health conditions at this age are comparable to those of middle generation; vitality, cognitive abilities are not weakened; life-long learning comes to its culminating point and also life long expertise comes to its peak (p. 203).

In the first chapter (pp. 11-33) the authors focus on the process of ageing in social evolution and in a man's life. The reader is involved in the process how ageing and seniors are perceived by the Czech population. The opinion of Czech people about what is the age of people who are seniors, is not the same, it varies. Based on the research results the authors emphasize that people are called seniors when they are 60 – 70 of age and, of course, it depends on individual characteristics. The second chapter analyses generations (pp. 34-49). The generation in its final phase – seniors and their attitude towards society – is discussed. It is emphasized that patterns of social development cover also the alternation of generations and social and historical changes. The social and

political situation of generations (young, middle and old) and their role in social processes have an impact not only on the dynamics in society but on the current conditions in society, and community, as well. In the third chapter (pp. 49-85) the authors Petr Sak and Karolina Kolesarova view the history of senior citizens generation from the point of history of society. The impact of social events on the current generation of senior citizens is clearly seen on the graphs. Close attention is focused on the demographic development and its impact on ageing of population. The issue of demography is discussed in the fourth chapter (pp. 86-97). The authors point out that the demographic structure of the Czech society is being transformed due to the two contrary trends such as birth rate drop and extended longevity. Some current changes in the state pension age, retirement age are discussed by the authors. They emphasize the importance of a healthy life style, eating habits, physical activity, and the importance of having a healthy environment, health care supporting active and healthy ageing of senior citizens. What is the real actual life style of the current senior generation? What leisure activities do they have? The answer to the questions can be found in the fifth chapter (pp. 98-114). The graphs show the ways how senior citizens spend their free time – the most popular leisure activity is hiking in the country, listening to the radio, more often they watch television, read newspapers. The authors devote their attention to the issue of family life, its importance for their lives. The sixth chapter (pp. 115-147) presents results of a survey on social, economic issues and health care. From the results it is seen that a rapid health worsening is recorded at the age above seventy. Based on the data sources the authors anticipate that nowadays senior citizens and the process of ageing have reached the best quality they have ever had from the historical point of view. They lead better lives if compared to the lives of their predecessors and to the ones of the next generation (pp. 141-143). Some extraordinary cases are described when some senior citizens can become homeless people. The categories such as society, state, country and senior citizens are discussed in the seventh chapter (pp. 148-165). The question “Is the Czech society prepared for population ageing?” is discussed by the authors. They base their statements on survey results when 77 per cent of senior citizens and 66 per cent of younger population say that the Czech population is not prepared for ageing (p. 206).

On page 204 the authors state that politicians and media present their attitudes towards seniors in a way evoking some tension and creating a generation gap. According to their views the attitude of younger generation towards the senior population has never been as bad and negative as it is today. The authors emphasize some attitude duality of young people: they praise and show respect towards their own grand parents, they consider them to be

authoritative but on the other hand they do not show the same attitude towards the other elderly people.

To understand the old age the authors give examples (pp. 168-190) of three types seniors' interviews. The interviewed elderly people are aged 80 – 90 and their interviews form part of a separate chapter. The interviewees are seen by the authors as real persons with their real lives and their views complete the results of quantitative researches when the data about people and their lives are analyzed and synthesised as social phenomena to be known. The story of an eighty-eight year old Ilja Hurnik, a musician and a writer who is creative and active although being aged can be used as evidence of being active and creative as an elderly. Another living example can be a personality in pedagogic science, Jarmila Skalkova (82), who is speaking about her vitality till she was seventy-five, pointing out that a remarkable change in her conditions occurred after she turned eighty. Foreign policy analyst and a university teacher Miroslav Polreich, seventy-six years old, expresses his view that pensions and retired senior citizens are neither a threat nor a risk to the society. Qualitative researches as commented by the authors have played a key role in improving the view of ageing and enable to understand senior citizens.

The monograph by the authors is published to help all readers, specialists and common readers penetrate into the field of ageing population and understand the issue of new social and cultural processes in demography by means of empiric sociological research, gathered data and analyses. All the data gathered in the survey lie in the core of the monograph on ageing, elderly people and are discussed from a sociological point of view in the Czech Republic where a lot of changes take place. The authors' goal is to put all the facts and data and knowledge on ageing, quality of life of elderly, and their retirement together into a system. The book is intended for senior citizens and for those who work and live with elderly people. It brings some facts to enrich the experience of those who are interested in the issue of ageing. The monograph "Sociology of the Old Age and Seniors" can be an aid for students who have signed up for the courses of sociology, social work, social services etc. It is expected to assist them while proving their knowledge on development in demography and its impact on ageing in Slovakia. The book is published as a result of a project co-funded by the grant of the Czech Ministry of Education. In Slovakia many works are published on the issues such as ageing, quality of life of senior citizens, e.g. Hana Draganova et al: "Social Care". The author offers a complete view of humans from the point of view of providing social care, discusses real social cases that social workers are responsible for. Martina Hrozenska et al.: "Social Work Provided to Elderly People, Theory and Practice." In this work social work is viewed as a process of enhancing the quality of life of elderly people. Beata Balogová's "Senior Citizens" offers an

overview of facts on different scientific studies on ageing, quality of life of the elderly, on their start of retirement. The author tackles also the point of passing away and death. The monograph “Selected Social Issues of Seniors in the Context of Social Pedagogic Science” aims at senior citizens and their issues in a society-wide context. It describes and discusses social pathological phenomena focusing on current issues of ageism, and seniors’ abuse. It emphasizes the importance of seniors’ education within the process of life-long learning.

Although a lot of works discussing the issues of senior citizens are published, views and opinions of sociologists are still missing.

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