

## **Annotation**

The monograph “Sociology of the old age and seniors” is based on 18 qualitative and quantitative research investigations and analytical and comparative studies, executed in the framework of the grant of MŠMT ČR “**Changes in the social content of the senior generation category. A contribution to the sociology of the third age.**” (project 2D06021). The monograph analyzes and draws conclusions from the extensive database of empiric research investigations and at the same time it tries to create a theoretic framework for interpretation of the respective empiric data. The results of empiric research investigations are presented in the publication in more than fifty graphs.

The monograph deals with seniors and old age in several levels. The first level constitutes a general grasp of a phenomenon of the old age and seniors without concrete historical correlations, only in the context of the life career and life phases.

The second level concerns the concrete historically unique generation of seniors entering into their active life after the Second World War. This generation, as an object of historical events and changing conditions in the society and also as a subject of the social development, is absolutely unique. No other generation since the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present was an object and subject of such qualitative changes as this one. No former and successive generation was so politically and socially engaged as was this one. It is an irony that all great social changes, for which it strived, turned out badly. The findings of the empiric research investigations, incorporated in the monograph, primarily describe this generation of seniors. The general findings about changes related to the old age are also based on changes of this generation. This generation is now confronted with the old age phase and is gradually departing from this life.

If we compare the generations since the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present, the greatest changes are associated with this generation. The life and social field is gradually expanding and right this generation is associated with the greatest widening of the life field. This generation also managed the phenomenon of the life field digitalization. This generation is also associated with other social processes, the growing education of women, their emancipation, including the economic one, the motorization, the mechanization of cooking and housekeeping and mass improvement of the housing culture etc.

The authors of this monograph arrived at a principal conclusion, based on the empiric findings, that the early old age of 60 up to 70 years features a potential of life culmination. This potential is given by social as well as by psychical characteristics of the senior at this age. The health condition at this age is comparable with the health condition of the middle-aged generation, the vitality and cognitive functions are not basically weakened, lifelong learning is cumulated and is associated with culmination of the life experiences. At exclusive seniors the prerequisites for wisdom are developing, the acquirement of which was impossible in the preceding life phases as a level of education and intelligence for acquirement of wisdom is only an essential condition but not a sufficient one.

The social status of a senior is characterized by objectively given and subjectively experienced freedom and availability of time, i.e. that a senior is a master and creator of his time content as nobody else in the society. These characteristics of the old age are also appreciated by the middle-aged and young-aged generation. Seniors on the contrary primarily worry about existential and financial difficulties, health problems and loneliness and only after that follows the fear of death. Seniors and the younger generations as well are more afraid of loneliness than of death. This of course associated with the post-modern society, in which the disruption of natural social relationships happens in the framework of the polis but also in the framework of a family and workplace.

The approach of the society to the old age potential as to the life culmination is dual. The humanistic approach that sees in a man and in his evolution and self-fulfilment a purport of the history, society and evolution and sees its mission in helping to realize the old age potential that will contribute to fulfilment of the purport of the society. The second approach is neoliberal, in which a man is not an objective but an instrument, an economic category and also a source – instrument for making profit. For this approach are categories such as self-realization, self-fulfilment, human evolution and social development, only unfilled ideas. On the contrary, a senior getting a pension is something negative as he does not make profit to “economic and social predators” but even draws means that the predators could channel to their accounts.

Politicians and media present attitudes, views and stands to the seniors and pensioners that cause inter-generation tension. The stand of the young-aged generation to the seniors was probably never so negative as nowadays. The attitudinal duality of the young-aged generation is also curious. The young people have a negative attitude to the generation of seniors but not to their own grandparents. Grandparents in the Czech population belong to the greatest authorities and are also respected by the young-aged generation. The major authority in the

Czech society is the mother. This fact speaks about the growing emancipation and authority of women in all their roles but also about the loss of social position of men and fathers. The present unstable family is a cause of a big change for men and fathers especially on the part of their children.

The research investigation showed a better social – economic situation of seniors than it is commonly viewed by the society. They are not so encumbered with debt in comparison with the young-aged and middle-aged generation and a great share of seniors from this generation has savings (33%). Major items of the seniors' budget form the costs of housing and foodstuffs. The socio-economical situation of the contemporary seniors is better than in the former and perhaps in the next generation of seniors. This is given by the fact that their situation is formed by advantages of both social systems in which they lived, before the November 1989 and the present one. In the former system they were able to secure their housing and often also the second recreational housing, the new system has offered them greater latitude in travelling, the health system fortunately still functions before disintegration to poorish and commercial health care. The pensions, even if they are not so high, enable to a great part of seniors to cover the costs of living. The old age security scheme has evidently culminated round the year 2009. Since then started the decrease of the living standard in certain segments of seniors but it does not encompass the whole generation. It concerns above all seniors who are living alone from one pension, they are ill or they pay a rent in greater cities, primarily in Prague. In some cases this led to situations that has left the seniors on the street or led to a suicide. Though the living standard of the contemporary seniors is now the highest when compared with the past and the future, the seniors themselves and the whole Czech population are of the opinion that the pensions do not secure an adequate and dignified life.

In the ninetieth, a gap has been created between the generation of seniors and the young-aged generation, which was not only an intergeneration gap but it was also a gap between the ages, between the age of literate culture and the age of cyber culture. The contemporary seniors are the last generation in the life of whose books and literature played an important role.

The contemporary young-aged generation on the contrary reads printed books only minimally. The age group of university students reads books the least in comparison with other population groups and devotes to reading five times less time than the seniors. The young-aged generation was fully computerized at the end of the ninetieth, whereas the group of seniors was distinctively lagging behind the computer literacy and availability of new

technologies. Other media associated with cultural life, communication and lifestyle also contributed to this gap between the generations. This gap began to be more and more shallow roughly round the year 2000. A great share of the seniors is now computer literate and the Internet forms an integral part of their life. 42% of seniors use a computer and 37% use Internet in the age group of 61 up to 70 years. It is the first generation that has changed the old age lifestyle by using the new technologies. There is not such a great leap in use of computers between the early age and the older middle-age generation.

There is nevertheless a great share of seniors who have no access to a computer and thus they find themselves behind a digital barrier. The state and public governments are now in the process of digitalizing and computerizing and the computer literacy now is not only a system advantage but a necessity. An individual without an access to the Internet is threatened by social exclusion. While an employed man has still his natural relationships and natural social nets, a senior can socially completely fail. It is therefore dangerous if the offices digitalize their agenda without compensation.

The development trends of the society are also reflected in the development of the seniors' lifestyle and in the change of frequency of their activities. This fact is evidenced by the data from the repeated research investigations based on time recording methodology. Though the seniors read a lot, the volume of time devoted to reading decreased in the course of ten years. Walks and excursions belong to the typical activities of seniors and this activity leapfrogs other generations, such activities of seniors nevertheless declined in the course of ten years. A marked drop can be seen by handicrafts. Activities associated with the computer and making phone calls start to play a more important role in the lifestyle of seniors.

The contemporary Czech society prefers youth namely in the employment. A senior however need not only be worse but he could also be better in a range of attributes and some qualities has nobody else. The working qualities and fulfilment of seniors were assessed in the research investigations of personnel officers and opinions of the Czech population. According to these research investigations, the seniors have some specific non-replaceable working qualities. To the advantages of seniors belong experiences, responsibility, dutifulness, honesty, discipline, carefulness, reliability, thoroughness, exactness and consistency. To these belongs also a quality that can be generalized as "professional wisdom". This category comprises following qualities: intelligent, reasonable, understanding of their craft; ability to identify the substantial things, foresight, logic, more grace, forwardness, deliberation and prudence.

Another attribute of a senior worker is associated with time and its availability in consequence of his social roles. This quality of seniors is characterized by: “enough time, independence of their family/children, they need not hurry home, they are anytime available, time flexibility, without commitments – they do not have children, they need not have a compassionate leave, they do not pay mortgages. All these mentioned and positively appreciated attributes of seniors are closely associated with the higher age and experience that is unavailable for the younger-age generations.

The research investigation also compared representation of qualities at individual generations. It emerged that the young-aged and old-aged generation have a contradictory set of qualities. A multi-generation setup of working teams is therefore optimal as seniors offer qualities which contribute to the competency of the team.

The health condition of seniors is up to roughly 70 years surprisingly good, 80% of them are more or less healthy. The health condition of seniors begins to deteriorate only after their seventieth. The quality of the health care is by seniors assessed positively as one of the few items, the quality of which is rated as a better one than in the past. On the other hand they consider the financial affordability of the health care as aggravating one.

The highest share of the faithful is to be found among the seniors and this share is even higher in the group of seniors over 70 years. This development has two reasons as the secularization of the Czech society is derived from the age. The most secular part of the Czech population is on a long-term basis the young-aged generation. The seniors on the contrary represent a lively history of the Czech religiousness. The second reason is the dependence of the spiritual development on age. The interest about spiritual questions rises with the progressing age and the oldest life phase – old age over 70 years is in contrary to the previous life phases characterized right by spirituality.

The Czech population believes that the Czech society is not prepared for its ageing. The same point of view is held not only by 77% seniors but also by 66% of the younger-aged generation. In the process of concrete formulation of this unpreparedness is often mentioned the problem of unsecured pensions for the future seniors and insufficient level of contemporary pensions.

The length of life rose by thirty years since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the present. The lengthening of life has not been caused only by changes in all spheres of the life of the society. The lengthening of life is also associated with the change of the old age, the quality of life of the old-age generation and the change of old people as individuals and as old-age generation. These changes will be retrospectively reflected in the society. It does not

concern only the fact, that in the society will live older people than in the past and their share will be higher, but it will also change the character of the society that will turn from the contemporary ageing society into a long-lived society. In conformity with another change in the society, represented by the emancipation of women and their growing influence in the society, this will entail the decrease of influence of middle-aged men and weakening of their positions, approaches and manners of behaviour associated with middle-aged men resulting in less aggressiveness and less competitiveness.