

Materialien zur vergleichenden Sozialarbeitswissenschaft
und zur interkulturellen/internationalen Sozialarbeit
(Materials for comparing social work science
and intercultural/international social work)

Volume 4

Oldrich Chytil (Editor) and Brian Littlechild (Co-Editor)

Strategies for the Maintenance of Autonomy in Old Age

Institut für vergleichende Sozialarbeitswissenschaft und interkulturelle/internationale
Sozialarbeit (ISIS) e.V. Eichstätt

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Introduction

The international scientific conference „*Autonomy in Old Age – Strategies of Its Maintenance*”, which took place on the 16th and 17th September 2004 in Ostrava, represents the culmination of the three year research project „*Seniors in Society. Strategies of Maintaining Individual Autonomy*“, carried out with the participation of the Department of Social Work, Medico-Social Faculty, Ostrava University, and financially supported by the Czech Science Foundation.

The research project was focused on the maintenance of personal independence and social integration of elderly people in terms of their material and social resources. It was based on the aim to understand the way seniors behave and the way they cope with everyday life and life crises. Its focus accentuates serious social and economic aspects of the demographic aging of the population and fundamental changes connected with the transformation of Czech society.

The conference has confirmed that the theme of aging and old age in relation to the autonomy of seniors is topical and productive both from the theoretical and empirical perspective, and, inseparably, from the perspective of social practice. The contributions presented by philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, theoreticians of social policy and social work and other fields have demonstrated the usefulness of the multidisciplinary handling of the topics, and, “within” the particular subject areas, they have also shown the productivity of applying various theoretical perspectives, paradigms and concepts.

Given the aim of the conference to present the results of the research project „*Seniors in Society. Strategies of Maintaining Individual Autonomy*“, we regard the contributions of the research team members, Dana Sýkorová, Alice Příhodová, Naděžda Špatenková, Radka Popelková and Oldřich Chytil, as the core of the conference proceedings. These include conclusions deduced from the data obtained from the constituent research projects of the above-mentioned project, i.e. from research with seniors, middle generation of adult children and social workers from the seniors and severely disabled people care facilities, and from the investigation into the accessibility of social care institutions for seniors in the Moravian-Silesian region. In her contribution, Ivana Loučková describes and analyzes the methodological frame of the project, the “integrated research strategy”. This strategy consists of the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of research in terms of the progression and the interconnection of facts in the process of data creation, which led to the multiresource design of the research.

We hope the readers will find the contributions of the research team members inspiring, and we also hope they will stimulate a relevant discussion in scholarly magazines, conferences and seminars.

Oldrich Chytil

Ostrava, December 2004

Age Structure of the Society

Gerlinda Šmausová

Abstract

In this chapter the retirement age is understood as a part of the age structure of the society. This structure by which human age is divided into passages of certain meanings, roles and positions ascribed, is not a physiological given, but is a purposeful construction. Stages called childhood, youth, adult and retirement ages are mainly derived from the organization of labour market. Nevertheless the age categorization fulfills two important functions: 1/ age as a so called *ascribed attribute* is a criterion of mostly inequalities resources distribution (distribution of property and power), 2/ it defines norms of the “right” generative behaviour. Presently these age categories which are not integrated in the labour market (i. e. the childhood, youth and retirement age) are prolonged whereas the age of “working” activity is getting shorter. The ageist term “overaged society” should be replaced by another one reflecting both extending human age as a “natural” aspect of development as well as the changing structure of the labour market as a social aspect of development.

Accelerating Changes and the Isolation of Seniors

Stanislav Hubík

Abstract

Theory of network society as well as dromological theory of speed are opening new problems connected with tele-inter-activity. Multimedial space and cyberspace create in cooperation new dimensions of perception, thought and speech. This process produces tensions and conflicts in cognitive orientation of individuals. Fundamental categories like *space*, *time*, *community* and *language* are living their own life in teletopia of cyberspace and such categories like *reality* and *virtuality* play their own intertextual games in multimedial space. Seniors as a social group must confront their original attitudes, ideas and views with these new phenomena of multimediality and of cyberspace. As in societies during times of industrialization also in contemporary network society quite new social problems arise— problems connected with high speed tele-inter-activity.

Intergenerational Solidarity and the Crisis of Insurance Systems

Jan Keller

Abstract

The paper deals with some problems pertaining to the crisis of relations between generations in the conditions of the crisis of the existing models of social insurance. The author suggests that neither the model of insurance known under the title "pay as you go", nor the institution of private insurance funds are capable of providing fully for the aging population. He states that the ideology of a so called "society of knowledge" has a latent function which consists in developing the third model of insurance. He criticizes the lack of effectiveness of this new system of insurance in the conditions of the so called modernization which denotes the transformation of a welfare state to the purely market regulated society.

Managing One's Old Age (How Seniors See Themselves in Terms of Personal Autonomy)¹

Dana Sýkorová

Abstract

The chapter is based on the results of the integrated multiresource sociological research „Seniors in Society. Strategies to Retain Individual Autonomy“, conducted in the years 2002-2004 and supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic (Reg. No. 403/02/1182). It seeks to answer the following research questions: 1. how seniors define *autonomy*; 2. how they perceive themselves in terms of personal autonomy; 3. what meaning they, as „people of a certain age“, ascribe to autonomy; 4. what they regard as conditions influencing personal autonomy; 5. which strategies they use to maintain autonomy. The research was based on a predominantly inductive research strategy. As the author points out in the conclusions presented, autonomy in old age from the seniors' perspective means especially physical self-sufficiency. Seniors ascribe the key role to health, which for them is both a *synonym* to and a *condition* of autonomy. Seniors also regard autonomy as independence *within* reduced conditions (resources) and role demands, as well as autonomy *within* personal responsibility and as autonomy *within* social relationships. The view of autonomy in old age, or autonomy of seniors, is characterized by a *duality of perspectives*, i.e. seniors use different viewpoints to judge themselves and “other seniors” (*Me vs. Them* perspective, or distancing oneself from the stigmatized group of the old; see Goffman 2003).

¹ **The contribution was supported by the Czech Science Foundation as a part of the research project *Seniors in society. Strategies of Preserving Personal Autonomy*. (Reg. No. 403/02/1182), realized in 2002-2004.** A part of the text was published in the proceedings of the conference “Autonomy in Old Age – Strategies of Its Preserving”, held in Ostrava on 16-17 September 2004 as a part of the research project. (Sýkorová in print a) It was also published in the proceedings *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis*, *Facultas Philosophica*, Palacký University Press (Sýkorová in print b).

The Role of the Quantitative, Qualitative and Integrated Approach in the Social-science Research of Aging and Old Age

Ivana Loučková

Abstract

The strategy of integrated research led to a conception of the “Seniors in Society” research as a multi-source inquiry in which the differentiated contributions were considered not only for a research inquiry (for the view of the respondents as well as for the specific view of their interviewers, inquirers as participants in one research interaction situation; one set of data was gained in this way) but also for the “macrostructure” of the views of (a) seniors, (b) adult children, (c) social workers professionally engaged in care of seniors (this corresponded to a “successive” variant of the approach presented by us; three independent and differentiated sets of data were gained in this way). The usefulness of the strategy of integrated research was proved by our research in that it allowed us to decide about choice among competing interpretations.

Old Age and its Interpretation by Social Workers

Alice Příhodová

Abstract

The chapter focuses on the theme of autonomy of people in old age. In the concrete we focus on external conditions and resources for the maintenance of autonomy in old age from the perspective of social workers. We analyse it against the background of the concepts of social work, which are based on the maintenance of autonomy and integration of seniors and we discuss it in the context of persisting myths about aging and old age in our society. We find social workers are caught within the pressures of these two forces. They live in a society with the negative stereotypes about aging, but they have to work in the framework of concepts emphasising the autonomy and competence of senior to deal with their living situations. In doing so, we discuss the results of the research project “Seniors in Society. Strategies to Retain Individual Autonomy”, supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic (Reg. Nb. 403/02/1182).

The Map of Social Services for Seniors in the Moravian-Silesian Region

Radka Popelková, Oldřich Chytil

Abstract

This paper focuses on the mapping of social services for seniors in the Moravian-Silesian Region and on the comparison of the services provided for the requirements of seniors in the city of Ostrava. We divide social services using the Pincus and Minahan division into formal and social systems. The map of social services includes information on retirement homes, pensions for seniors, temporary retirement homes, nursing homes, domiciliary services, nursing care, stationary homes, advisory centres, seniors clubs and seniors associations.

Seniors and Their State of Health¹

Naděžda Špatenková, Dana Sýkorová

Abstract

Health is an important condition of the autonomy of seniors. However, it is not easy to define health, or concepts such as “good health” and even “excellent health” on the background of involution processes in old age. For seniors, health is a most subjective category – seniors perceive it in the context of the quality of life and self-sufficiency. The perception and evaluation (self-rating) of health (*good/bad health*) are determined to a large extent by the mental state of seniors (e.g. the feeling of life (dis)satisfaction, depressive symptomatology, living through a significant loss – e.g. becoming a widow/widower, accumulation of demanding life situations, the senior’s personality) as well as by the level of lack of self-sufficiency (or its anticipation).

¹ This article was written as part of the project Seniors in the Society. Strategies of Maintaining of Personal Autonomy. supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. Methodology of this project – research approaches, methods, techniques – and other information about this project are published in the research report for the 1st year of work on the research task GAČR, reg. no. 493/02/1182 (*Sýkorová 2003*).

Attachments

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