

Public interest activities of older adults

The thesis focuses on the activities of older adults of the third age, especially on activities whose direct impacts go beyond the boundaries of family and personal interests and bring public benefit, i.e. benefit to municipalities, communities of interest or the whole society. How could society naturally use the potential represented by their knowledge, experience and skills?

The thesis pursued three objectives: to theoretically and empirically investigate ordinary and public interest activities of the elderly as a contemporary social phenomenon, to identify motives, external factors and barriers to the realization of activities, and to propose an individual index of active old age. A concept of personal coping strategies of older adults was introduced and the so-called ideal, pure type of offensive, proactive strategy was proposed.

The gerontological theories of activity, disengagement, and continuity, supported by several universal psychological theories, were discussed and interpretively linked to the issue of needs. Concepts such as public interest or activity, their classification, and operational definitions of diverse determinants and factors that influence the activities and attitudes of older adults were clarified.

The empirical part of the work had an exploratory rather than a verifying purpose and provided insights into activities of various kinds and into ways in which older adults cope with their old age and aging. The main data source consisted in an anonymous survey using the internet in which 2031 people aged 60 and over participated. The survey defined aggregated scales that characterize different aspects of older adults' behaviour and experiencing, as well as three individual indices of active old age and public interest activities. In addition to the survey, a semi-structured interview method with 29 older adults was performed.