polish 2(170)'10
sociological
review
ISSN 1231 – 1413

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Aging in Poland at the Dawn of the 21st Century*

Abstract: The aim of this article is to present some aspects (both individual and collective) of the present and future situation of the elderly in the Western world, with particular stress on Poland. The authors examine a few contexts of aging as a stage of human life. Some aspects of the processes discussed here are relatively common whereas others have only gained importance in recent decades. This paper is composed of two parts. The first one, using socio-cultural anthropological, as well as historical data, describes various significant contexts of the present and approaching processes, focusing on the continued and changing perceptions of old age. The second part, based on the quantitative data delivered by statistical services and pooling centres, shows the most likely positions of various groups of the elderly in the Polish society in the perspective within the coming 25 years.

Keywords: ageing in the lifecourse; anthropology of ageing; ageing and social panics; retirement strategies; intergenerational transfers.

In order to avoid engaging in the 'panics' focused on the present and future situation of the elderly in the Western world, including Poland (see, e.g., Palska 2004), it is a good idea to examine a few contexts of aging as a stage of human life. Some aspects of the processes discussed here are relatively common whereas others have only gained importance in recent decades. This paper is composed of two parts. The first one describes the context of the present and approaching processes, focusing on the continued and changing perceptions of old age as a stage in human life. The second part shows the most likely positions of various groups of the elderly in the Polish society in the perspective within the coming 25 years.

Old Age in the Life Course: Individual and Collective Aspects [1]

More than seventy years ago Leon Petrażycki, Polish law theoretician and sociologist, wrote that not all living creatures were mortal (example: unicellular organisms),

* This paper is a longer and slightly revised version of our chapter "Polska starość na początku XXI wieku" [Old age in Poland in early 21st century], in: Krzysztof Frysztacki and Piotr Sztompka (eds.), *Polska początku XXI wieku: przemiany kulturowe i cywilizacyjne* [Poland in Early 21st century: Transformations in Culture and Civilisation], in print.

[1] For obvious reasons, we cannot refer directly to all the sources used. In the first section of this paper we draw on the vast body of Polish and international literature on the subject (mostly in sociology but also

and not all mortal creatures had to grow old. Insects as well as other animals die 'in the prime of life,' soon after they have fulfilled their reproductive function (1939: 92–94). Modern biology has confirmed at least some of those claims but it also contextualises them in the sense that it is reluctant to apply 'human' terminology to less sophisticated creatures. Unicellulars (which are not part of the animal kingdom) multiply through cell division but cannot be said to die. The course of life of an insect may consist of a single stage only. Having gone through the stage of a larvae and chrysalis (sort of an 'external embryo'), the emerging insect is mature and ready for reproduction. The life course of some animals takes two stages: infancy and sexual immaturity is followed by sexual maturity and readiness for reproduction. Some animals, such as insects, die without a sign of senescence or soon after losing fertility. Hydras and jellyfish are other examples of creatures which do not age. Numerous amphibians, reptiles and some birds reproduce until they die so their also 'never age' (see http://www.senescence.info/nature.html). As regards humans, physical anthropologists identify the following stages in their life course: a) passivity (up to about 7 months of age), b) mastering one's own body (up to around 3 years), c) control of the surrounding world (up until 8–10 years), d) puberty, i.e. preparation for reproduction and for starting a family (till reaching sexual maturity), e) coming of age (up until around 20–25), f) stabilisation (up until approx. 40), g) ageing (from around 60) (see Wolański 1979: 330–331).

In traditional societies, in and outside Europe, classifications of the human life course are quite different from those proposed by physical anthropology. People tend to subdivide their own lives into immaturity, maturity and old age. The period of late maturity is the cultural ideal. On the other hand, modern industrialised societies conceptualise the course of life very much the same way as physical anthropologists do. Special social roles are ascribed to infancy, childhood, puberty, young adulthood, middle age and old age. As young adulthood is viewed as the ideal stage, there is a strong focus on the 'youth culture' that old people find hard to accommodate to. Regardless of what physical anthropologists have stated, the aforementioned categories and the borderlines between them are socially constructed and they change under the pressure of factors which will be discussed later on in this paper. However, it is useful to recall the words of Philippe Aries, the French historian who wrote that while children had existed at all times, childhood as a separate socio-cultural category did not appear in the societies of Western Europe until the late 17th and early

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anthropology and demography), with Polish literature being confined to the last thirty years. Let us name just a few references: Hoff and Perek-Białas (eds) 2008, Keith 1980, Palska 2004, Petrażycki 1939, Piotrowski 1973, Synak (ed.) 2002, Szukalski 2008, Zalewska 2009, Vincent 1995 and 2003. The history of old age in the Western culture is described in at least two seminal works: by Georges Minois (1995/1987) and Jean-Pierre Bois (1996/1989). In this paper we include specific references only when quoting authors' ideas. The second section of this paper is based on reports from various, mostly Polish, research providers. Such reports, which have now considerably grown in number, first appeared in late 20th and early 21st century. Our work draws mostly on reports from the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), Social Diagnosis (Diagnoza Społeczna), Gemius, Poland's Central Statistical Office (GUS), available from the following websites:www.cbos.pl, www.diagnoza.com, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/,http://www.gemiusacademy.pl/raporty-analizy-2007.html, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL_L_prognoza_ludnosci_na_lata2008_2035.pdf.

18th century. Likewise, old age is also a cultural category. Jean-Pierre Bois, a historian of old age, once stated:

> Naturally, old people had always existed but their presence had not always been felt in the same way. Undoubtedly, the awareness of the existence of old people in European societies was born in mid-18th century. This was a breakthrough moment in the history of mankind. Before that time the image of old age had always been theoretical: the society would create a picture of old people in accordance with their norms and ideals. […] Between mid-18th century and World War I […] old age ceased to be a marginal phenomenon (Bois 1996: 314, backtranslated from Polish).

The aging process in humans has biological, psychological and social aspects. Biological ones are clearly visible for instance in diseases which become evident at a mature age, such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's diseases. Nowadays old age is often medicalised and treated as a disease which the pharmaceutical industry, and advertising, promises to cure radically, bestowing people with immortality. Despite the aforementioned diseases and other conditions typical of the old age 70% of people aged 65+ in the USA feel physically 'good' or 'excellent' (with class and ethnicity playing an important role). While physical co-ordination and memorisation of new material may be problematic, the ability to express oneself in words improves over time for some inexplicable reasons. Personality changes in the old age are very slight.

Of most interest for us is the social aspect, i.e. retirement. Seen as either a blessing or a curse, this aspect is discussed in nearly all sociology handbooks. We know, however, that the entry in the so-called 'third age' is socially constructed and occurs at different moments in different societies (very early in Poland), often having little to do with the actual biological ageing of the body. Retirement entails a significant change in types of activities undertaken, a reduction of income, a new type of social interactions (sometimes 'social isolation' which will be discussed further on), and an increase in costs (relative and absolute) of subsistence and medication. Another social aspect of aging is the surge of aggression against the elderly, who usually make easy targets (also this aspect will be mentioned later). Aggression is often physical but also symbolic as old age is not positively valued in the youth-oriented culture.

The beginning of the ageing process which we are now witnessing in Western countries can be traced back to a specific moment in the past. Jean-Francois Bois saw the 19th century as a great demographic boom, leading to a growing number of people across all age categories. The declining number of births towards the end of that century meant that the proportion of the elderly in the society went up. Only then did old age become so easily noticeable and became an object of interest for researchers, enforcing new forms and content of social policies (starting from 1830s, Western Europe began to introduce universal pension systems, albeit that process was by no means smooth). Taking a systemic view, we can say that a society with a very high share of elderly citizens would have different needs than a society where young people prevail. It is easier to ensure care for the elderly when their numbers are not very high, when families are large and there are many people who can either take care of the elderly directly or pay taxes to finance the pension system and the social welfare system. At the end of 20th century and the first years of the 21st century we see an increasing number of societies where 20–25% of the population are retired,

most people live up to eighty and fewer children are born than are necessary to ensure the traditionally understood replacement of generations and to finance the pension system. Again, the necessity of immigration comes to the fore, with debates on the resulting costs, based on the painful experience of Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century. The public debate becomes more heated when it comes to issues such as smaller flexibility of retirement age which may be achieved not only by enabling early retirement but also by extending the period of economic activity, whenever a person's health so permits.

Again, it is interesting to look at the borderline which delineates the old age or, rather, various forms of old age. Biological age is not always a relevant basis for categorising individuals. When it is, delineation usually depends on the economic structure and ethnic diversity in the society (and the position of the individual in those settings), on gender (for instance, retirement age for women and men may be different, and feminisation of poverty in old age is noticeable in Poland), and the person's position in the family structure. The 19th century ideas associated social usefulness of individuals with their paid work, which has a bearing on modern Western societies. Another subdivision of the life course has become widespread, i.e. life is subdivided into the first age (pre-productive), the productive age and the third age (retirement). Sometimes even the fourth age is identified as the period of ill health, overall frailty and withdrawal from the post-productive activity. Since there is a difference between the latter two periods, one can hardly imagine a simple and unambiguous definition of old age, whether now or in future. Old age in a particular aspect of life may entail age-based exclusion from activity.

Social prestige is generally associated with factors such as knowledge and skills that are appreciated under particular circumstances; assets owned and income earned; monopolisation of access to rare and coveted social rewards. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that in traditional societies high status is enjoyed by people who have access to knowledge and skills essential for survival, and who monopolise power and economic resources. This status dwindles as societies become more heterogeneous in their social, economic and cultural dimensions. The line which defines old age in societies is usually functional (withdrawal from various activities), chronological (biological age) or, rarely, associated with physical or mental deterioration. As a rule, people are treated as old before they grow frail and reach the latter stage. The greater their ability to take part in community life, the more favourable treatment they receive. However, we cannot claim that traditional societies always treat old people well. Social anthropologists and the historian quoted earlier have reported enormous violence (including killings) towards old people who have already lost the required social resources (notably economic ones). Hence, violence is by no means a contemporary invention, we just have a greater awareness of those facts. On the other hand, support for the economically established status of the elderly is not only a traditional phenomenon. Thanks to modern-day universal pension systems old people are often in a position to support entire families when economies collapse or when unemployment affects large groups of productive-age population. As a result, the elderly play a highly valued role.

Going back to various forms of violence and exclusion, not all societies exclude their elders and those that do, vary in the methods and scale of such exclusion. In some societies the elderly enjoy a high status. Hence, it is incorrect to claim that there is a common negative correlation between age and social status, power and respect. A loss of power associated with old age is not 'a natural process' but, rather, a characteristic of particular societies. In some communities old age does, indeed, entail poverty as well as a loss of power and influence but this is not the case universally (see, Vincent 1995: 33–38). Old age is socially constructed: it is the society that indicates who fits into the category labelled as 'old'. In (post)industrial societies the state plays a dominant role in such categorisation. The legal and bureaucratic agencies of the state place people in respective age-based categories, circumscribing the array of potential (im)possibilities. Access to education, driving licence or retirement are only some aspects of social life where access is defined by year of birth (Vincent 1995: 71–74).

All comparative sociological and anthropological studies on large samples (of individuals, local communities or culture-based groups) demonstrate a considerable variety of cultural practices among old people (see, Keith 1980). They also prove that popular beliefs are often incorrect. Let us make a few interesting distinctions at this point. As a rule, we speak about old people within a particular society at large. However, in traditional societies in Europe, and between the 18th century and today's modern and postmodern world there are numerous examples of 'voluntarily isolated' communities of the elderly. Those go beyond old peoples' homes and shelters. For instance, already in the eighteen-century Paris some neighbourhoods were inhabited mostly by old people, with shops and service outlets catering mostly to elderly residents. Today one can find numerous age-homogenous (yet class-heterogeneous) neighbourhoods in many cities across Europe and the USA. The situation of old people (and the prevalent types of interactions) within such neighbourhoods is quite distinct from that in the society at large. A lot has been written about 'social isolation' of old people living alone, especially of retired women. Studies have revealed, however, that those people often appreciate their independence, actively maintaining two functionally disparate types of social networks for as long as possible: a family circle and a network of friends. Interestingly, those independent networks are mutually reinforcing in a sense, i.e. people who have a wider network of friends tend to stay in closer relations with their families and relatives. Family- and friendship-based support networks are also an interesting case if we want to analyse the exchange of goods and services. Old people are strongly involved in multi-party transfers, primarily within their families but also outside them (the smaller the family, the less support it can offer). Within families, old people are usually the providers of material goods and child care (in many a case those transfers are culturally enforced and based on a strong expectation that grandparents will take care of grandchildren). Towards the end of their lives, when living alone is no longer feasible, old people sometimes evolve from givers to takers of time and space: they become recipients of care and housing.

Let us go back to the 'panics' signalled earlier in this paper, for instance the 'panic of multiple deprivation.' It is well-known that groups of elderly people are highly diversified. While only approx. 20% of the world's population aged 60+ can rely on

some sort of social security, many old people in Western countries still support their adult children and their immediate families. Poverty in old age, often highlighted in the media, tends to be far less acute (statistically speaking), than poverty among children. This is the case in modern-day Poland (however, on the other hand, the unit cost of living for the elderly is high, with essential medicines being costly). Deprivation consisting in (more or less imaginary) isolation has already been mentioned. We have also touched upon the 'demographic panic' discussed by Hanna Palska: it is stressed that fewer economically active people must work to support a growing number of retirees. Following Palska and John Vincent (2003), it is important to emphasise that old people nowadays, in the Western world, are increasingly well-educated, more affluent and more active. However, they have fewer children than was the case in the past. Undoubtedly, the challenge to ensure replacement of generations will certainly be solved, and some solutions are already widely discussed. Another 'panic' refers to the assumed interactional and cultural passivity of the elderly. Those who subscribe to this panic talk about isolation and the fact that television is the main pastime. However, we can find a number of arguments against this panic, for instance the rapid growth of 'universities of the third age' in Western Europe (dating back to 1970s), and increasing level of education among retiring women. On the other hand, television is often a typical pastime for much younger people.

Naturally, the culture of the broader community exerts considerable influence on the life in old age. Even 'natural' physical ageing of the human body (e.g. menopause) may be experienced differently, depending on the cultural context. Often times, longevity depends more strongly on the available social support system than actual physical health. Therefore, we can tell whether a person 'is already old' by referring not only to the physical condition of the body and age-related health problems but also by looking at factors such as mortality among that person's peers, the grandparent status as well as rituals (e.g. birthdays) or culture-specific forms of address applied to people at different ages. Culture imposes age-related limitations which are reflected in social expectations (do's and don'ts) applied to various age categories. Some of them are informal whereas others may be bureaucratised, reflected in country-level legislation and corporate by-laws. On the other hand, such cultural influences also involve compensations: the elderly (esp. women) are often allowed to do more and engage in things that are condemned when undertaken at a younger age.

Culture also exerts other influences on people who reach old age. Culture-related content is increasingly available through high-tech media which are hard to use for those who have no lifelong learning habits or opportunities. The Western world will see an increasing number of well-educated old citizens, the rate of technological developments may still widen the gap between their level of knowledge and what is required to use those technologies (and to access essential information). In view of ecologically driven changes in cities, consumption at the old age may become constrained due to the ever increasing distance between shopping destinations and homes. As mentioned earlier, partial solutions to this problem have existed for some time, such as age-homogeneous neighbourhoods. Family-based or other prefigurative networks are seen as another solution.

While age is a continuous variable, divisions into stages of life are socially constructed. Even if they were 'natural,' the belonging to a particular age category in a culture may have quite a different meaning in different periods. Researchers emphasise that age groups cannot be seen as overlapping with generations in the sociological and anthropological sense. For instance, the chances for 'good' living (under given cultural circumstances) depend on the condition of the economy and legal regulations applicable in the period where a particular group lives its old age. If we take recent and coming decades in Poland, we will see a considerable difference in the level of affluence between people retiring under different legal systems. This issue will be discussed later on in the paper.

A change of the broad cultural system and, in particular, the legal and political system, also has some other effect on the situation of old people in Poland and in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Many Polish authors emphasise that following a radical political revision of Poland's communist past, the collapse of many branches of communist economy, accelerated lifestyle changes and practical rejection of many aspects of traditional culture, with a boom of consumption-and youth-oriented culture and changes in the life of many families, the sense of personal insecurity aggravated, with the collective memory and identity of many old people being shaken. In common perception, their previous work turned out to be 'worthless' and their achievements were suddenly challenged. The new world became foreign and threatening for that group. Discrimination of the elderly at work, driven by the cult of youth, has tangible consequences: the legally available early retirement allows the elderly to withdraw from careers and economically active life.

However, it is important to emphasise that everywhere in the Western world (including Poland), the elderly represent a growing proportion of the electorate and an ever more powerful market segment. As voters, they certainly harbour more traditional orientations and, as such, are more likely to support conservative parties. At the same time, the elderly are increasingly well-educated, with the urban environment of modern technologies and dynamic lifestyles being a natural environment for a growing proportion of this group. In the capacity of consumers, the elderly have the power to exert influence on the market of goods and services through their financial resources.

Old Age in Poland at the Dawn of the 21st Century

The described context of ageing and the place of old age in the course of human life will serve give us a point of departure in order to describe the likely positions of various groups of elderly citizens in Poland's society in the perspective of the next 25 years. In this section, we will look at selected demographic trends which are likely to emerge and gain importance within the lifetime of a single generation. Obviously, those trends might change over time. Factors which affect accuracy of demographic forecasting include, above all, varying birth rates, mortality rates and foreign migration (see reports of the Polish Central Statistical Office GUS 2009). Further on we will deal with the

following contexts of old age: attitudes towards elderly people, their occupational activity and retirement, changes within family structure and intergenerational relations, social insurance, social welfare and the use of modern communication technologies. However, before discussing those aspects, let us examine population forecasts for Poland for the coming 25 years (i.e. until around 2035).

According to GUS population forecasts (GUS 2009, *Prognoza ludności na lata 2008–2035*), the fertility rate will go up to 1.45 by 2020 (from 1.3 in 2007) and will stabilise at that level by 2035. This means that the rate needed for replacement of generations (approx. 2.10–2.15) will not be attained. Meanwhile, the life expectancy will continue to increase. According to forecasts, men will live approx. 6 years longer and women will live about 3 years longer than they do at present (in 2008 the life expectancy for female infants was 80 years, with 71 for male infants). As a consequence of those developments (and assuming that migration will persist), Poland's population will shrink by more than 2 million by 2035. Particularly significant in this context is the increasing dynamics of aging in the population. According to Eurostat, citizens aged 80+ represented 3% of Poland's total population in 2007 but this percentage may go up to nearly 8% in 2035 (Eurostat 2010). As a result of those developments the demographic dependency ratio, calculated as the number of citizens aged 65+ per 100 people aged 15–64, will go up from 19 in 2010 to 38 in 2035. This change in Poland's demographic structure will not only affect the actual position of the elderly in the society but also the social perception of this social category and intergenerational relations.

One area where increasingly more intensive intergenerational tensions will be felt is the pension system. Financial welfare of the elderly depends on factors such as the existing social insurance system, income from continued paid work and savings. In 2003 Poland had the second highest old-age pension spending expressed as a percentage of GDP: 14.3% (Eurostat 2009). According to forecasts, old-age pension outlays in Poland will shrink, reaching approx. 9.3% of GDP in 2035 (Eurostat 2010). It seems that the structure of pension benefits may only change if the elderly stay economically active for a longer time or if a greater tax burden is shifted onto younger workers. The economic dependency ratio, calculated as the population past the working age (women: 60+, men: 65+) versus the working-age population (women: 18–59, men: 18–64), will rise from 24.8 to 46.4 in 2035.

> Hence, if we want to maintain the current level of pension benefits and health care quality for senior citizens, we should expect greater fiscal burdens on salaries and wages, and expenditures incurred mostly by economically active individuals (Szukalski 2009: 24).

Insurance providers have found that Poles are not willing to save up for retirement. Very few people set up personal savings plans, for instance by making investments through their individual pension accounts (Polish abbreviation: IKE) (Bojanowski 2009). Worse still, Poles seem to harbour a very optimistic outlook on this aspect of their lives. In a study conducted by one insurance company, as many as ⅓ of the respondents believed that their pension would be much higher than their most recent paycheck (*ibidem*). Meanwhile, forecasts developed by the Polish Ministry of Labour

and Social Policy indicate that people who are today in their twenties, thirties and forties will receive only two thirds of the current old-age pensions (Kostrzewski & Miączyński 2009).

CBOS studies conducted in 2009 show that 72% of Poles do think about their old age but one in four never thinks about this period of life. Women give it much more thought (45%) than men do (29%) and, not surprisingly, young people are least likely to wonder about their old years. The vision of old age which emerges from the CBOS survey is hardly optimistic. The respondents are most worried about becoming ill and infirm (68%), losing their independence, being dependent on others and being a burden to other people (50%). Over a third of the respondents are also afraid of being in a bad financial situation (36%), of losing their loved ones and feeling lonely (34%). Interestingly, a breakdown into categories shows that it is young, well-educated people who are most concerned about their living standard in the old age (CBOS 2009).

Economists call for measures to boost economic activity of pre-retirees, raise the retirement age and institute the same threshold for women and men. Opposition to the idea of raising the retirement age to 67 has been dwindling. The results of surveys conducted by Homo Homini, a Polish opinion survey company, indicate that currently a half of Poles rebuff the idea. Yet quite recently, in 2003, this percentage was as high as 90% (*Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* 2010). Demographic studies identify three important trends in modern-day Poland: increasing longevity, falling fertility rate and no extension of the economically active period. According to Eurostat, the average retirement age is 57 for Polish men (61 in the EU), and 55 for women (59.5 in the EU). Meanwhile, the employment ratio for the 55–64 age band in Poland is lower than in any other EU member state. A longer period of paid work has important consequences for the size of pension benefits to be received. Each additional year in paid work (around retirement age) increases the pension by approx. 7% (*Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* 2010). If the official retirement age in Poland does go up, this will boost interest in productivity of elderly workers. Relying on experience of countries which have already elevated their retirement threshold one can predict that Poland will also experience greater pressure from employers on elderly workers, demanding that the latter engage in constant learning and acquire new skills. This will change individual and collective labour relations and career paths, with an increasing percentage of elderly people opting for flexible forms of employment.

Despite numerous studies on the subject, one cannot identify one single reason that drives people into retirement. The propensity to stay in employment (or to retire early) largely depends on social relations at the workplace.

> Empirical studies have found that while financial stimuli play the greatest role in young people's job satisfaction […], mature people are attaching more importance to another factor, i.e. the quality of relations with colleagues and atmosphere at work (Szukalski 2009a: 182).

Representative studies unambiguously show that job satisfaction increases with age. While the quality of relations with superiors was perceived as good or very good by 72.7% of the respondents aged 45–49, the respective percentage for the 60+

group was 76.6%. Likewise, the share of respondents who perceived the quality of their relationship with co-workers positively increased from 79% among 45–49-year-olds to 90% among the 60+ group. These data invalidate the common Polish panic associated with the idea that pre-retirees are not attached to their workplace and will seek to become economically inactive once they have reached retirement age. Job satisfaction is another factor that may extend the economically active period. Overall, people who believe their work is underpaid are more likely to withdraw from the labour market (*ibidem*). Age discrimination (ageism) is another phenomenon which indirectly influences the propensity to stay on the job market. Intergenerational tensions in the sphere of welfare (notably old-age and disability pensions), and social policies requiring people to work for longer coexist with ageism and competition for jobs between the old and the young. Results of a CBOS survey (CBOS 2007) have demonstrated that Poles tend to be friendly and kind towards elderly people in their families and neighbourhoods whereas negative attitudes can be observed at workplaces, health care facilities, public transport and in the streets. As the number of citizens aged 85+ goes up (the fastest growing population group), negative attitudes towards the elderly are likely to persist.

The increasing number of the 'oldest old' will affect not only the pension system and the labour market but also intergenerational relations in families. As mentioned earlier, the percentage of people aged 80+ may reach 8% in 2035. This means that four-generation families will become more common. Consequently, working adults may find themselves under a heavier burden: not only will they need to provide financial and emotional support for their children and parents but also for their grandparents. Since the fertility rate is unlikely to be much higher than it is now, a greater number of family members who need care (parents and grandparents) will not be matched with an increasing number of care providers. This change in the structure of family networks will almost certainly lead to an expansion of the social category known as the *sandwich generation*. This name refers to the double burden, experienced particularly acutely by women. On the one hand, they will serve as care providers for their children, living parents and, increasingly, grandparents. On the other hand, women live longer than men (statistically speaking), and, as such, will require care for more years. At present, it is difficult to quantify this phenomenon in any definite way. As Marta Styrc found in her research,

> only 2% of households provided care simultaneously for at least two people who were in different kinship relation with the head of household (for instance, they simultaneously took care of their grandchildren and parents, or children and grandparents) (2009: 136).

This problem of care for the elderly should be situated in a broader context of private intergenerational transfers. Transfer analysis is important for forecasting for three reasons. Firstly, ever more generations will live in parallel (for instance, it is very likely that greatgrandparents will live side by side with their greatgrandchildren). Therefore, not only the number of 'sources of transfers' will increase but also the direction and formats of transfers will change. Secondly, as the number of multi-generation households has been shrinking steadily, transfers will increasingly

occur between different households. Thirdly, from the perspective of social policy in nation states and supranational institutions, it is important to find answers to questions concerning care services, available from family networks (familisation of care) and/or public institutions (defamilisation) (Styrc 2009). Nowadays, care transfers from households are directed mostly towards grandchildren (42% of households making care transfers) and parents (40%), with age being the key differentiating factor. Where the head of household is at least 55 years old such transferred care covered grandchildren whereas in 'younger' households parents were under care (*ibidem*). As life expectancy continues to go up, this system will change to accommodate two more generations (greatgrandchildren and greatgrandparents). The demographic evolution will necessitate development of institutional care for the elderly. In 2007 the number of people aged 75+ living in assisted living facilities in Poland was 26,563. According to forecasts, this number will leap to 51,934 in 2035 (Szweda-Lewandowska 2009). It is interesting to consider these forecasts in the context of Poles' ideas about their own old age. Two thirds of CBOS respondents think they will live in their own house/flat and rely on *ad hoc* relatives' assistance in their old age. Only 9% allow the possibility of getting regular, paid-for assistance (in their own house) from specialised care providers. Interestingly, the last decade saw a declining number of Poles who want to share their housing with children, grandchildren and more distant relatives (CBOS 2009). 20% of the respondents wanted to live with their immediate relatives in 2000 but this figure shrank to 12% in 2009 (*ibidem*). 1% or 2% consider renting a portion of their housing space to a stranger in exchange for care, sharing home with other elderly persons for mutual assistance, or moving to an assisted living facility (private or public).

Clearly, various transfers (including care transfers) are neither unidirectional nor defined once for all. Let us now consider the roles that are, and will be, played by grandparents in family networks, bearing in mind that 50% of grandparents also have greatgrandchildren (Roberto & Stroes 1992). Moreover, the average number of grandchildren per a grandparent has been declining. Those two factors change the relations between grandparents and grandchildren, making them more dynamic. The importance attached to relations with grandparents depend largely on gender. The relations between grandchildren and grandparents on the maternal line tend to be more intensive than those on the paternal line (Dubas 2001). Furthermore, grandparents attach varied importance to relations with grandchildren, diversifying their close involvement and assistance across their children's children (Dubas 2001). The dynamics of relations between grandparents and grandchildren changes over the lifetime. Over time, grandchildren's preferences in their relations with grandparents tend to grow weaker. The frequency of intergenerational interactions changes and so do the patterns of interaction and emotional support. Looking at statistics, one can identify different types of 'grandparenting' and of intergenerational solidarity, with varied patterns of intergenerational relations.

Anne Gauthier (2002), for instance, proposed a typology which includes: educational subcontractors, specialists and passive grandparents (quasi-passive and absent grandparents). Educational subcontractors are located within relatively greater ge-

ographic proximity to their grandchildren. Within this type of intergenerational relations, visits have a relatively high frequency and relations are pursued at home: grandparents help their older grandchildren with schoolwork and provide care for younger ones. This group of grandparents performs numerous parenting tasks. This model prevails in Poland but is likely to disappear gradually following lifestyle changes. Specialists see their grandchildren less frequently and intergenerational relations are pursued mostly in places other than home (e.g. recreational spaces). Specialists tend to believe that the responsibility for raising children lies with parents rather than grandparents. Passive grandparents, the last type in Gauthier's classification, maintain neither frequent nor intensive relations with their grandchildren. Within this type, there is a subtype of quasi-absent grandparents who have too many grandchildren to look after, which does not allow them to establish individualised intergenerational relations. Absent grandparents do not stay in touch with their grandchildren, usually because of conflicts with children or children's partners. Individualisation of relationships between grandparents and grandchildren is worth noting: as the fertility ratio remains low, those relationships are likely to become even more individualised.

Many of the aforementioned issues concerning old age in the early years of the 21st century, notably in the sphere of labour market and pensions, may come across as 'panics'. Nonetheless, one should also recognise that the elderly increasingly undertake activities stereotypically associated with 'the youth culture'. Social networks outside the family (e.g. clubs for senior citizens, universities of the third age, prayer circles, associations of pensioners) play an ever more important role in the lives of the elderly. Senior citizens feel increasingly more comfortable with new communication technologies. There are dedicated fora and websites for the elderly (for instance www.senior.pl) and this group is improving their computer and Internet skills, even if this activity is negligible in statistical terms. In 2009 over 60% of Polish households owned a personal computer, with nearly 52% of the respondents having access to the Internet (Diagnoza Społeczna 2009). When we look at usage of computers and the Internet in the age breakdown, we will see that, statistically speaking, the figures are very low for retired people. Among those aged 65+ only 6% use the Internet, 7.5% use a computer and 36% have their own mobile telephone. However, it is important to recognise that the situation is by far not static. While the elderly (aged 65+) represented approx. 2.8% of all Internet users in 2005, this figure rose to 3.6% in 2007, reaching 5.8% in 2009. The use of the world wide web spreads systematically among those aged 60–64 and this growth is more rapid. In 2005 this group represented 7.6% of all Internet users but this proportion leapt to 13.7% in 2007, reaching as much as 20.6% in 2009 (*Diagnoza Społeczna* 2009). This increasingly popularity of the Internet users among pre-retirees and retirees is also reflected in another survey (*Internet: A medium for senior citizens*, Gemius 2007). Based on this research, an elderly web user is interested mostly in the automotive industry, banks and insurance providers but hardly use the Internet for entertainment. Considering that today's forty-somethings regularly use the Internet, the use of this medium among the elderly in 2035 is likely to be very common.

Summary and Conclusions

The processes occurring in Poland do not differ from those known earlier in social and cultural anthropology, sociology and demography. While we should not reinforce social panics, we cannot downplay the aggravating problems.

The current and anticipated changes caused by demographic and cultural factors have an impact on the activity of elderly people, their expected quality of life, living standard in retirement and family relations. Certainly, it is reasonable to expect that the fiscal burden on salaries, wages and expenditures made by young people will become a more or less lasting part of the picture, affecting social relations and the perception of the elderly. While Poles do not yet want to save up for their retirement, nor do they want to remain economically active for more years, those attitudes are visibly, albeit slowly, evolving towards acceptance of the fact that everyone must provide for themselves. However, this may entail a more intensive competition on the labour market. The changing family relations will become increasingly individualised, with institutionalised care being increasingly acceptable. While many old people suffer from loneliness, Poland does have social networks, family and friendships circles as well as institutional networks which facilitate social involvement. Old people get more and more engaged in activities that used to be associated only with the 'youth culture'. Even though elderly people do face difficulties when operating the ever more needed modern technological devices, one should not give way to pessimism as more well-educated cohorts, accustomed to new technologies, enter the retirement age. Moreover, this development opens a new sphere of prefigurativeness and raises the need for strengthened intergenerational relations.

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