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SOCIAL CAPITAL OF SENIORS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IDEA OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ABSTRACT

Along with the development of societies, we observe that establishing and maintaining relationships, including intergenerational relations, is a huge challenge. However, experience shows that the cooperation of generations is of inestimable value. It can be used as an effective tool for meeting needs and solving problems. However, intergenerational dialogue should also have the potential to achieve the most important rights of older people. The aim of this article is to show the possibilities of intergenerational dialogue involving the social capital of seniors, while being a space for the implementation of rights and respect for the dignity of the elderly.

KEYWORDS: *intergenerational dialogue, social capital, seniors, human rights*

INTRODUCTION

Human rights are fundamental rights that belong to every human being. They grow out of basic values such as: dignity, equality and respect for every human being. They have a protective function and prevent all forms of discrimination and humiliation. They are fundamental means of defending the dignity of the human individual.

When we hear about human rights, we often think of them as theoretical concepts, detached from our lives. Meanwhile, many everyday situations may relate to human rights. Older people in particular may not be aware that improper treatment may be a violation of their human rights (Bulletin of the Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012, p. 5). Human rights impose on institutions and organizations the obligation to treat their clients, patients, residents with due respect, dignity and autonomy.

In his message for World Older People's Day in 1998, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated: *A society open to all generations* is a community that does not reduce the elderly to a caricature of a government of the underprivileged and pensioners, but approaches them as those who contribute to human development and benefit from its benefits." (Szarota, 2002 ,p.221).

However, there seem to be several factors that influence the need for increased protection of the situation of older people in legislation. Firstly, all demographic forecasts show the prospect of a significant and accelerated ageing of societies, especially in highly developed countries. In the face of

this demographic revolution, associations were formed, whose mission was to protect the rights of the oldest generation. The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) – a UN agency based in Montreal – has been in existence for over 20 years, with its global scale of action. In the activities of the Federation, it is worth noting above all initiatives related to the definition of rights and principles regulating the situation of the elderly in social and civic life. In September 1999, Recommendations for the United Nations were developed and addressed to the member states. They include the universal rights of older people to a sense of economic security, food, health care, housing, clothing, means of transport. Seniors should be guaranteed full participation in the political and cultural life of their communities.

Secondly, the dominant statistical perspective in the description of population ageing, related to the health, economic and political condition of the elderly, does not take into account the interest in the individual perspective of going through the ageing process – consisting not only of the objective life situation, but also attitudes towards old age and the way it is experienced. Thirdly, the prevailing cult of youth, orientation towards change, novelty, progress and a fast pace of life, can lead to the situation where older people, who find it difficult to find their way in such dynamics, may be exposed to discriminatory attitudes, deception, manipulation and other abuses (Łuszczynska, 2019, pp.127-130).

In the social dimension, older people become victims of discrimination. The following reasons for this phenomenon are indicated:

- negative stereotypes about old age;
- the cult of youth in Polish society;
- ethical crisis in the case of professions of public trust (e.g. in medical professions);
- lack of reliable knowledge about old age among employers, decision-makers and people providing various services to the elderly;
- unemployment, which increases competition in the labour market;
- shortage of money in households and in social policy;
- intensification of specific needs in old age – health, care;
- procedures and rules for the application of the law (e.g. the adversarial principle in civil proceedings);

- procedures for dividing financial resources among social policy institutions (e.g. from the National Health Fund);
- low education and loneliness of the elderly;
- poor organization of the work of institutions serving the elderly (e.g. lack of comprehensive geriatric care).

In most legislative documents applicable to older people, these people do not appear as a separate category of entitled persons, they do not have special rights on the basis of age. This is due to the fact that excessive protection could have the opposite effect to the intended one – this group would experience stigmatization. In addition, special rights for any group would expose it to the charge of special treatment (Szczupał, Chatzipentidis, 2016, p.105).

In the above context, the creation of special laws regulating the treatment of seniors is completely unjustified. Rather, the right action seems to be to create conditions conducive to meeting the needs of seniors through activation and noticing the values of the social capital of this group. Active inclusion and intergenerational relations allow for the implementation of the rights of seniors in a special way, while noticing the huge potential of their social capital.

SOCIAL CAPITAL OF SENIORS

The concept of *social capital* is becoming more and more important in many fields of science. Management taking into account social capital is a new look at the factors of development, efficiency and competitiveness not only in economic issues, but also in social conditions (Putnam, 1995, p.258). Social relations, which are a potential tool for the adaptation of individuals, groups and local communities to changing environmental conditions, can lead to an increase in the effectiveness of human activities. The use of these relationships can be essential both for the self-employed and for the effective functioning of individuals in the labour market, as well as for people seeking and in need of help, which they can receive within various types of aid organizations or through their personal contacts, i.e. the network of *connections*. The concept of capital is often identified in the literature on the subject with

the concept of a resource, where resources are owned and capital can be actively used (Ziółkowski, 2000, p.175).

With reference to the classical theories of Pierre Bourdieu, James Samuel Coleman, and Robert D. Putnam, capital includes four categories. It is a division that organizes social issues, which includes: economic capital, e.g. financial resources, material goods, infrastructure; social capital – interpersonal relations, social interactions, networks of connections or bonds; cultural capital, i.e. customs, habits, language styles, type of completed schools, tastes, lifestyles; and symbolic capital – slogans, signs, symbols that facilitate any transmission of ideologies, doctrines, norms, principles and/or strategies (Olechnicki, Załęcki, 1998). An integral element of economic and social capital is human capital, which determines the comprehensive development of society: economic, informational, cultural and educational. Human capital is activity, education, qualifications, broadly understood knowledge possessed by citizens, and the process of its creation and accumulation accompanies all phases of life (Graniewska 1999, p.4). The optimal dimension of human capital potential occurs in adulthood and old age (Klimczuk, 2012, pp.48-52). In the case of senior resources, we are dealing with both capital in the form of resources that are already or can be used, multiplied, exchanged for other types of capital by stimulating activity on various levels, such as inter-generational relations, volunteering, education, experience and support in crisis situations. Older people can undertake various activities and use their human and social capital for the good of their loved ones and for society. Social gerontologists claim that the human and social capital of the elderly should be diagnosed and managed, in particular with regard to improving the use of their intangible resources and the ability to meet their needs in local communities (Szatur-Jaworska, 1991, p. 250).

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

Old age brings many new values into life – it equips you with experience, introduces a greater distance to all changes, objectivity in perceiving reality. Seniors are generally unquestionable authorities, advisors, they have a lot of knowledge about the world, interpersonal relationships, especially family relationships. They are a guarantee of proven ethical and moral values, family, social and national traditions, and also through the memory of their history, past and roots, they determine national identity.

In the context of the social capital of seniors, it is important to notice the components of competences which, if not noticed and not used or undeveloped, and often underestimated, lower the position of older people in society (Klimczuk, 2010, pp.92-107).

In traditional cultures, where oral transmission and customs played a fundamental role, seniors were treated as an irreplaceable treasury of knowledge for many generations. They knew how the world works and provided young people with the knowledge necessary to take up a job, start a family and cooperate in a group. The experiences of successive generations were similar, based on respect and hierarchy resulting from age (Raszeja, Ossowska, 2016). Intergenerational relations provide a specific context within which a person grows up and reaches maturity and prepares for old age. The quality of intergenerational relationships shapes feelings, thoughts and actions towards others (Bigss, Lowenstein 2011). Modern generations, although living in the same time and place, in fact live in two different *worlds*. They are not only different environments or social strata, but also different cultures (Godlewski, 2002, pp.56-67). Each generation thus creates its own narrative of reality. It is important that it is accessible to other generations and thus forms a space for true respect and understanding (Czapiewska, 2019, pp.165-167). As part of the discussion on intergenerational dialogue, attention should be paid to the quality, nature and manner of communication with the elderly, who may be difficult due to their psychophysical dysfunctions. We observe among the elderly how their social contacts, including family contacts, are gradually decreasing. This is influenced by both the illness or death of community members and the limitations of the seniors

themselves (including those related to mobility). The period of old age is undoubtedly a time when the current activity in many aspects is interrupted. This concerns, among others, narrowing family contacts (the so-called abandoned nest syndrome), retirement, death of a spouse and other relatives, it is a general disappearance of the quantity and quality of social contacts. The oldest seniors very rarely use technical innovations (telephone or Internet) to help maintain these bonds. Sometimes this may be related not so much to their aversion to these devices, but to physical limitations, e.g. impaired memory, hearing, sight, and this in turn makes contact with the world around them a problem. The results of research by the American Mac-Arthur Foundation indicate that *about 70 percent of the processes related to aging and the stage of life called old age can be formed, improved, in a word: you can have a positive impact on these processes. Old age can be healthy and satisfying for the senior* ^[1].

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AS A MANIFESTATION OF INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

As already mentioned, intergenerational relations are the basis for the functioning of all kinds of communities, collectives or communities. Along with the development of the information society, we observe that establishing and maintaining relationships, including intergenerational ones, is a great challenge and poses many difficulties. Today's youth and seniors are considered to be two separate generations, because the way they grow up, their lifestyle, the hierarchy of values, their needs or aspirations, the way they contact the world and their loved ones are completely different from each other. There is a gap between young people and the elderly, which makes contact between them difficult (Wiśniewska, 2017, pp.27-47). Seniors often have problems with using the media, which nowadays create an unlimited possibility of communicating with the world. This results in many cases of digital exclusion of seniors, which leads to marginalization and lack of communication between generations. It would seem that modern communication technologies and a higher standard of living support dialogue in its various forms. Dialogue as a form of

communication between individuals or a group should aim to solve problems, mutual understanding and get to know each other better. However, the abundance of information and goods effectively prevents communication between generations. Contact with people younger or older than themselves can be difficult, because they communicate in a different language (e.g. slang, ancient dialect), as well as using other tools (e.g. telephone, Internet, communicator).

Intergenerational dialogue is often identified with intergenerational solidarity, as a manifestation of the responsibility of community members for each other, mutual care and protection. Intergenerational solidarity assumes the use of the potential of older people, which consists of:

- life wisdom (knowledge of life), resulting from the knowledge gained and acquired competences. In the literature on the subject, it is an unquestionable attribute of late adulthood. It needs to be shared, passed on to generations, documented in various ways and constantly improved. The life wisdom of an older person builds his spiritual wealth, which consists of responsibility, caring, prudence, emotional balance and empathy;
- social potential, or relational potential, is social capital expressed in involvement in social life. He is characterized by: building social bonds, healing relationships with the environment, involvement in the activities of associations and volunteer work. It is maturing in humanity by acting for the benefit of others. It gives a chance to organize support and self-help, improves the quality of life;
- potential for family life, building all family ties by caring for grandchildren, caring for a sick person in the family, nurturing and passing on family traditions (Wnuk 2013,p.56).

There is no place for competition in intergenerational dialogue. It should be based primarily on the acceptance of members of a given generation, their social roles and the place they occupy in society. The solidarity of younger people with the elderly satisfies the need among seniors, which is so important to them, to be useful, helpful and, above all, to be needed. The condition for a successful dialogue between generations is individual, non-objective treatment of each other, i.e. the assumption that both an older person and a younger

person are a full-fledged individual. Each side has the right to have its own opinions, views, as well as weaknesses and imperfections, so any criticism is inadvisable. It is worth following the principle of active listening, excluding moralizing, getting along, intrusive questioning and judging. For dialogue to take place, mutual interest and care are needed. Intergenerational relations are fostered by the openness of both parties to their differences in views, experience or appearance. The issue of intergenerational dialogue concerns each of us, because we all create a society in a world that is changing so quickly, which is why the ability to communicate properly is so important and important. Without direct contact, it is impossible to know the truth, because being stuck in one's own views with complete isolation from each other makes individuals fall victim to the illusion that only their way of thinking is synonymous with reality. The truth, however, is the fruit of the experiences and points of view of both sides (Skorowski, 2017, pp.7-12).

Intergenerational dialogue is a challenge of modern times, so it is worth making every effort to make it a real action, not just a postulate (Wiśniewska, 2017, pp.27-47). Intergenerational dialogue enables cooperation between both generations for the common good, helps to understand the relationship between generations, makes it possible for us to get to know ourselves better, acquire new skills, as well as find a new passion or hobby, allows us to overcome our own limitations and fear of criticism and evaluation, breaks the stereotypes imposed on us, which we use in perceiving and evaluating other people, reduces the distance of both groups to each other, satisfies the need to be noticed and important to others by giving the other person care, care, interest, prevents ageism or gerontophobia, maintains durability in the development of the family and community (Wnuk, 2013, p.57).

Intergenerational dialogue also fosters the quality of life of seniors, as the sense of alienation and social maladjustment is softened along with the satisfaction of basic needs related to the sense of usefulness. Young people have a chance to take a closer look at old age and form an adequate and own opinion about it. The social distance between generations is decreasing. Intergenerational relations also affect the local community. They build capital and social cohesion, support seniors and young people in taking up civic activity, and promote a healthy and active lifestyle. They also help solve

social problems related to the feeling of loneliness, insecurity or the disappearance of neighbourly ties. We should create a reality that, despite its diversity in views, experiences or professed values, will be friendly to everyone. One in which every person, both young and old, will feel respected and understood.

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AS THE REALIZATION OF THE NEED FOR GENERATIVITY

In the 1980s, social activities were recognized as an important instrument for solving social problems and attention was drawn to the importance of intergenerational activities in the processes of reconstruction and regeneration of society. In the 1990s, under the influence of the World Health Organization, there was a growing interest in the broader concept of active ageing, which combines the desire to maintain the productivity of older people with their quality of life and mental and physical well-being. At the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid in 2002, the United Nations (UN) adopted the so-called International Action Plan on Ageing, which has contributed to the development of strategies for creating a welcoming environment for people of all ages (Epale Polska, 2020).

Noticing and appreciating intergenerational activities is closely related to the need to build integrated and cohesive local communities, responding to the needs of all residents and using their potential and knowledge. The need for intergenerational solidarity can be found in gerontology, in which positive relationships with other people are also mentioned among the factors of successful aging, giving existence a deeper meaning (Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski, Dzięgielewska, 2006). These relationships are important because they satisfy the need for emotional contact, which is important at every stage of life, constituting an attitude of mental health. According to UNESCO, the area of intergenerational activities concerns: *intergenerational programmes that are a carrier of a purposeful and timed exchange of resources and the learning process between younger and older generations. This exchange brings individual and social benefits* (Hatton-Yeo, Ohsako, 2000). In the light of this definition, a successful intergenerational project should show the participants

mutual benefits, establish new social roles and allow to go beyond stereotypes, engage at least two generations not connected by family ties, lead to mutual understanding between young and older generations, increase the self-esteem of both groups, help solve local problems, meet the needs of the generations involved, develop relationships and intergenerational ties.

On the basis of psychology, the needs of seniors in terms of contribution to the development of subsequent generations are best described by Erik Erikson's concept. *According to Erikson, generativity is expressed in caring for the young generation, in guiding their life path and showing care for their well-being. It is also an opportunity to develop new dimensions of one's own identity. The emergence of generativity is a consequence of the successful resolution of the crisis between two attitudes occurring in middle adulthood. At the opposite pole to generativity is the psychological quality defined as stagnation and self-preoccupation, characterized by an aversive approach to taking care of specific people or groups and excessive concentration on oneself, leading to regression to previous conflicts, to an obsessive need for pseudo-closeness and a co-occurring sense of personal impoverishment and loneliness* (Wojciechowska, Szaciłło, 2019, p.353).

Generativity is, on the one hand, the ability to share various values, knowledge, acquired skills and experience with the young generation, supporting them in their development, and on the other hand, the ability to actively continue and develop their own identity.

Organizing an environment conducive to contacts and intergenerational dialogues in addition to the family circle is a challenge of modern times. Neighbourhoods, schools or workplaces are circles in which young people and older people must be willing to make an effort to ensure that their contacts and meetings are based on partnership rather than hierarchy. Intergenerational activities can be experienced in different circumstances and places. Among the most common are: work environment, family, educational institutions, local community, religious associations, care facilities (Wnuk, 2013). Children and young people spend their time mainly at school, on extracurricular activities and university, without having the opportunity to meet people from a different age group. Seniors, on the other hand, spend most of their time at home, and if they spend time actively, they choose offers aimed mainly at them. Those who require constant care stay in various types of centers,

which unfortunately deepens segregation due to age and affects the consolidation of stereotypes of old age (Wiśniewska, 2017, pp.27-47). Intergenerational activities are undertaken in order to integrate both groups of generations by means of invaluable, valuable, beneficial activities for both generations, which have a positive impact on improving contacts between the elderly and the young. They improve communication, allow you to understand mutual dependencies, teach respect for each other and integrate the community. Good intergenerational practices are based on the strengths of both groups, thanks to which the resources offered bring many benefits both to each other and to the entire community (Epale Poland, 2000). Referring to the experience of countries investing in activities based on cooperation between seniors and youth, it can be concluded that fraternal activities meet the needs of both groups, while solving local problems such as loneliness of seniors, problems with learning or care and educational problems of children and troubled youth.

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES TO PROMOTE THE ACTIVE INCLUSION OF SENIORS

Intergenerational projects are considered in three categories: focusing on helping the elderly in everyday activities, satisfying their care or meal needs, aimed at spending free time together in a pleasant way, focusing on mutual education and learning, using the potential of each party. Their common denominator is the exchange of services, both for the benefit of older and younger people in relation to society, surroundings and local communities. In local communities, intergenerational activities can be carried out in areas such as: cultural heritage (e.g. memories, local history, traditions and rituals); civic affairs (e.g. activities for the development of the village, education); passions and interests (e.g. collecting); artistic projects (e.g. theatre, music, art); intergenerational exchange of skills (e.g. workshops, seminars, conferences); volunteering by young people in favour of older people and vice versa (e.g. in care, education); activities around new technologies (e.g. young people guide older people in the world of digital technologies); family initiatives, strengthening multigenerational bonds (Czapiewska, 2019, pp.165-167).

Table. 1. *Areas and examples of intergenerational activities*

Artistic activities	– staging a theatrical staging – choir activities – dance lessons – photography – music workshops – learning handicrafts (jewellery making, sewing)
Region history	– promoting local customs and traditions – obtaining information about local history – creating guides in the form of books about the region
Education	– learning to use digital technology
Revitalization	– activities for common goods, e.g. flowering roadside alleys, painting the staircase, neighbourly help
Integrated-artistic actions	– common games and activities – leisure activities
Volunteering	– promoting volunteering among older and younger people, e.g. in day care centres.
Entrepreneurship promotion	– supporting local creators and brands – involvement of seniors in creating local brands and supporting their products

Source: own data

Currently, there are many projects that support the participation of older people in social life, give them the opportunity to continue learning and enable them to share knowledge and experience. At various levels of social functioning, initiatives with a narrower or broader nature of impact have appeared. Partners who have a large contribution to the creation of social capital of seniors are governmental, local government, non-governmental organizations, primarily organizations and associations of local, regional or national range, and Universities of the Third Age, which play an extremely important role in the reconstruction of social bonds, especially among women after the death of a spouse, adult children leaving home or the death of people from the same generation, especially siblings. Local government institutions create conditions for the activities of NGOs and informal groups, as well as organize activities to prevent or combat the phenomenon of social exclusion of the elderly. Among the institutions of public life, cultural institutions and social infrastructure organizations should also be indicated. The group of partners should also include more formal institutions of public life,

uch as political parties, and on the other hand – informal communities – groups of friends, neighbours or acquaintances and religious organisations (Czapiński, Błędowski, 2013, pp.76-80).

CONCLUSION

The basis of any dialogue, especially intergenerational dialogue, apart from the skilful use of effective communication tools, is the attitude of mutual respect, which is associated with openness and tolerance towards other people. It can be assumed that in every environment, both professional and private, such an attitude and skills are needed. One of the most effective forms of improving attitudes and skills is participation in various types of institutions, which, by creating conditions for dialogue and effective cooperation, can contribute to the achievement of the set goals in various professional and social environments and in various thematic areas. They can be a support for organizers of local social policy. They are a platform that enables both learning and developing various ideas in intergenerational dialogue in public institutions, local governments, education, Universities of the Third Age, and non-governmental organizations. Intergenerational activities and programmes are therefore an effective form of acquiring new knowledge and skills and engaging participants in joint projects.

Activities supporting relationships between generations largely improve the quality of life of seniors, actively engaging them in functioning at the social and family level. They allow seniors to remain empowered and proactive, strengthening their subjectivity and independence. They emphasize the dignity of the senior as a person who has the right to develop despite age and the limitations associated with it (Zieliński, 2019, p.107).

Intergenerational dialogue as a set of activities aimed at the mutual exchange of experiences, knowledge and skills naturally builds awareness of their own value and usefulness in seniors, protects them from thinking of themselves as dependent, useless, and thus worthless. Intergenerational exchange can therefore be seen as the realization of dignity as a fundamental value (Polak, Trzciński, 2018, p.25).

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ENDNOTES

^[1] Na Temat, 2005, no. 2, p. 1.