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Decline of Professional Activity and the Needs Fulfilled by Work. Comparative Analysis of Polish and Czech Working Retirees

Schyłek aktywności zawodowej a potrzeby
zaspokajane przez pracę. Analiza porównawcza
polskich i czeskich pracujących emerytów

Abstract

The article aims to investigate how work satisfies values and needs of retired workers through the theoretical concept of active aging. It discusses the three needs that work satisfies (economic, social, and self-realization) and references Ronald Inglehart's concept of changes in the value system. The results of quantitative research conducted in 2019 in the Czech Republic (Ostrava) and Poland (Katowice), along with qualitative research conducted in 2024, were used for the empirical analysis. The quantitative research aimed to scrutinize the life and work strategies of the 55–65-year-old generation in large cities (169 interviews were conducted in Poland and 152 in the Czech Republic). The qualitative research utilized an in-depth interview (12 in Poland and 10 in the Czech Republic), with the results drawing comparisons between retirees who are still working and the remaining working 55-plus generation. Similarities and differences in the needs and values satisfied by work among the two analyzed groups are then discussed.

Keywords: professional activity, needs, values, work, Poles and Czechs working retirees

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Abstrakt

Celem artykułu było przedstawienie wartości i potrzeb, jakie praca zaspokaja u emerytowanych pracowników. W części teoretycznej przedstawiono koncepcję aktywnego starzenia się ludności. Omówiono trzy potrzeby, które zaspokaja wykonywana praca zawodowa (ekonomiczne, społeczne i samorealizacyjne). Odwołano się również do koncepcji zmian systemu wartości Ronalda Ingleharta. Do analizy empirycznej wykorzystano wyniki badań ilościowych przeprowadzonych w 2019 roku w Czechach (Ostrawa) i w Polsce (Katowice) oraz badań jakościowych przeprowadzonych w 2024 roku. Celem badań ilościowych było poznanie strategii życiowych i zawodowych pokolenia w wieku od 55 do 65 lat w dużych miastach (przeprowadzono 169 wywiadów w Polsce i 152 w Czechach). Badania jakościowe polegały na przeprowadzeniu wywiadów pogłębionych (12 w Polsce i 10 w Czechach). Wyniki badań zostały oparte na porównaniu emerytów, którzy nadal pracują z pozostałymi pracującymi w wieku 55 plus. Następnie przedstawiono podobieństwa i różnice potrzeb oraz wartości, jakie zaspokaja wykonywana praca.

Słowa kluczowe: aktywność zawodowa, potrzeby, wartości, praca, polscy i czescy pracujący emeryci

Introduction

The concept of professional activity is widely understood and requires little explanation, rather than highlighting that both economic and social reasons drive it. Due to increasing life expectancy and decreasing birth rates, the demographic structure of the population is changing, resulting in an aging population. The proportion of older people in the post-working age group is increasing very rapidly in most countries, particularly in highly developed ones, where the labor force is shrinking. Although the influx of migrants partly solves this problem, a better solution is to use existing workers¹. This article will analyze working retirees of Poland and the Czech Republic and compare the results against the 55-plus generation².

In Poland, Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) data shows that the total number of retirees in 2023 was 9 318 200, which accounted for 24,7% of the population³. Of the retirees in Poland, 13,1%, or about 783 400 people, are working (people who pay health contributions and taxes and are recorded by ZUS). Women were predominant among working retirees, accounting for

¹ S. Szkołut, *Migracje zarobkowe pracowników z Ukrainy do Polski po 2014 roku*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie, Kraków 2021; M. Piotrowski, *Popyt na pracę cudzoziemców w Polsce. Perspektywa teoretyczna i empiryczna*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2020.

² U. Swadźba, S. Swadźba, *Aktywność zawodowa pokolenia 55+. Polska na tle Czech i Węgier. Analiza porównawcza*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2023.

³ Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, *Struktura wysokości świadczeń wypłacanych przez ZUS po waloryzacji w marcu 2023 roku*, Departament Statystyki i Prognoz Aktuariatnych, Warszawa 2023, <https://www.zus.pl/documents/10182/39637/Struktura+wysoko%C5%9Bci+%C5%9Bw%C5%84+wyp%C5%82acanych+przez+ZUS+po+waloryzacji+w+marcu+2023+r..pdf/80f7bf-78-09b8-4489-d9ff-be8b8895ddeb?t=1697111858608> (accessed: 16.12.2024).

57,5% of this population, while more than 95% of working retirees are aged 60–65 and over. Most working retirees reside in the Masovian (16,2%) and Silesian (14,5%) Voivodeships. The Silesian Voivodeship is the only one where men were predominant among working retirees, accounting for 54,8%, with this data influenced by the number of retirees who work as miners⁴.

According to the Czech Statistical Office (Českého statistického úřadu [ČSÚ]), the number of retirees and annuitants at the end of 2023 was 2 833 930, including 2 365 668 retirees (26% of the population)⁵. A higher percentage of retirees work in the Czech Republic than in Poland (27,5%). According to the ČSÚ, the number of working retirees more than doubled by 2021 compared to the 2011 Census. The 566 000 workers accounted for 10,7% of the total working population, with more than half being women. The most significant number of working seniors lived in the most populous regions of the Czech Republic, including Prague, Central Bohemia, South Moravia, and the Moravian-Silesian Region. In the capital alone, there were 29 000 working retirees⁶.

The data presented here show that working after retirement is a widening phenomenon. It is now possible to see a change in the perception of this phenomenon, not only in terms of risks, but also in terms of benefits, such as to the economy. The activation of the older generation is also important because older people are at risk of social exclusion⁷. The continued employment of older workers is of considerable importance for their psychological and social well-being⁸. Therefore, this article addresses the needs satisfied by work, as perceived by retired workers.

The following research questions were therefore formulated:

- What are the needs of working retirees met by work?
- Are they different from the needs of the 55-plus generation as a whole?
- Are there national differences?

To answer these research questions, the concepts of active population aging and the realization of needs and values through work were adopted. The results of quantitative and qualitative research were used for empirical analysis, with

⁴ Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Emeryci i renciści pracujący w gospodarce narodowej w marcu 2023*, <http://stat.gov.pl> (accessed: 16.12.2024).

⁵ Český statistický úřad, *Sčítání lidu, domů a bytu, 2024*, www.scitani.cz (accessed: 16.12.2024); *Starobní důchodci – počet starobních důchodců, důchody*, <https://www.kurzy.cz/duchod/starobni-duchodci/> (accessed: 16.12.2024).

⁶ Český statistický úřad, *Počet pracujících důchodců v Česku se za deset let více než zdvojnásobil*, 2024, <https://csu.gov.cz/produkty/pocet-pracujicich-duchodcu-v-cesku-se-za-deset-let-vice-nez-zdvojnasil> (accessed: 20.12.2024).

⁷ U. Jeruszka, *Aktywizacja zawodowa osób w wieku 50+*, “Edukacja Ustawiczna Dorosłych” 2018, no. 2, p. 193.

⁸ *Diagnoza obecnej sytuacji kobiet i mężczyzn 50+ na rynku pracy w Polsce*, eds. E. Kryńska et al., Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2013.

quantitative surveys conducted in 2019 and quantitative research undertaken in 2024 in the Czech Republic (Ostrava) and Poland (Katowice). The presentation of the research results will include statistical analyses of the quantitative research and content analysis of the qualitative research. The *Discussion and Conclusions* will consist of the interpretation of the research results, the answer given to the research question, and the comparisons made.

1. Theoretical Background – the concept of active aging

Fully understanding the problems older people experience requires a comprehension of the concept of active aging, a notion of increasing interest to various theoreticians and practitioners. Initially devised by Robert J. Havighurst in 1961, the concept of active aging discusses how people develop in old age⁹. It has been hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between a person's level of activity and their life satisfaction, which, in turn, positively impacts how individuals view themselves and increases their self-worth and self-esteem. Sana Loue further developed the theory and elaborated that activities help older people replace lost life roles, especially those that are meaningful and fulfilling¹⁰.

The World Health Organization (WHO) also used the concept of active aging, describing it as the practice of enabling individuals, regardless of age, to be socially valuable¹¹. According to the WHO, active aging encompasses rights (e.g., the right to social security and lifelong learning) and responsibilities (e.g., remaining active in various fields). Such activities aim to improve the quality of life of older people by focusing on optimizing opportunities related to health, participation, and safety, so that they remain productive for as long as possible¹².

Responding to active aging requires all available human resources to optimally prepare for the aging process. Aging is a natural and valuable experience for the vast majority of people, though the way old age is experienced depends on external and internal factors. In addition to the concept itself, the WHO identified the most important determinants of active aging, of which gender and cultural background were the most important¹³. The aging pattern is defined by the norms, values, and customs within family and community environments,

⁹ R.J. Havighurst, *Successful Aging*, "The Gerontologist", vol. 1, 1961, no. 1, pp. 8–13. DOI: 10.1093/geront/1.1.8.

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia of Aging and Public Health*, eds. S. Loue, M. Sajatovic, Springer, New York 2008.

¹¹ World Health Organization, *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*, http://www.who.int/aging/publications/active_aging/en/, 2002 (accessed: 10.01.2025).

¹² Ibidem; K. Boudiny, *Active Aging: From Empty Rhetoric to Effective Policy Tool*, "Ageing and Society", vol. 33, 2013, no. 6, pp. 1077–1098. DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X1200030X.

¹³ World Health Organization, *Active Ageing...*; K. Boudiny, *Active Aging...*

along with the social acceptance of different life phases, specifically the final phase of old age and aging. Currently, the European Union is also promoting active aging by implementing tools that enlighten and equip those preparing for old age¹⁴. This preparation includes work, health, education, social activity, and securing an adequate standard of living.

One indication of active aging is work activity, with the continuation of work by older individuals being of considerable importance for several reasons. Both Polish and international research show the impact of work on quality of life, including maintaining physical and mental health¹⁵. Furthermore, a positive work environment harnesses the potential of older workers, their knowledge, and skills. Their knowledge can be passed on to the younger generation in specific areas of work, which allows younger workers to enrich their social capital and gain experience in the operation of the company¹⁶. In a period of declining unemployment rates, including and retaining a generation of older workers in the labor market not only combats unemployment but also has social significance, as it allows them to feel needed. Indeed, working satisfies needs that can be categorized into three groups¹⁷, including economic (i.e., earning money), perhaps the most important, social (i.e., meeting people), and self-realization (i.e., engaging in creative activities).

When explaining the differences in professional activity between Polish and Czech working retirees, one may refer to Ronald Inglehart's concept of

¹⁴ Eurostat, *Ageing Europe. Looking at the Lives of Older People in the EU. 2023 Edition*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Ageing_Europe_2023.png (accessed: 20.12.2024); G. Lamura, A. Principi, *2018 Active Aging Index: Analytical Report*, United Nations, Geneva 2019, https://unece.org/DAM/pau/age/Active_Aging_Index/ECE-WG-33 (accessed: 20.12.2024).

¹⁵ G. Bartkowiak, *Zatrudnianie pracowników wiedzy 65 plus. Perspektywa pracowników i organizacji*, Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2016; M. Kartuzova, *Work Practices of Older Population Groups: Reasons for Choice*, "Journal of Economic Sociology/Ekonomicheskaya Sotsiologiya", vol. 21, 2021, no. 1, pp. 81–99; M. Bednarski, I. Kukulak-Dolata, I. Poliwczyak, *Nowi Biedni Emeryci. Czynniki sprzyjające i ograniczające zatrudnianiu osób starszych w opiniach powiatowych urzędów pracy*, in: *Nowi biedni emeryci. O osobach uzyskujących świadczenia emerytalne niższe niż emerytura minimalna*, vol. 2, eds. P. Szukalski, D. Zalewski, Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, Warszawa, 2023, pp. 3–118.; K. Skalaćka, *Aktywne starzenie się jako wyznacznik poczucia jakości życia w późnej dorosłości*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, Opole 2023; J. Maćkiewicz, *Satisfied Ageing*, transl. D. Jakubowska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Komisji Edukacji Narodowej, Kraków 2024.

¹⁶ K. Skalaćka, *Aktywne starzenie...*; M. Visser et al., *Inequality among Older Workers in the Netherlands: A Life Course and Social Stratification Perspective on Early Retirement*, "European Sociological Review", vol. 32, 2016, no. 3, pp. 370–382. DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcw013; M. Abramowicz et al., *Rozwiązania na rzecz utrzymania aktywności zawodowej pracowników w wieku przedemerytalnym i emerytalnym. Model praca 60 plus*, Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, Warszawa 2023.

¹⁷ See, for e.g.: U. Swadźba, *Wartości – pracy, rodziny i religii – ciągłość i zmiana. Socjologiczne studium społeczności śląskich*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2012, pp. 228–240.

changes in the value system¹⁸. Inglehart's theory plays a key role in the analysis of value systems based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It assumes that human needs are hierarchical, with physiological and safety needs being the most important. Individuals can then strive to satisfy other intangible needs once these basic needs are met. As such, the transition from materialist to post-materialist values, where economic concerns give way to self-expression and quality of life, accompanies economic prosperity. Research on changes in the value system has been conducted in Europe since 1970¹⁹, with analogous research in post-communist contexts, including Poland and the Czech Republic, ongoing since 1989²⁰.

Two factors, objective (institutional) and subjective, influence the labor force participation of retirees²¹. The objective factors include the universal retirement age and the possibility of continuing to work despite early/normal retirement and active labor market policies, etc. Subjective factors such as age, health status, and the health status of family members (especially aged parents) are also important. The retirement age is 65 for men and 60 for women in Poland, placing the country among those in Europe with the shortest working lives, which is particularly true for women²². In Poland, people who are drawing a pension can still be employed. When discussing the problem of economic activation of the 55-plus generation in the Silesian Voivodeship, one should also consider the large number of male miner retirees, who retire much earlier than their peers.

In the Czech Republic, the retirement age depends on the year of birth. For persons born before 1971, the retirement age is determined by a table that also accounts for gender and, in the case of women, the number of children brought up (including adopted children). For those born after 1971, the retirement age is standardized at 65. Retirees are allowed to work under this system²³.

¹⁸ R. Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Systems among Western Publics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1977.

¹⁹ R. Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990; idem, M. Basañez, A. Moreno, *Human Values and Beliefs: A Cross-Cultural Sourcebook*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1998; European Values Study, *Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2022 dataset*, <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/joint-evs-wvs/> (accessed: 20.12.2024).

²⁰ *Hodnoty a postoje v České Republice 1991–2017. Pramenná publikace European Values Study*, eds L. Rabušic, B.E. Chromková Manea, Masaryková Univerzita Nakladatelství, Brno 2018; M. Marody et al., *Společenství na zakřecí. Zmiany postaw i wartości Polaków w latach 1990–2018*, Scholar, Warszawa 2019.

²¹ *Diagnoza...*, P. Szukalski, *Aktywność zawodowa ludzi starszych*, in: *Aspekty medyczne, psychologiczne, socjologiczne i ekonomiczne starzenia się ludzi w Polsce*, eds. M. Mossakowska, A. Więcek, P. Błędowski, Termedia, Poznań 2012, pp. 407–418.

²² Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, <https://www.zus.pl>, 2024 (accessed: 16.12.2024).

²³ Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí České republiky, *Systém sociálního zabezpečení v České republice*, https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/955203/ssz_cr_cz.pdf (accessed: 20.12.2024).

2. Methodological Approach

The empirical analysis was based on two types of research. The first, quantitative, was conducted in 2019 in the Czech Republic (Ostrava) and Poland (Katowice) as part of the international project titled *Social and Cultural Mechanisms of In- and Exclusion: A Comparative Perspective: Life and Work Strategies of Generation 55 to 65: Their Position on the Labor Market, Obstacles and Wishes* (Institutional Development Project, IRP, No. 201819).

The second qualitative study was ultimately presented within the project entitled *Economic Awareness of the Inhabitants of the V4 Countries: A Comparative Study of Two Generations*, which was completed in 2024 by the Visegrad Research Team, established at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Silesia, and financed with internal funds.

The initial quantitative research explored the life and work strategies of the 55 to 65-year-old generation in large cities. The research sample was selected using a quota method, considering the gender and education structure of the 55–65 generation in the cities studied – Katowice, Ostrava. Data were drawn from national population censuses (the 2011 National Census in Poland), with efforts made to cover all city districts. In this way, the research sample was representative of the 55–65 age group in large cities. The survey collected 321 interviews, with 169 conducted in Poland and 152 in the Czech Republic. Of these, 113 respondents worked in Poland and 97 in the Czech Republic. This article confines its analysis to data pertaining only to working retirees in Poland and the Czech Republic. In Poland, less than one-third of the people surveyed received a pension (52 people). Some of those respondents combine the status of a retired person with professional work. Of these retired people, 42,7% worked (11,5% worked full-time and 21,2% worked part-time). In the Czech Republic, more than one-third of the surveyed retired people received a pension (56 people), and none of them combined their retirement pensions with full-time work. Of these retired people, 37,5% worked (8,3% worked full-time and 29,2% worked part-time).

The following question was asked: “If you are currently working, please tell us what needs your job satisfies and how important they are?” The respondents were presented with the following needs: 1. economic (economic reasons, it assures me and my family to keep me, gives a sense of security); 2. social (it gives a sense of belonging to a group, gives me an occupation, and allows contact with other people); 3. self-realization (it allows me to develop myself, puts interesting tasks ahead of me, and provides a sense of prestige and social respect). Respondents had five possible answers to choose from: very important, fairly important, fairly unimportant, completely unimportant, and hard to say.

The second qualitative study included in-depth interviews with working retirees (12 in Poland and 10 in the Czech Republic). Purposive sampling was used, considering gender and education. A sociology student conducted the interviews in Poland, while an employee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Ostrava, who is proficient in both Czech and Polish, conducted interviews in the Czech Republic. The respondents' statements were typologized.

3. Results – needs met by work

It is important to learn about retirees' work activity to understand the needs that their current jobs meet. In the theoretical part, three groups of needs that can be satisfied by the currently performed job (existential, social, and self-actualization) were distinguished and conceptualized in nine statements. The responses of working retirees were compared with those of the other workers of the 55-plus generation. The following tables show the results of the survey. The first table shows the results of the responses: very important and rather important.

Table 1. The needs satisfied by work and their importance (% answers)

Statements	Poles n = 113				Czechs n = 97			
	Very important		Fairly important		Very important		Fairly important	
	R	W	R	W	R	W	R	W
S.1.	38,1	64,1	47,6	31,5	61,9	67,1	19,0	28,9
S.2.	47,4	62,4	36,8	31,2	52,4	71,4	4,8	22,1
S.3.	30,0	57,0	50,0	26,7	35,0	36,5	35,0	44,6
S.4.	10,5	31,2	63,2	33,3	21,1	19,5	42,1	44,2
S.5.	57,1	46,2	42,9	40,9	33,3	24,3	9,5	31,1
S.6.	71,4	55,3	28,6	36,2	33,3	27,3	52,4	48,1
S.7.	15,8	30,3	31,5	40,4	36,8	27,3	36,8	41,6
S.8.	14,3	25,0	38,1	37,0	21,1	27,0	47,4	36,4
S.9.	5,0	25,9	35,0	27,7	15,8	23,7	26,7	36,8

Source: own data and calculations.

Explanations: S.1. – Economic reasons; S.2. – It assures me and my family to keep me; S.3. – Gives a sense of security; S.4. – It gives me a sense of belonging to a group; S.5. – It gives me an occupation; S.6. – Allows contact with other people; S.7. – It allows me to develop myself; S.8. – It puts interesting tasks ahead of me; S.9. – It provides a sense of prestige and social respect.

Abbreviations: R – retired; W – rest of workers 55-plus.

Table 2. The needs satisfied by work and their importance (chi-squared significance and Cramer's V)

Statements		Chi-square significance			Cramer's V	
		Value	df	Relevance asymptotic	Value	Proximate relevance
S.1.	PL n = 113	7,380	3	0,061	0,256	0,061
	CZ n = 97	7,622	3	0,054	0,280	0,054
S.2.	PL	4,491	3	0,213	0,200	0,213
	CZ	20,128	3	0,001	0,453	0,001
S.3.	PL	6,656	3	0,084	0,251	0,084
	CZ	9,667	3	0,022	0,321	0,022
S.4.	PL	6,487	3	0,090	0,241	0,090
	CZ	3,664	3	0,300	0,195	0,300
S.5.	PL	3,149	3	0,369	0,166	0,359
	CZ	4,518	3	0,211	0,218	0,211
S.6.	PL	2,837	3	0,417	0,157	0,417
	CZ	2,429	3	0,488	0,157	0,488
S.7.	PL	5,705	3	0,127	0,230	0,127
	CZ	0,857	3	0,836	0,094	0,836
S.8.	PL	4,226	3	0,238	0,193	0,238
	CZ	5,263	3	0,154	0,234	0,154
S.9.	PL	3,985	3	0,263	0,197	0,263
	CZ	2,109	3	0,550	0,149	0,550

Source: own data and calculations.

Explanations: S.1. – Economic reasons; S.2. – It assures me and my family to keep me; S.3. – Gives a sense of security; S.4. – It gives me a sense of belonging to a group; S.5. – It gives me an occupation; S.6. – Allows contact with other people; S.7. – It allows me to develop myself; S.8. – It puts interesting tasks ahead of me; S.9. – It provides a sense of prestige and social respect.

The first three statements refer to the existential needs that work satisfies. The survey results indicated a substantial difference in responses between working retirees and the rest of the working 55-plus generation, applicable to both Poles and Czechs. Statistical dependence was found in answers to T.2. (CZ: chi-squared significance of $p = 0,001$, Cramer's V of 0,453) and T.3. (CZ: chi-squared significance of $p = 0,022$, Cramer's V of 0,321). There was a near statistical relationship in responses to T.1. (PL: chi-squared significance of $p = 0,061$, Cramer's V of 0,256; CZ: chi-squared significance of $p = 0,054$, Cramer's V of 0,280) and T.3. (PL: chi-squared significance of $p = 0,084$, Cramer's V of 0,251).

Percentage results indicated differences in “very important” answers among Polish respondents: T.1. – 26 p.p. (percentage points), T.3. – 27 p.p., as well as Czech respondents: T.2. – 19 p.p. Thus, the respondents’ declarations show that their current work satisfies the needs of retirees to a lesser extent than those of other working people.

Working retirees were far less likely than other working people to indicate that work does not satisfy their economic needs. This is understandable, as retirees derive their income primarily from their pension, with work serving as just a supplement. This conclusion is supported by the “definitely not” answers of retirees and other working people: T.1. (PL: $R^{24} - 9,5\%$, $W - 1,3\%$; CZ: $R - 14,3\%$, $W - 1,3\%$), T.2. (PL: $R - 11,5\%$, $W - 2,4\%$; CZ: $R - 28,6\%$, $W - 2,6\%$). For some retirees, work is not the primary source of income, and the livelihood of respondents and their families does not depend on it. There were some differences in the answers of Polish and Czech working retirees, especially if the answer “very important” is considered. For Polish retirees, economic aspects of work are less important than for Czech retirees (T.1. difference of 23 p.p.; T.3. – 15,5 p.p.).

Responses to this question in the interviews indicate that working retirees, regardless of nationality, emphasize that work satisfies economic needs. However, these needs are not the only expressed priority: “I work mainly for financial reasons, I am also among people, which is nice” (Veronika, CZ, 60–65, BV, works in a law firm, M)²⁵; “Of course, thanks to work, I will improve my finances considerably, and I can afford things (travel, equipment, house renovations) that I would not be able to afford from my pension alone. But above all, I enjoy what I do” (Jakub, CZ, 65-plus, H, architect – own business, M). Those with a lower education more often indicated the economic aspects of work. In contrast, those with higher social standing suggest that work allows them to satisfy additional development and self-realization needs.

The responses to the statements about realizing social needs at work no longer differentiated the research groups in this manner. The Polish responses to T.4. were close to statistical significance (chi-squared significance of $p = 0,090$, Cramer’s V of 0,241). On the other hand, the percentage analysis showed a diversity of responses. Both Polish and Czech working retirees indicated more often than other working members of the 55-plus generation that work enables contact with other people (T.6. answer “very important”, PL: difference of 22 p.p.; CZ: 6 p.p.). Also, retirees indicated more often that work keeps them occupied (T.5. answer “very important”, PL: difference 10,9 p.p., CZ: 9 p.p.). In contrast,

²⁴ Explanations of abbreviations: R – retired; W – rest of workers 55-plus.

²⁵ Explanations of abbreviations: Fictitious name given by the researchers (e.g., Veronika, Jakub); PL – Polish respondent; CZ – Czech respondent; age group; Education: P – primary, BV – basic vocational, S – secondary, H – higher; profession; marital status: M – married, P – partnership, W – widow, D – divorced, S – single.

there was no such relationship for T.4. – “gives belonging to a group”. However, there were differences in the responses of Polish and Czech working retirees. Poles, more often than Czechs, emphasized the fact that work keeps them occupied and enables contact with other people (T.5. difference 23,8 p.p., T.6. 38,1 p.p.). Meanwhile, Czechs, more often than Poles, indicated that these needs are “completely unimportant” to them (T.5. PL: 0,0%, CZ: 23,8%; T.6. PL: 0,0%, CZ: 9,5%). Thus, Poles are more likely to realize their social needs at work.

The free interviews emphasize that working retirees realize their social needs within the workplace. Such statements were found in the interviews of Poles and Czechs: “150% is working for others. For self-realization, for success. There are moments for which it is worth working, although sometimes I feel I stand out from the rest of the crew” (Danuta, PL, 60–65, S, accountant). “Running the office, contacting people, getting clients—beforehand, calling them with an offer, or going around and getting companies” (Anna, PL, 60–65, W – own insurance company, M). One statement included a motive for working: “I am still working because I have no one to hand over my practice to. There is currently a shortage of dentists in the Czech Republic. I am looking for a replacement for myself so that I can refer my patients to someone” (Zdenka, CZ, 65-plus, W, dentist, M). The analysis of the interviews shows that a significant proportion of retirees often work for social rather than existential reasons.

The last group of needs realized through work is the self-realization needs. The statistical test did not show any relationship. However, the percentage data showed some differences in responses between working retirees and the other workers of the 55-plus generation, with a difference in the answer “very important” in T.7. (PL: 14,5 p.p.; CZ: 9,5 p.p.), T.8. (PL: 10,7 p.p.; CZ: 6,2 p.p.), and T.9. (PL: 20,9 p.p.; CZ: 7,9 p.p.). When analyzing the answers to “completely unimportant”, the greatest difference was in T.7. (PL: R – 36,8%, W – 14,6%) and T.8. (PL: R – 38,1%, W – 19,6%; CZ: R – 21,1%, W – 7,8%). Thus, it follows that work satisfies self-realization needs for Polish working retirees to a lesser extent than for the rest of the working population, especially the characteristic “allows me to develop myself”. The difference in the responses of Czech respondents was not so significant. On the other hand, when comparing the answers of Polish and Czech working retirees, differences emerged. Poles were much less likely to indicate that work allows them to develop, as shown by the answer “very important” – T.7. difference of 21 p.p., and “completely unimportant” (PL: 36,8%; CZ: 5,3%). They were also less likely to feel that work presents them with new tasks (T.8. answer “very important” – difference: 6,8 p.p.; answer “completely unimportant” – PL: 38,1%, CZ: 21,1%), and that it provides a sense of social prestige (answer “very important” – 10,8 p.p. difference). Thus, the survey results indicate that Czech respondents satisfy their self-realization needs at work to a greater extent than Polish respondents.

Statements from the interviews of both Polish and Czech interviewees indicate that work largely satisfies their self-realization needs. In fact, most of the interviewees talked about this. Such statements include: “It is the realization of the self, the different activities, the environment – the very fact of nice cooperation, nice cooperation is important for me. Relationships with people are important to me. Money too, but above all, the realization of passions” (Krzysztof, PL, 55–65, S, retired miner, M); “I work because it gives me pleasure, I am always active, I look for new solutions, it is creative work” (Tomas, CZ, 60–65, ZZ, co-owner of a waste disposal company, M); “The main motive – not to be idle and to have my ambitions fulfilled, out of the need for self-development, but also for contact with people” (Ela, PL, 60–65, W – manager, P); “I work because I like it, I set up my company and work out of interest in what you have created and carried yourself, you can continue and develop it further” (Jerzy, PL, 60–65, W, retired miner, M); “Thanks to work, I am active, I learn new things, I have my position. And I can communicate with people, meet them” (Alenka, CZ, 60–65, ZZ, porter, D). Thus, it is clear from the statements that the self-realization aspect of work is very important for working retirees. It is important for those in higher professional positions, but those in lower positions also emphasized it.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the analysis indicate that work plays a substantial role in activating seniors, specifically working retirees. Work fulfills several needs of retirees and is a source of satisfaction. In particular, qualitative research has shown that it fulfills self-realization needs, indicating that working retirees are largely guided in their professional activity by the realization of post-materialist values. Our research confirms the findings of international studies that the impact of longer employment affects the quality of life, including the maintenance of physical and mental health in mature people. Thus, aging can occur in an active and elderly-friendly way²⁶.

Respondents emphasized that part-time work is the most suitable because it offers the possibility of fulfilling economic, social, and self-realization needs while also being less tiring. Other researchers also pointed to similar findings²⁷.

²⁶ B. Foweraker, L. Cutcher, *An Ageless Gift: Reciprocity and Value Creation By and For Older Workers*, “Work, Employment and Society”, vol. 34, 2020, no. 4, pp. 533–549; T.P. van Tienoven et al., *Active Participation and Well-Being Among the Elderly in Belgium and the USA: A Cross-National Time-Use Perspective*, “Social Indicators Research”, vol. 160, 2022, pp. 625–644. DOI:10.1007/s11205-020-02383-y; K. Skalaćka, *Aktywne starzenie...*; J. Maćkiewicz, *Satisfied Ageing...*

²⁷ M. Kartuzova, *Work Practices...*; L. Železná, M. Kreidl, *Transitions between Employment and Unemployment among Older Workers in the Czech Republic*, “Sociologický Časopis/Czech Sociological

Our research also pointed to existing barriers in the form of stereotypes towards older workers. Existing barriers from employers can make it much more challenging to be active. Many other authors have documented such stereotypes regarding the performance of older workers²⁸. Furthermore, research from various countries describes discrimination by some companies and institutions relating to the employment of older workers²⁹.

When comparing working retirees to the 55-plus generation, different emphases are placed on realizing needs and values that are satisfied by professional work. In each national group, existential needs are realized less frequently compared to other working people, and self-realization needs are realized more frequently. Thus, professional work primarily serves the fulfillment of post-materialist values. There is a correlation between working retirees and other working people, and the acceptance of claims about the satisfaction of needs through work. This is particularly true for existential needs, which other authors have highlighted³⁰. Financial needs are fulfilled by drawing a pension, while work supplements this. However, this does not mean that the financial function of work is not essential, as it increases the standard of living for working retirees. Moreover, the financial needs are more strongly satisfied for those of lower economic status in particular.

Social needs and values are much more strongly fulfilled among working retirees than the working 55-plus generation. Professional work offers the opportunity to meet with colleagues and clients (patients), facilitating conversation and exchange on both professional and nonprofessional topics. Through such activities, the older person has the opportunity for intergenerational contact. It is also important to go beyond one's family and neighborhood circle. Other researchers also point to such aspects of work as a social dimension³¹.

The study evaluated self-realization through, an issue addressed by comparative sociological research³². The quantitative survey showed that working retirees

Review", vol. 52, 2016, no. 4, pp. 505–533. DOI: 10.13060/00380288.2016.52.4.270.

²⁸ K. Turek, K. Henkens, *How Skill Requirements Affect the Likelihood of Recruitment of Older Workers in Poland: The Indirect Role of Age Stereotypes*, "Work, Employment and Society", vol. 34, 2020, no. 4, pp. 550–570. DOI: 10.1177/0950017019847943.

²⁹ M. Kartuzova, *Work Practices...*; E. Meliou, O. Mallett, S. Rosenberg, *Being a Self-Employed Older Woman: From Discrimination to Activism*, "Work, Employment and Society", vol. 33, 2019, no. 3, p. 529–538. DOI: 10.1177/0950017018800235; M. Visser et al., *Inequality...*

³⁰ M. Kartuzova, *Work Practices...*; E. Meliou, O. Mallett, S. Rosenberg, *Being a Self-Employed Older Woman: From Discrimination to Activism*, "Work, Employment and Society", vol. 33, 2019, no. 3, p. 529–538. DOI: 10.1177/0950017018800235; M. Visser et al., *Inequality...*

³¹ Szukalski P., *Aktywność zawodowa ludzi starszych...*; M. Svoboda, *Přibývá pracujících seniorů. Kvůli zdražování nevystačí s důchodem*, <https://www.ospzv-aso.cz/obsah/71/pribyva-pracujicich-senioru-kvuli-zdrazovani-nevystaci-s-duc/332938> (accessed: 16.12.2024).

³² Bartkowiak G., *Zatrudnianie pracowników wiedzy 65 plus...*

indicated the realization of this need less frequently than other working people of the 55-plus generation, implying that employees no longer expect a creative aspect from their work in the final phase of their working life. However, the qualitative research indicates that such an aspect was emphasized by many interviewees, particularly senior employees and business owners. Working retirees emphasize that work gives them a higher social position in their family and neighborhood environment, signifying that they are still fit enough, both mentally and physically, to continue their work.

Answering the second part of the research question revealed differences in how needs and values are satisfied by work among the different national groups. The work performed by Czech respondents fulfills their existential and self-realization needs to a greater extent than Polish respondents. In contrast, Polish working retirees fulfill their social needs to a greater extent in their work. Such differences were not apparent in the qualitative research, possibly because of the higher wages in the Czech Republic and the fact that the sample included people with higher qualifications. Comparative studies show that almost two-thirds of working Czech seniors are employed in high-skilled occupations, categorized as mainstream professionals or a broad group of technical, health, and pedagogical workers³³. In contrast, other studies show that Czech society is more post-materialistic and individualistic³⁴.

Summarizing the study as a whole, the results confirmed the role of professional work within the theoretical concept of active aging. It is important to emphasize the need to optimize complex activities that improve the quality of life of older people, which can be achieved through good health and high physical fitness. Continued activity will make them feel needed and enable them to develop their passions.

³³ M. Svoboda, *Přibývá pracujících seniorů...*

³⁴ U. Swadźba, *Jak bliscy a jak różni. Analiza komparatystyczna wartości społeczeństwa polskiego i czeskiego*, in: *Sąsiedztwa III RP – Czechy. Zagadnienia społeczne*, eds. M. Dębicki, J. Makaro, Gajt, Wrocław 2013, pp. 74–99.

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