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SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL WORK OF THE 55+ GENERATION. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLAND, THE CZECH REPUBLIC, AND HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT. The aim of the paper is to diagnose social attitudes towards professional work of the 55+ generation of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The analysis is based on the research carried out in Katowice, Ostrava and Debrecen among the 55-65 age group. The research was conducted in April – June 2019. The resulting discussion concerns the cognitive, affective and behavioural attitudes towards professional work. Three national groups are compared. The research findings indicate that taking into account all components of the overall attitude, it is the Poles who achieve the highest value of a positive attitude towards work, then the Hungarians, and finally the Czechs. The Poles demonstrate a consistent attitude towards work, with the individual components displaying similar results. The Czechs exhibit an inconsistent attitude. The highest value is achieved by the affective component and the lowest - by the behavioural one. The Hungarians also show an inconsistent attitude. The cognitive component achieves the same values as in the Czech Republic, however, the affective component achieves a very low value and the behavioural component is high. In Conclusions, the author shows that the economic activity of the 55+ generation is influenced by objective factors, in particular the state policy in the field of obtaining retirement rights and employment opportunities.

JEL Classification: J14**Keywords:** social attitudes, professional work, 55+ generation, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary

Introduction

Demographic aging of the population in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary follows the same route to that in most European countries. Initially, the demographic transformation mainly concerned the societies of the “old Union”, now it is also a phenomenon affecting the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Commission Staff Working Document, 2020; European Commission, 2021a; Walker and Maltby, 2021). Such changes were predicted by scientists a few years ago, but their scale is larger than assumed.

Especially in Poland and Hungary, this situation was exacerbated by the migration processes, as a consequence of which young people emigrated in search of a job and better living conditions (Swadźba & Swadźba, 2021). Therefore, the remaining generation of older workers in the labour market and inclusion of the unemployed are the immediate imperative. This situation has an impact on the economy of a given country and plays a very important social role, as it allows older people to feel needed. Societies are therefore facing a challenge on account of the increasing proportion of mature people versus young people (up to 35 years of age) in the labour market. Primarily, they are a great resource, with great socio-cultural capital that they have accumulated during their work (Janosova & Reichel, 2016; Foweraker & Cutcher, 2020; Nyqvist et al., 2021; Egdal et al., 2021). The concept of active aging, which is becoming more and more popular among theoreticians and practitioners of social sciences, entails enabling individuals to be socially useful (Szukalski, 2008; Constança, Ribeiro & Teixeira, 2012; Harper, 2019). Active aging is the process of optimizing health, participation and safety opportunities to improve quality of life as people age (Fernández-Ballesteros, 2008; Lamura & Principi, 2019). This means maintained physical fitness and the possibility of working professionally as long as possible for the elderly, as well as their active participation in social, economic, cultural, and civil life. Prolonging professional career is an important element of this concept. That is why, in Poland and in other European Union countries, more and more emphasis is placed on increasing the economic activity of the 55+ generation (WHO, 2002; Foster & Walker, 2015; European Commission, 2021b; Fedor, 2021). Not only does social usefulness concern professional work, but also other activities such as community work, house chores or volunteering (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Morawski, 2021). Long-term demographic trends, combined with the increasing complexity of social life, translate into an increase in the demand for work of older people. The current trends in the professional activity of Poles, Czechs and Hungarians in the pre-old age indicate that they are not overly willing to prolong their professional activity (Szukalski, 2008; Zelezná & Kreidl, 2016; Gal, 2018; Lamura & Principi, 2019; Siemieńska, 2021). Hence, it is very important to learn about the factors that attract people towards, as well as discourage them from, continuing their professional activity.

The objective of the article is to diagnose the attitudes towards the work of the 55+ generation of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, as well as to answer the following questions:

1. What is the professional situation of the 55+ age cohort in the labor markets of individual countries, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary? What are the specific national characteristics?
2. What is the assessment of the 55+ generation regarding the labor market relevance? What are the specific national characteristics?
3. What are the intentions and plans of the 55+ generation to continue or start a professional career? What are the specific national characteristics?

In order to answer the research questions, the “Literature review” includes the theoretical concept of attitudes (including attitudes towards work) containing three components (cognitive, affective, and behavioral). The concept of professional work and concept of population active aging are discussed. Then the research results are presented. Complex indicators are also constructed through the aggregate indexation. On the basis of these indexes, types of attitudes towards professional work of the surveyed national groups of the 55+ generation are constructed. These research questions are answered in the conclusion of this paper. The conclusion also contains a reference to the theory of attitudes towards work and the active aging of the population.

1. Literature review: Attitude, professional work, concept of population active aging

The issue of social attitudes is very often distinguished by sociologists (Janosova & Reichel, 2016; Dzionek-Kozłowska & Nehman, 2017; Cucina et al., 2018; Siemieńska 2021). It often applies to attitudes towards work, especially professional work. However, researchers rarely have a possibility to make international comparisons based on empirical research, which is uniform and conducted at the same time. One of the important concepts used in this article is a social attitude. This concept has also been discussed in American sociology (Rokeach, 1968). In Polish sociology, it has been undertaken by Stefan Nowak (Nowak, 1973). The attitude features so-called components: cognitive, emotional-evaluative (so-called affective), and behavioral (also called functional). Nowak, in line with Rokeach, distinguishes three components. A cognitive component represents person's knowledge at a different level of certainty of what is real, good and desirable or what is false, wrong and undesirable in the subject matter of attitude. Then an affective component contains positive and negative feelings towards the subject matter of attitude. Finally, a behavioral component consists of predisposition to react which leads to action, when there is an update or reference to particular subject matter of attitude (Rokeach, 1968; Nowak, 1973).

Work, in sociological terms, is very closely related to the concept of professional work and still refers to it. Furthermore, in sociological research, the most common concept of work refers to professional work. Professional work determines life activity for a large part of the population. An individual finds their place in society through professional work. This includes an economic position, but also a social position. Sociological studies on work often focus on its attitudes (Szukalski, 2008; Eugester et al., 2017; Cucina et al., 2018; Erceg et al., 2018; Siemieńska, 2021).

The following components of attitude towards work and professional career will be subject to our analysis: cognitive component, that is knowledge and current work experience, taking into account the professional status of the 55+ generation, then affective component, that is assessment of opportunities for the 55+ generation in the labor market. Behavioral component of attitudes towards work, which concerns certain behavior towards professional work (undertaking work) and potential behavior towards placing oneself on the labor market and carrying out professional work.

The concept of active aging was a significant milestone in the proper understanding of the problem of the elderly (Boudiny, 2013). It implies enabling individuals to be socially useful. The concept focuses on optimizing the opportunities related to the health, participation and security of older people so that they remain productive for the longest possible period (Foster and Walker, 2015; Constança et al., 2012; Foweraker, 2020; Van Thienoven et al., 2020; Sophier et al., 2020). The most indicative utility is professional activity (Kartuzova 2020; Raab, 2020; Lulle, 2021). The continuation of professional work by older workers is of great importance for several reasons. These reasons are indicated by the scientific research carried out by doctors, economists, psychologists and sociologists (Szukalski, 2008; Boudiny, 2013; Harper, 2019; Aidukaite & Blaziene, 2021). Polish and international studies indicate the impact of professional work on the quality of life, including maintaining a mature person in physical and mental health. Aging can thus be active and friendly to the older generation (Foweraker, 2020; Van Thienoven et al., 2020). Professional activation influences the use of older workers' potential, their knowledge and skills. Knowledge of older employees can be passed on to the younger generation in specific areas of work, enrich their social capital, accumulate experience in the functioning of the firm (Zelezna & Kreidl, 2016; Kartuzova, 2020; Roman-Gravan et al., 2021).

Scientific research indicates at least two factors that are not conducive to active aging and continuing professional work. The first factor is the discrimination by some companies

and institutions against continuing employment of older workers. This is indicated by studies conducted in various countries (Kartuzova, 2020; Meliou et al., 2019; Viser et al., 2016; Topgul, 2016; Roman-Gravan et al., 2021). The second factor is the existence of many stereotypes regarding the performance of work by older workers (Janosova, 2016; Makienko & Panamareva, 2016; Turek & Henkens, 2020; Siemieńska, 2021).

Employment of employees in the 55-64 age group varies greatly. In Europe, in many countries, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 55-64 age group works professionally. For example, Iceland is in the lead, where as much as 81.6% of people over 55 worked professionally in 2019, then the Scandinavian countries (Sweden 77.7%, Norway 72.8%, Estonia 72.6% Denmark 71.3%) and Switzerland (73.0%) and Germany (72.7%). In the countries of interest to us, a much lower percentage of people aged 55-64 works professionally, in the Czech Republic – 66.7%, in Hungary – 56.7%, and in Poland only 49.5%, with the EU average – 59.1% (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2020). Therefore, the use of the potential of experienced employees is very diverse. This is particularly important in the face of an aging population and shortages in the labor market. Empirical research on economic activity conducted in this age group has shown that employees working in this age category relatively more often occupy specialist and managerial positions (Visser et al., 2016; Vilčiauskaitė et al., 2020). The level of education is a factor that strongly modifies the frequency of performing work in the 55+ group. The higher the education confirmed by a certificate or diploma is, the higher is the level of the professional activity rate (Szukalski, 2008; Visser et al., 2016; Vilčiauskaitė et al., 2020).

Sociological research carried out in the 55+ category shows that there are a number of factors that attract to and force those people out of the labor market. These factors can be divided into two categories, objective and subjective (Boudiny, 2013). The objective factors include the state policy in this area, and above all the law provisions that enable retirement, early retirement, or disability pension.

In Poland, the retirement age is 65 years of age for men and 60 years of age for women from October 1, 2017. Lowering the retirement age places Poland among the European countries where people work the shortest – this concerns women in particular (ZUS, 2021). People who receive old-age pensions may take up professional work in Poland. Due to the fact that empirical research was carried out in the Upper Silesian agglomeration, mining pensioners should be mentioned. The mining pension is due to an employee who meets all of the following conditions: 1) is 55 years old; 2) has a period of mining work amounting to at least 20 years for women and 25 years for men, including periods of equivalent work (LexLege, 2021). In 2019, the age of the average retiring miner was 49, and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the retired miners were under 55.

In the two analyzed countries, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the retirement age varies. In the Czech Republic, according to the previous regulation, the retirement age was different for men and women, and in the case of women it was additionally based on the number of children raised. In accordance with the current regulation, in force since 2018, the retirement age for women and men will continue to be increased and, moreover, standardized. For those born in 1971, this age will be the same for men and women, and it will be 65 years of age (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2020; Szyszko-Głowacka, 2020). It is possible to work full time and receive a full pension every month.

In Hungary, on the other hand, a person must be 62 to reach the retirement age, this applies to both women and men. In 2011, after more than 20 years, the Hungarian pension system returned to single-pillar compulsory insurance based on the principle of defined benefit (PAYG). From 2010, the retirement age is gradually being shifted by six months for each age group and in 2022 it will be 65 for people born in 1957 and later (this change applies to people born after 1952). Women with 40 years of work experience may retire regardless of

their age (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2020; Szyszko-Głowacka, 2020). Hungarian pensioners are not allowed to work if they have worked in the public sector. In the private sector, it is allowed by special regulations (Gal, 2018).

The work attracting factors will include all institutional activities activating the 55+ group. In Poland, the situation changed depending on the general economic situation and the policies of the ruling parties. In the 1990s, when the unemployment rate was rising and employment in industry was falling, the 50+ generation was encouraged to leave the labor market through early retirement and disability pensions. A similar situation took place in the early 2000s (Turek & Henkens, 2020; Siemieńska, 2021). People were encouraged to take up professional activity in the last years of the economic boom, even before the pandemic.

Subjective factors such as age, health, and health of family members (especially elderly parents) are also important. Interactions in the family play an important role, especially caring responsibilities towards grandchildren. Sociological research indicates that the situation in the family and the strength of social ties inactivate women who, in the social perception, should devote themselves to the family to a greater extent (Meliou et al., 2019; Van Tienoven et al., 2020).

A number of factors, but the most important – state policy, affect the active aging of the 55+ generation. The “Active Aging Index” from 2018 shows the living conditions for older people. When we compare the index of the surveyed countries then the Employment in the Active Aging Index (AAI) has the following values: the EU average is 31.5 points. Slovakia has 26.3, Poland 26.5 and Hungary reached 27.5 points. These countries belong to the “green cluster” with the fewest overall points. The Czech Republic lays with 34.2 points in the domain Employment over the EU average (Lamura & Principi, 2019). Therefore, professional work plays an important role, and attitudes towards it determine its continuation.

2. Methodological approach

The empirical analysis was based on the results of research conducted in April – June 2019 in the Czech Republic (Ostrava), Poland (Katowice and the neighboring cities of the Agglomeration) and Hungary (Debrecen). The analysis has been carried out on the basis of research conducted as part of an international project: “Social and Cultural Mechanisms of In- and Exclusion: a Comparative Perspective” Life and Work Strategies of the Generation 55 to 65: Their Position on the Labour Market, Obstacles and Wishes (Institutional Development Project (IRP), No. 201819), organized and financially supported by the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts University of Ostrava in cooperation with the Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Silesia and the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen.

The research was supervised by academics, and the interviews were conducted by selected students and doctoral students. The aim of the research was to investigate the life and professional strategies of the 55–65 generation in large cities. The survey regarded the diagnosis of the current position of this generation in the labor market, obstacles to work and the wishes of this generation towards work. A joint questionnaire was prepared in English and then translated into national languages. Then, a research sample was selected in each of the examined cities. First, the structure of gender and education in the 55-65 age group was determined in each of the examined cities, using statistical data. Then, the respondents were selected for the research, taking into account this structure. The research covered all city districts so that the respondents were socially diverse. Each of the interviewers conducted interviews in the assigned district and had to take into account all the designated structural factors in the selection of respondents. Thus, the sample reflected the diversity of the 55-65 age generation in the examined cities and was representative. In Poland and Hungary, 169

interviews were conducted and 152 in the Czech Republic. In total, there were 490 interviews carried out. The collected empirical material was coded and statistically developed using the SPSS program.

The article focuses only on answers regarding questions about work. The basis for the analysis are three main questions. The first question: “Please, could you tell me what is your current employment status? Here you can give more than on answer.” (Multiple option possible). The respondents were requested to choose between seven possibilities: “A - Employed full time (40 or more hours per week), B - Employed part time (less than 40 hours per week), C - Self-employed, D - Unemployed, E - Retired, F - Homemaker, G - Unable to work”. The respondents were confronted with two statements in the second question: S.1.: The 55+ generation would still be well suited to the workplace of the previous workplace. S.2.: People over the age of 55, if they wish, should be able to work, earn income. The Likert scale was adopted, which is a good tool for examining attitudes. The respondents had five possible answers from complete acceptance of statements to complete rejection. They could choose from: “definitely yes,” “rather yes,” “rather not,” “definitely not” and “hard to say.” The third question was: “If you could choose between the following alternatives, without becoming significantly worse financially, what option would you choose? The respondents could choose one of the following options: “1. Full-time job (40 hour or more per week), 2. Part-time job (less than 40 hour per week), 3. Occasional temporary work, 4. I would not work.” The results are presented in tables (in percentage data), graphs and correlations with Chi-square and Cramer’s V in the text below.

3. Conducting research and results

We start the analysis by presenting the socio-demographic structure of the respondents. It includes those independent variables that will be useful in the correlations of individual questions.

Table 1. Gender and education of the respondents, (% answers)

| | Gender | | Education | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|------|-----------|------------|-----------|--------|
| | Women | Men | Primary | Vocational | Secondary | Higher |
| Poles N = 169 | 53.3 | 46.7 | 7.7 | 29.0 | 39.1 | 24.3 |
| Czechs N = 152 | 58.6 | 41.4 | 5.3 | 34.9 | 37.5 | 22.4 |
| Hungarians N = 169 | 59.8 | 40.2 | 9.1 | 25.4 | 35.5 | 29.9 |

Source: *own data*

The research involved 40% to 46.7% of men and 53.3% to 59.9% of women. The percentage of women is higher because women also predominate in the population structure at this age. The education level of the respondents of the 55+ generation reflects the education structure of this generation. We have a slightly higher percentage of people with higher education, but this is probably due to the fact that the research was conducted in large cities. The Hungarian respondents stand out in this respect. The research was conducted in Debrecen, a city that is a major scientific, educational and cultural center of the region. On the other hand, research in Poland and the Czech Republic was carried out in industrial cities, where the working-class population dominates.

3.1. Cognitive component of attitude - the current professional situation of the 55+ generation

The first aspect of our analysis is the presentation of the research results regarding the cognitive component of attitude, i.e. the current situation of the respondents on the labor market. The respondents were asked a question: "Please, could you tell me what is your current employment status? Here you can give more than one answer." The respondents were given such an opportunity to diagnose a situation when someone receives a pension and works full-time or part-time. The table below shows the test results.

Table 2. The current professional situation of the 55+ generation by gender in the labor market (% answers)

| | Poles (N = 169) | | | Czechs (N = 152) | | | Hungarians (N = 169) | | |
|---|-----------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|----------------------|------|------|
| | W | M | T | W | M | T | W | M | T |
| A | 44.4 | 57.0 | 50.3 | 22.5 | 36.5 | 28.3 | 38.9 | 44.3 | 40.8 |
| B | 18.9 | 11.4 | 15.4 | 15.7 | 11.1 | 13.8 | 8.3 | 13.1 | 10.1 |
| C | 5.6 | 5.1 | 5.3 | 6.7 | 15.9 | 10.5 | 2.8 | 8.2 | 4.7 |
| D | 6.6 | 2.5 | 4.8 | 11.2 | 4.8 | 8.5 | 6.5 | 9.8 | 7.7 |
| E | 26.1 | 35.4 | 30.8 | 46.1 | 30.2 | 39.5 | 43.5 | 27.9 | 37.9 |
| F | 21.1 | 1.3 | 11.8 | 14.6 | 0.0 | 8.6 | 9.3 | 1.6 | 6.5 |
| G | 2.2 | 6.3 | 4.1 | 0.0 | 3.2 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 4.9 | 1.8 |

Explanatory note: A - Employed full time (40 or more hours per week), B. Employed part time (less than 40 hours per week), C. Self-employed, D. Unemployed, E. Retired, F. Homemaker, G. Unable to work; W – women, M – men, T – total.

Explanatory note: The respondents could choose more than one answer. Therefore, the percentage values do not add up to 100%.

Source: *own data*

The results of the research show that Polish respondents of the 55+ generation are professionally very active (71.0%). More than half of the respondents works full-time and 15.4% part-time. 5.3% of the self-employed should also be added to this figure. Only less than 1/3 receives a pension. Some of those respondents combine the status of a retired person with professional work. Of the retired people, 11.5% works full-time and 21.2% part-time. This is due to the fact that in Poland it is possible to work while receiving a retirement pension. This applies to people who have already reached retirement age and there is no earnings limit. As miners reach retirement age relatively early, they very often take up jobs in other sectors of the economy, in other positions. The proportion of respondents who are unemployed is not high. Until the pandemic, unemployment in Poland was very low and amounted to 3.9% in December 2019. In Katowice, the research site was even lower and amounted to 1.0%. Therefore, if someone wanted to work, they were able to find a job.

In the other two analyzed countries – the Czech Republic and Hungary, the respondents are less professionally active. In the Czech Republic, less than 1/3 of respondents work full-time, and 13.8% works part-time. The proportion of the self-employed is slightly higher than in Poland and amounts to 10.5%. In total, 52.6% of the 55+ generation respondents are professionally active. This proportion is lower than the national average. Among the Czech pensioners, none of them combines their retirement pension with full-time work, and only five people (8.3%) work part-time. This situation takes place despite the fact that the Czech law allows professional work after retirement. The percentage of the unemployed, 8.5%, is also much higher, which is far from the national average. The proportion of retirees is quite high – 39.5%.

By contrast, in Hungary we have a higher percentage of full-time employees than in the Czech Republic, i.e. 40.8%. On the other hand, slightly lower proportion of people work

part-time, it is 10.1%, and the proportion of self-employed is lower – 4.7%. Overall, 55.6% of the Hungarian respondents are economically active. Only one of the Hungarian pensioners works full-time, and five work part-time (7.8%). This is due to the provisions of Hungarian law which only in exceptional circumstances allow a retiree to combine an old-age pension with work. However, similarly to the Czech Republic, there is also a large proportion of the unemployed (7.7%) among the Hungarian respondents.

Therefore, another question arises. Do structural factors such as gender and education influence economic activity or inactivity of the 55+ generation?

When it comes to gender, there is no statistical correlation with the status in the labor market among the Polish respondents. The exception is the status of a “housewife” (at $p = 0.000$ chi squared significant, Cramer’s V 0.307). This is understandable, because only a woman should be granted this status in the common conscience. This is particularly true of the older generation. Remaining “in retirement” (at the level of $p = 0.095$ chi significant square, Cramer’s V 0.217) is close to the statistical relationship. Interestingly, a greater proportion of men than women declare such status (women – 26.1%, men – 35.4%). This is probably due to the early retirement of miners. There are many marriages in Silesian communities where the woman is a working person and the man remains retired. Comparing to the Czech and Hungarian results, there is no static dependence, except for the status of a “housewife” the Czechs (at the level of $p = 0.002$ chi square significant, Cramer’s V 0.252), the Hungarians (at the level of $p = 0.008$ significant chi square, Cramer’s V 0.204). On the other hand, the retirement status does not depend on gender. The percentage data, however, indicate a higher proportion of women than men (Czechs: women – 46.1%, men – 30.2%; Hungarians: women – 43.5%, men – 27.9%). This is understandable in the situation of Czechs, where women may retire earlier than men, while a question arises with regard to the Hungarians, where this is not the case.

Does education influence the continuation of professional work? In the literature, one can find studies showing that the proportion of people in retirement decreases with the increase in education (Szukalski 2008, Visser *et al.*, 2016). In our research, this regularity is only partially true. A slightly higher percentage of Polish respondents with basic vocational education works full-time than those with higher education. These results are probably influenced by mining retirees, who usually have secondary education. What are the results in this respect in the Czech Republic and Hungary? In the Czech Republic, there is also no statistical significance in the correlation of professional status with education. However, the percentage results indicate an increase in full-time employment with an increase in education: primary – 12.5%, vocational – 24.5%, secondary – 29.8%, higher – 35.3%. In Hungary, there is also no statistical significance of the correlation of professional status with education, while with the increase in education, the proportion of full-time employees also increases: primary – 28.6%, vocational – 32.6%, secondary – 40.0%, higher – 49.2%. Thus, in the two analyzed countries, we have the regularity indicated in the literature, but not in Poland. The reason is the existence of a large group of mining pensioners who take up a job after retirement. This causes an increase in the proportion of the employed among respondents with basic vocational education.

3.2. Affective component of attitude – assessment of the relevance of the 55+ generation in the labor market

The next analyzed issue is the affective component of attitude, i.e. the respondents’ opinion about the relevance of the 55+ generation in the labor market. There are myths and stereotypes regarding the functioning of the older generation in the labor market. Therefore, the respondents were asked a question in which two statements were made, whether or not

they remained in the labor market. These statements were as follows: Statement 1. (S.1.) The 55+ generation would still be well suited to the workplace of the previous workplace; Statement 2. (S.2.) People over the age of 55, if they wish, should be able to work, earn income. The table below presents the results of the respondents' answers.

Table 3. I give you some statements concerning work and the generation 55+. Do you agree with the following statements? (% of answers)

| | Poles (N = 169) | | | | Czechs (N = 152) | | | | Hungarians (N = 169) | | | |
|-------|-----------------|------|-----|-----|------------------|------|------|-----|----------------------|------|------|------|
| | DY | RY | RN | DN | DY | RY | RN | DN | DY | RY | RN | DN |
| S. 1. | 52.6 | 37.5 | 8.6 | 1.3 | 50.8 | 36.2 | 11.5 | 1.5 | 27.7 | 37.3 | 22.9 | 12.0 |
| S. 2. | 56.8 | 37.0 | 4.3 | 1.9 | 76.7 | 19.3 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 49.7 | 33.7 | 8.9 | 7.7 |

Explanatory note: DY - definitely yes, RY - rather yes, RN - rather not, DN - definitely not. The answer – it's hard to say – is not included.

Source: *own data*

The presented statements (1 and 2) indicate a positive attitude towards professional work. Statement 1 is accepted by the vast majority of Polish respondents (almost 90% of respondents), and definitely yes, by more than half. A more or less similar group of accepting people is present in the Czech Republic (definitely yes – 50.8%, rather yes – 36.2%). However, different results were obtained in Hungary. The statement was supported by 65% of respondents, including “definitely yes” – 27.7%. Almost 1/4 of the respondents did not agree with this statement. Thus, the results would indicate that the Hungarian respondents are more reserved in assessing the professional relevance of their own generation.

Statement 2 that “people aged 55+ should still be able to work and earn money” is definitely accepted by almost 60% of Poles, 76.7% of Czechs, and 49.7% of Hungarians. One third of Hungarian respondents answered “rather yes” (33.7%). This means that almost half of Hungarian respondents, despite not very good assessment of their generation's professional relevance in the labor market, want to continue working.

Does a positive attitude to work depend on structural factors, gender and education? The results of the statistical test do not show any statistical relationships. However, there are differences in the answers and choices when the percentage data are analyzed. S.1. “The 55+ generation would still be well suited to the workplace of the previous workplace” is accepted more by men than women. This especially applies to the Czechs and Poles (answers “definitely yes” – Poles: women – 49.4%, men – 56.5%; Czechs: women – 42.9%, men – 62.3%; Hungarians: women – 25.0%, men – 29.2%). This would mean that men believe less in their generation's capabilities than women. The level of education does not always play a role in accepting S.1. The Polish respondents with higher education accept it much more often than the Czech, and especially the Hungarian respondents (answers “definitely yes”: Poles: secondary – 41.5%, higher – 75.7%; Czechs: secondary – 53.2%, higher – 40.0%, Hungarians: secondary – 27.1%, higher – 29.3%). Thus, structural factors do not always clearly affect the acceptance of the possibility of an answer.

The analysis of the results of the choices made in S.2. shows similar regularities. “People over the age of 55, if they wish, should be able to work, earn income.” There are no statistical dependencies. However, when we look at the differentiation by gender, it turns out that women more often choose the answer “definitely yes” than men (Poles: women – 58.1%, men – 55.3%; Czechs: women – 77.0%, men – 76.2%; Hungarian: women – 51.9%, men – 45.9%). In the case of Poles and Czechs, the differences are not great, but in the case of Hungarians, the difference is as much as 6.0 percentage points. Therefore, it turns out that it is women who want to become active through work more than men. In turn, education affects the acceptance of this statement. This applies especially to respondents with higher education

(answers “definitely yes”: Poles: vocational – 52.1%, higher – 61.5%; Czechs: vocational – 75.8%, higher – 79.2%, Hungarians: vocational – 37.2%, higher – 50.8%). While there is a slight difference between respondents with vocational and higher education in the Czech Republic and Poland, it is much larger in Hungary. This probably results from the fact that in Poland and the Czech Republic the research was carried out in an urbanized environment and the possibilities of finding an interesting job are definitely greater also for people with basic vocational education.

3.3. Behavioral component of attitude – undertaking work by the 55+ generation

The presented analysis shows that there are various barriers that affect the potential economic activity of the 55+ generation. One can presume that some people would be willing to work if there were opportunities. Therefore, in order to diagnose what would be the respondents’ behavior towards starting or continuing work, the respondents were asked the following question: “If you could choose between the following alternatives, without becoming significantly worse financially, which option would you choose? Respondents could choose one of the following options: “1. Full-time job (40 hour or more per week), 2. Part-time job (less than 40 hour per week), 3. Occasional temporary work, 4. I would not work.” The results of the answers are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. If you could choose between the following alternatives, without becoming significantly worse financially, which option would you choose? (% of answers)

| | Poles (N = 169) | | | Czechs (N = 152) | | | Hungarians (N = 169) | | |
|----|-----------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|----------------------|------|------|
| | W | M | T | W | M | T | W | M | T |
| FT | 22.2 | 44.1 | 32.8 | 22.2 | 16.0 | 19.2 | 30.5 | 28.6 | 29.7 |
| PT | 44.4 | 30.5 | 37.7 | 24.1 | 24.0 | 24.0 | 42.4 | 44.2 | 43.6 |
| OW | 11.1 | 8.5 | 9.8 | 35.2 | 22.0 | 28.8 | 5.1 | 4.8 | 5.0 |
| NW | 22.2 | 16.9 | 19.7 | 18.5 | 38.0 | 27.4 | 22.0 | 21.4 | 21.8 |

Explanatory note: 1. FT: Full-time job (40 hour or more per week), 2. PT: Part-time job (less than 40 hour per week), 3. OW: Occasional temporary work, 4. NW: I would not work.”

Explanatory note: W – women, M – men, T – Total.

Source: *Own data*

Most of the Polish respondents chose the option of part-time work, 37.7%. A bit less would like to work full-time, i.e., 32.8% of the respondents. A relatively low proportion of respondents would like to take up occasional temporary work. The Poles, therefore, if they wish to take up or continue work, they want its stability. Only less than 20% of Poles in the 55+ generation do not want to start or continue working. This is due to the fact that the studied sample included young mining retirees, who most often take up employment when they receive their retirement pension.

The situation is slightly different in the case of the Czechs. More than half of them would prefer not to work full-time and more than ¼ not to work at all. The Czechs would most willingly do part-time jobs, not being bound by full-time jobs.

The Hungarian respondents, on the other hand, want to continue or take up employment. This is what nearly ¾ of the 55+ generation surveyed declare. In the vast majority of cases, it is preferable to work part-time rather than full-time (full-time – 29.6%, part-time – 43.6%). A very low percentage would like to take up occasional temporary work. Working in the situation of Hungarian respondents, like Polish respondents, would be associated with some stabilization. More than 1/5 of Hungarians are not willing to work.

How do structural features, such as gender and education, influence the willingness to start or continue work? Table 4 shows that in Poland far more men than women would like to work full-time. This is almost a two-fold difference. This means that working women over 55 would rather work less and devote themselves more to the home. Occasional temporary work would be preferred by slightly more women than men, the proportion of such people is within 10 percentage points. More women than men would prefer not to work. Compared to the Poles, there are no such large differences among the Czechs in the willingness to take part-time work between women and men. Women are more likely than men to take up full-time and part-time jobs. Men, on the other hand, are much more likely not to work at all. This is almost a two-fold difference. This is a surprising result, as it is mostly men, not women, who are willing to continue professional work. There are also differences among Hungarian respondents, but not to the same extent as among Czech respondents. The data analysis shows that women were slightly more likely to work full-time and part-time than men, and slightly less likely to take up occasional temporary work. As a result, there is a gender balance when it comes to people who do not want to work.

In turn, education influences the willingness to continue professional work, but in a different way. There is no statistical dependence. In Poland, the respondents with primary and secondary education are most likely to take up full-time work, while in the Czech Republic and Hungary with higher education (vocational – Poles: 35.0%, Czechs: 30.0%, Hungarians: 26.7%; secondary – Poles: 27.5%, Czechs: 30.0%, Hungarians: 26.7%; higher – Poles: 25.0%, Czechs: 35.0%, Hungarians: 36.7%). As I have already written, the differences in the results of Polish respondents are influenced by the responses of mining retirees, who are willing to work after retirement. Therefore, depending on objective conditions, the representatives of the 55+ generation adjust their individual plans.

3.4. Aggregate indexation of the components of attitude to work and general attitude to work

To sum up the analysis concerning the components of the attitude, the index of the individual components of the attitude, cognitive, affective and behavioral, and the aggregate indexation of the attitude towards the work of individual national groups is presented. The attitude components are calculated on the basis of single-base indexes:

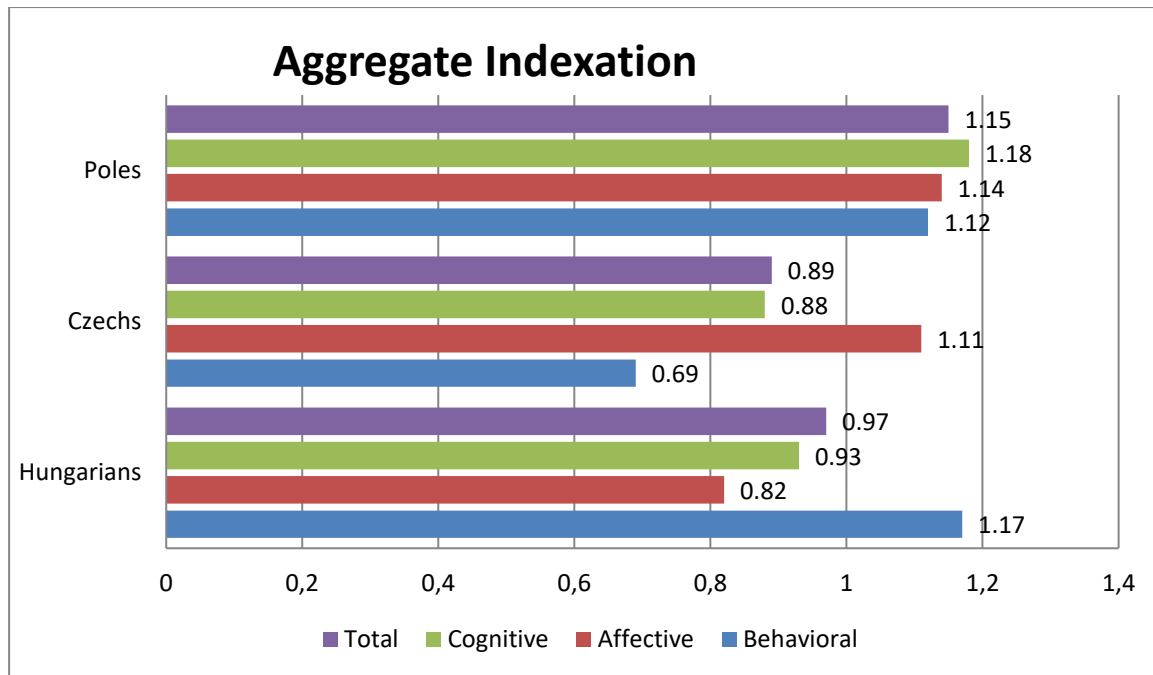
1. The cognitive component takes into account the acceptance responses of A, B and C [A - Employed full time (40 or more hours per week), B. Employed part time (less than 40 hours per week), C. Self-employed].
2. Affective component, accepting responses DY and RY [DY - definitely yes and RY - rather yes].
3. Behavioral component, acceptance of FT and PT [FT - Full-time job (40 hour or more per week, PT - Part-time job (less than 40 hour per week)].

The average for all three countries was used as the basis for indexing. Based on the formula:

$$\text{Index} = yn / yp$$

yn is the country average
yp is the all country average

The generalized attitude was computed as the averaged indexes for the three dimensions. The comparisons are shown in Graph 1.



Graphs 1. Aggregate indexation of the components of attitude to work and general attitude to work

Source: *own data*

In summary, taking into account all the components of the attitude, it is the Poles who achieve the highest value of a positive attitude towards work, then the Hungarians, and finally the Czechs. This is an overall result because when the individual components are taken into account, the situation is more complex.

The Poles represent a consistent attitude towards work because individual components of the attitude achieve similar results. There are no major differences between the cognitive, affective and behavioral components. This can be explained by the high value of work in the Polish society (Swadźba and Horakova, 2019). The participation in the sample of mining retirees who take up professional work also impacted the results.

The Czechs represent an inconsistent attitude. The highest value is achieved by affective component and the lowest by behavioral. Furthermore, the cognitive component is at a lower level than in Poland. This means that the Czech 55+ generation has a very positive opinion of their opportunities in the labor market, but is less willing to take up a job. However, this attitude can be explained by the fact that pensions in the Czech Republic are not low compared to the other two countries. As I have already indicated, the Czech society values more post-materialistic values, in which the possibility of choosing activity is an important element (Swadźba and Horakova, 2019). Leisure time is also an important value. Therefore, starting professional work may not be so attractive for the 55+ generation.

The Hungarians also represent an inconsistent attitude. However, this has a different dimension than in the Czech Republic. The cognitive component achieves the same values as in the Czech Republic. However, a very low value is achieved by affective component and a high value by behavioral component. This means that a significant part of the Hungarian 55+ generation does not agree that people from the 55+ generation would still do well in their jobs to date, but on the other hand, they still show willingness to continue working. Therefore, we are dealing with a unique inconsistency of attitudes. It probably results from material coercion due to low pensions.

Discussion and conclusion

In the summary of the presented research, it is necessary to point out some common features of the 55+ generation of the analyzed countries. This will allow for the identification of similarities and differences that result, in part, from objective reasons as well as subjective reasons. The surveyed 55+ generation is characterized by different attitudes towards work. Other researchers have pointed to such regularities (Eugester et al., 2017; Van Thienoven et al., 2020; Sophier et al., 2020; Siemieńska 2021). They result from cultural differences and differences in professional position (Visser et al., 2016; Cucina et al., 2018; Raab, 2020; Aidukaite & Blaziene, 2021). In what follows, the components of attitudes towards work are summarized and the answers to the research questions are provided.

Answering the first of the research questions characterizing the cognitive component of attitude, it can be concluded that the 55+ generations under study are diversified in their professional activity. The most active are the Poles who have the opportunity to work in retirement and they take this advantage. This is especially true of relatively young mining retirees. The Hungarians show slightly lower economic activity. This is probably due to the fact that there is a higher retirement age. This is especially true for women compared to the other two countries. The Czechs are characterized by the lowest professional activity. Perhaps this is due to the proportionally higher pensions in the Czech Republic, which do not force retirees to work.

Answering the second of the research questions characterizing the affective component of attitude, we can conclude that the 55+ generation assesses their relevance in the labor market in various ways. There are national differences in the perception of the 55+ generation's place in the labor market. In Poland, the retirement age was lowered in 2017, and at least part of the society realized that it was too low. Therefore, the Polish 55+ generation supports longer activity in the labor market. The Czechs highly assess the relevance of the 55+ generation in the labor market. They also support the possibility of continuing work if someone from the 55+ generation is willing to do so. Therefore, the Czechs place emphasis on the possibility of choosing to continue the work. The Hungarian older generation assesses their relevance in the labor market the lowest. However, to a moderate extent, they support further professional work. The Hungarians have the highest retirement age of the analyzed countries. Therefore, the possibility of working longer is not positively assessed.

Answering the third of the research questions indicating the behavioral component of attitude, it should be stated that the vast majority of the 55+ generation want to work professionally. A full-time job is not preferred. Full-time employment is chosen by a smaller part of the generation, more often men. Women of this generation would prefer to work part-time. There are national differences in the attitude of potential professional activity. The Czechs are the least willing to work, while the Poles are the most willing to work and the Hungarians are ranked in the middle. Where could such differences result from? I believe that the reason may be the higher pensions in the Czech Republic compared to the other two countries and a slightly lower position of work in the value system. In the value system, the Czech society values post-materialistic values more, where work is an important value, but not the most important (Zalezna & Kreidl, 2016; Swadźba & Horakova, 2019). Leisure time also plays an important role in this system. Therefore, if someone has sufficient means to live, they do not continue their professional work, but undertake other activities that allow them to spend this time in a pleasant way.

Referring to the concept of active aging of societies, studies have shown that activation through work is largely accepted by the 55+ generation. As other sociological studies have shown, it has two positive dimensions.

This type of inclusion benefits the labor market through the growth in the number of experienced employees. These employees have the potential for specialist knowledge and competences (Vieser et al., 2016; Van Tienoven et al., 2020; Vilčiauskaitė et al., 2020; Egdell et al., 2021). They also have emotional and social capital, which they can pass on to the younger generation of employees (Cucina et al., 2018; Siemieńska 2021). Regardless of age, this is a specific value for the organization, and their competences and experience seem to be a good that is difficult to overestimate. Professional activity of 55+ employees and increasing the retirement age are also of economic significance as it limits payments from the retirement benefit fund.

The professional activity of 55+ employees also brings benefits to the employees themselves through greater financial rewards obtained through professional activity. This is important for their mental well-being and social contacts. The benefits that employees themselves receive when their creativity and knowledge are used affect their well-being (Harper, 2019; Raab, 2020). This reduces illness, depression and the feeling of emptiness and loneliness. Professional activity affects their mental well-being and quality of life (Sophier et al., 2020; Nyqvist et al., 2021). This relieves the health care system from patients and brings tangible benefits to the economy. Two factors are essential for this type of vision to be fulfilled.

Appropriate state policy. Research has shown that the professional activity of the 55+ generation in the analyzed countries is diversified and results to a large extent from the provisions of the labor law and the possibility of combining retirement with taking up employment. The unemployment rate and the possibility of getting a job have a significant impact on the activity of this category. In principle, it can be concluded that the economic activity of the 55+ generation is influenced by objective factors, in particular the state policy in the field of obtaining retirement rights and employment opportunities (Walker and Maltby, 2012; Boudiny, 2013; Foster and Walker, 2015; Zelezna and Kreidl, 2016).

It is also important to be aware of one's value in the labor market and the value of the entire generation. Researchers indicate that the bias and stereotypes of an older employee are a barrier, which lower their self-esteem (Manienko and Panamareva, 2016; Janosova and Reichel, 2016; Topgul, 2016; Turek and Henkens, 2020). Other values are also important, such as the value of family, friends and leisure time, which are competitive in relation to work (Van Tienoven et al., 2020; Fedor 2021). These objective and subjective factors determine the place of the 55+ generation in the labor market.

The coming demographic changes lead to the extension of human life. The 55+ generation will play an increasingly important role in the labor market. This is due to the aging of the generations and the increasing demand for employees. Awareness of aging societies requires taking actions aimed at developing new forms of work organization, and utilizing the potential of mature employees of the 55+ generation

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