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## OLD AGE IN COMMUNIST POLAND: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Abstract

The article attempts at determining the most important factors shaping the social situation of aged people in Poland in the period 1945–89, seeking to describe, in vast amounts of detail, the demographic diversity (size of population concerned, gender categorisation, numerical amounts by age), residence (urban or rural region) as well as living conditions, health, and education status of the population concerned. Research has shown that the social security system in force played an increasing role in the shaping of the material situation of the elderly: in 1989 some 50 per cent retirement-aged people took advantage of its offer. That this system remained the basis for livelihoods of a definite majority of aged people in the 1980s primarily ensued from the extension of the farmer's retirement and disability pension system. Nonetheless, a considerable group of elderly people (amounting to several dozen per cent, though estimates vary) received income below the minimum subsistence figure until the end of 1989 – thus remaining condemned to poverty and the need to seek for other, extra sources of income, such as assistance from family or acquaintances, gainful labour, and/or social protection.

**Keywords:** old age, old-age pensioners, minimum subsistence level, income, household, communist Poland

### I INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

When attempting to determine the state of play in the research on old age in what was the People's Republic of Poland (PRL), one comes across a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, we have access to sizeable and diverse scholarly literature produced by exponents of social politics, sociology, statistics, and law. Old age was of interest to Polish communist authorities primarily in the context of social insurance and social welfare, which resulted in numerous analyses produced by various institutions, some of them created on an ad-hoc

basis. This scholarly literature is considerable, often dispersed, in many cases using a quite hermetic language. This is true, for instance, for the pension scheme, which was one of the major ways to ensure income for people of post-working, or retirement, age.

On the other hand, it is hard to indicate in-depth studies in social history which would deal with the subject-matter in question, making use of the new research opportunities opened once access was enabled to the archives of the communist state's institutions after 1989.

Before such research produces rich and exhaustive effects, yielding sizeable monographs, it is worthwhile to determine the basic issues and place the elderly in a broader social context of the People's Republic. The findings quoted and discussed below are based on published studies ascribable to various scientific disciplines as well as archival sources not hitherto used by researchers, including – in the first place – files of state institutions and political (communist) party institutions, kept at the Central Archives of Modern Records (Polish abbr., AAN) in Warsaw. An important source based on which conclusions have been built are statistical analyses published before 1989 by the Central Statistical Office (CSO [Polish abbr., GUS]) – often in microscopic number of copies, prepared for selected groups of members of the authorities.

Another problem ensues from the way in which old age research was approached in communist Poland. The attention was focused on senior citizens primarily from the standpoint of making subsequent decisions concerning changes of the pension system. Hence, descriptions and decisions regarding the situation of elderly people (including the crucial question of profitability of households) had to be made through extrapolation of the findings concerning disabled pensioners and retirees, though these categories varied (as I point out later on).

Having regard to these difficulties, it is worth to try and answer the question: What were the major factors determining their social situation in that period?

## II

### OLD AGE IN POLAND: PEOPLE AND SPACE

This analysis ought to be founded on the primary demographic findings (Tab. 1). In the first years after WWII, the Polish society was one of the youngest in Europe. Its 'youth' continued into the early

1960s: as of 1960, the share of people aged sixty or above in Poland was the lowest compared to all European countries (above 9%). This situation began changing in the subsequent years.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1.** Population aged sixty and over sixty – percentage rates for Poland in 1946–90

Year	Persons aged 60 and over
1946	8.8
1950	8.2
1960	9.6
1970	12.9
1980	13.3
1990	16.6

Sources: Brunon Synak (ed.), *Polska starość. Praca zbiorowa* (Gdańsk, 2003), 12, Tab. 1.1; *Rocznik Demograficzny 1967–1968* [Demographic Yearbook, 1967–8] (Warsaw, 1969), 74–5, Tab. 15; *Rocznik Demograficzny 1945–1968* (Warsaw, 1968), 54–5, Tabs. 14–15; *Rocznik Statystyczny 1947* [Statistical Yearbook, 1947] (Warsaw, 1947), 19, Tabs. 6–7; *Rocznik Statystyczny 1950* (Warsaw, 1951), 17, Tab. 7; *Rocznik Statystyczny 1957* (Warsaw, 1957), 20, Tab. 12.

**Table 2.** Population aged sixty-five and over in urban and rural areas, 1950–87

	Urban areas		Rural areas	
	(Thousand)	Percentage of urban population	(Thousand)	Percentage of rural population
1950	463.6	5.0	854.6	5.4
1960	786.5	5.5	963.9	6.3
1970	1,312.7	7.7	1,423.6	9.1
1980	1,868.9	8.9	1,720.2	11.7
1987	1,937.5	8.4	1,689.3	11.4

Source: Jan Łopato, 'Społeczna kwestia ludzi starych na wsi', in Barbara Rysz-Kowalczyk (ed.), *Społeczne kwestie starości* (Warsaw, 1991), Tab. 1.

Characteristic of this ageing process was that it occurred faster in the countryside than in towns (Tab. 2). This resulted from action of various social-political factors and economic drivers. The critical ones included migrations from rural into urbanised areas and the progress of urbanisation, yet the effect of these factors was variable, let us stress. While the migrants 'rejuvenated' the urban population

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Tryfan, *Wiejska starość w Europie* (Warsaw, 1993), 9–10.

still in the 1970s, later on, when reaching the retirement age, they contributed to its 'aging'. It was for this reason that in 1950, the urban elderly population (above 65) was smaller by less than 0.4 million than its rural counterpart; in 1960, the difference lessened to almost 200,000 and then, as of 1970, to approx. 100,000. In 1980, the excess of older people in towns was nearly 150,000 and in 1987, almost 250,000. Between 1950 and 1985, the population aged 60/60+ increased in urban areas almost fourfold (0.6 into 2.4 million), and less than twofold (1.1 to 2.1 million) for rural areas. The trend remained permanent: the old age ratio (elderly versus total population, per cent) performed lower for urban than rural areas throughout the period – the distance increasing as years passed.<sup>2</sup>

The spatial distribution of older people in communist Poland was moreover informed by migrations between the various regions of the country. Of particular relevance in this respect was the post-war wave of resettlement to the so-called Recovered Territories. The migrants were, mostly, young people; once resettled, they would set up their families (as of 1948, the marriage index was 16.3 per 1,000 inhabitants, with 13.3 per 1,000 for Poland as a whole) and more children were born there (40.8 per 1,000 as of 1950, the country's average being 30.7 per 1,000). As a result, in the late 1970s the percentage rate of the elderly proved particularly low there – the agricultural regions of eastern Poland being the other extreme.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth remarking, at last, that old age in the People's Republic, in quantitative terms, primarily affected females. This trend is visible beginning with the first years after the war, intensifying gradually. In 1990, people aged 65 or more constituted 12.2 per cent of the society as a whole, whereas the rate for the female population amounted to 14.7 per cent and for males, 9.6 per cent.<sup>4</sup> This domination was growing with age, which was primarily related to the so-called excessive

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<sup>2</sup> Władysław Kondrat, 'Demograficzne aspekty starzenia się ludności Polski', in Przemysław Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia i problemy ludzi starych* (Warsaw, 1986), 148.

<sup>3</sup> Rajmund Rybiński, *Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne w półwieczu 1945–1995* (Toruń, 1997), 35–43; GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja ludzi starszych* (Departament Badań Demograficznych i Społecznych, Warsaw, 1982), 19; Kondrat, 'Demograficzne aspekty', 143; Lucyna Frąckiewicz, *Karta praw człowieka starego* (Warsaw, 1985), 26–7; Jan Łopato, 'Społeczna kwestia ludzi starych na wsi', in Barbara Rysz-Kowalczyk (ed.), *Społeczne kwestie starości* (Studia nad kwestiami społecznymi, Warsaw, 1991), 44, Tab. 3.

<sup>4</sup> 'Wstęp', in Brunon Synak (ed.), *Polska starość* (Gdańsk, 2003), 12, Tab. 1.1.

mortality among elderly males. Taking into account the fact that an overwhelming majority of the elderly in the late 1970s and early 1980s were aged 65 to 79 (86.6% in 1978; 84.6% in 1981),<sup>5</sup> the above-outlined trend of increasing dominance of females appears reconfirmed.

Against the background of the Polish society, older people were moreover distinct with their worse education (particularly, in rural areas), as confirmed by the CSO statistics of the 1970s and 1980s. As of 1978, tertiary education represented 4.5 per cent of the public at large, the figure for those aged 65 and more being 1.9 per cent (incl. 3.3% men and 1.0% women). Poor education, in the same year, was the case with 2.1 per cent all over Poland, whilst the rate for the eldest (65 or more of age) was 13.6 per cent (mostly, in rural areas).<sup>6</sup> CSO research from 1984–9 confirmed that about a half of the elderly (aged sixty and more) had elementary education background, while 20–25 per cent never completed their elementary school. This resulted from broader educational changes. Older people, born before 1939, most of them in the countryside, faced much lesser educational opportunity than the increasing population of Poles born after 1945, the time dissemination of education was increasingly efficient.<sup>7</sup>

### III MATERIAL LIVING CONDITIONS

What were the living conditions of the elderly, against the People's Republic society as a whole, and how did they change? To answer this question primarily calls for determining the sources, and actual amounts, of their income; this has proved an extremely hard task, due to a shortage of systematic and comparable analyses.

The first post-war comprehensive research into the material situation of the elderly (aged 65 or above) was undertaken by Jerzy Piotrowski's team in late 1966 and early 1967. As it was found, 48 per cent of people aged 65 or above used agricultural holdings as a source of income; with 45 per cent of them, retirement and social pensions

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<sup>5</sup> GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja ludzi starszych*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Daszyńska, 'Warunki bytu ludzi starszych', in Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia*, 359; GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja bytowa ludzi starszych w 1989* (Warsaw, 1990), XXII.

were such source. For this age category, the main source of upkeep consisted of four types of income: retirement and social pensions – for 42 per cent; farm-based income – 40 per cent; assistance from their offspring – 7 per cent; income from labour other than farming – 7 per cent. Among people not connected with farm holdings, a dominant position (71%) was taken by retirement and social pension, the other major items being earned income (11%) and assistance provided by offspring (10%). For farming people, the farm was the main source of income in 84 per cent cases, social or retirement pension – for 8 per cent, offspring's assistance – 4 per cent. Every fifth polled declared two sources of income; every hundredth, three or more.

Low social and retirement pensions rates caused that they could not be the only – or, as in many cases, the main – source of the pensioners' income. The analyses produced by Piotrowski's team found that 33 per cent of the beneficiaries had other sources of income apart from their pension; these included, mainly, income from farm holding and from their own work outside farming. What stemmed from these analyses was also the disturbing phenomenon of a considerable group of older people (13%) with no pecuniary revenue, or such whose revenue was undefined (20%). This was mainly due to the fact that some benefits, particularly in rural areas, were received by them in non-pecuniary form. On this occasion, the regularity was confirmed whereby the respondents' income goes down with aging – as described by the researchers analysing the circumstances of pensioners in communist Poland.<sup>8</sup>

In 1979, CSO, together with the Institute of Social Economy, questioned more than 1,000 females and males of retirement age, inhabiting urban areas (aged 60+ and 65+, respectively). As it turned out, for 75 per cent of them the basic source of income was social or retirement pension; 12,5 per cent were supported by their spouse (in most cases, women being provided for by their pensioner husbands). In total, some 90 per cent of the polled were dependent on the income provided by the social security system. A mere 5 per cent drew their main income from labour, while 17 per cent declared they performed some additional activities.

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<sup>8</sup> Jerzy Nadolski, 'Sytuacja materialna ludzi starszych', in Jerzy Piotrowski and Jan Kordos (eds.), *Miejsce człowieka starego w rodzinie i społeczeństwie* (Warsaw, 1973), 314–33.

Analysis of the income mix for households of the elderly, per household member, has shown that every twenty-fifth household had an income so low that it did not even cover the biological minimum (less than 800 złoty per month per person). In the subsequent range, 45 per cent respondents were below the minimum subsistence level (with 900–1,900 zł per person). The financial situation of almost a half of the elderly under analysis was thus, generally, tough, while it proved clearly worse among individuals supported by their spouse (a non-working wife would receive low allowances) or by other members of the household. On the opposite pole, the percentage of older people receiving higher income, in excess of 4,000 zł per month per household member, was as low as approximately 4.5 per cent.<sup>9</sup> As for the same year, CSO estimated the average monthly income per person in pensioners' households at 2,563 zł, the figure for working-age households being 3,077 zł.<sup>10</sup>

Some relevant information concerning the situation of the elderly population was produced by CSO's research on household budgets. Chronologically, the last such research before the systemic transition was carried out in 1988, showing that 8 per cent of the elderly were members of low-income households (up to 22,000 zł per month); the like indicator as for 1985 (with the income test of up to 6,000 zł) equalled 20.1 per cent. Particularly often, low income proved to be the case with married couples keeping the house together with their grandchildren (32.2%) and older people supported by their spouse (19.9%) or children (14.3%); elderly people from peasant households also fell into this category (11.2%).<sup>11</sup> According to a CSO study, as of 1988, the average monthly income for pensioner households equalled 28,233 zł, working-age households – 33,297 zł, peasant households – 41,043 zł, and worker-peasant households – 35,046 zł.<sup>12</sup>

As there is scarce systematic research available on senior citizens of the People's Republic of Poland, it is worth considering to what extent their material situation is describable with use of the analyses, more frequent as they were, of the pensioner group. As it seems,

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<sup>9</sup> Andrzej Tymowski, 'Sytuacja materialna', in GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja życiowa osób starszych* (Z Prac Zakładu Badań Statystyczno-Ekonomicznych, 127, Warsaw, 1982), 61–2.

<sup>10</sup> *Rocznik Statystyczny GUS 1980* (Warsaw, 1980), 90–1, Tab. 15 (134).

<sup>11</sup> GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja bytowa*, XXVI.

<sup>12</sup> *Rocznik Statystyczny GUS 1989* (Warsaw, 1989), 159, Tab. 15 (229).

conclusions on this topic must be drawn carefully, and this for two important reasons.

First, the correlation between retirement pension and old age was not always as plain as one would be inclined to presume. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, in connection with the so-called early retirement regulations then in force, the age of the people actually using those benefits slid down rapidly; the percentage of female pensioners aged below sixty was in excess of 30 per cent as of 1984, the rate for males up to sixty-four being 44.4 per cent. (The category of 'young pensioners' increased again owing to the regulations reducing the retirement age of miners and those 'working in peculiar conditions'.)<sup>13</sup>

Second, as found and indicated by experts analysing Poland's social security system between 1945 and 1989, the pension system extended to a minority of elderly people until mid-1970s, to say nothing of the fact that the amount of the benefits usually offered no chance for those people to use these benefits as the material basis for their subsistence. Estimates have it that pension benefits were used in 1960 by approximately 37 per cent retirement-aged people, the respective rates for 1970 and 1978 being 40 per cent and approximately 50 per cent<sup>14</sup> (with 27% retirement-aged people earning their living from work). Michał Winiewski states that in the late 1980 social and retirement pensions were received by less than 60 per cent people classed in this category.<sup>15</sup> A representative CSO study of 1989, embracing persons aged sixty and more (a different category than in the earlier quoted research), indicated that retirement pension was the source of income for 54.8 per cent and social pension, for 25 per cent of them (the respective rates in a similar 1985 research equalling 50.4% and 25.3%), thereof: farmer's pension – 11 per cent, own work 17.5 per cent (including 12.4% at one's own individual farm).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Wojciech Muszalski, *Zatrudnienie a ubezpieczenie społeczne* (Warsaw, 1992), 150–1.

<sup>14</sup> Women aged 60 and more, men aged 65 and more. The index-based differences, compared to the earlier-quoted findings of Jerzy Piotrowski's team, may be based on different methodologies applied for such research and from the assumption by the said team of a different age criterion for elderly people (65 or above for females and males alike).

<sup>15</sup> Michał Winiewski, 'System emerytalny i problemy jego doskonalenia', *Polityka społeczna*, 8 (1980) (cited by Lila Mackiewicz-Golnik, *Powszechne ubezpieczenie emerytalne. Aspekty ekonomiczne i problemy finansowania* [Warsaw, 1983], 23–5).

<sup>16</sup> GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja bytowa*, 1 ff.

The fact that the social security system remained the basis for livelihoods for a majority of senior citizens in the 1980s primarily ensued from an extended pension system for farmers. Whereas 0.01 per cent of the total rural retirement-aged population received such benefits in 1963, the 1982 figure – should the experts' findings be believed – amounted to 28.9 per cent, finally reaching 62.8 per cent, as of 1989.<sup>17</sup> The reason for this instrument becoming widespread was the conditions of its granting, which became increasingly opportune for farmers. The conditions laid down in the Laws enacted in 1962 and 1968 (as modified in 1971 and 1974) were not encouraging (primarily, the need to give the land away to the state), the amendments made in 1977 and 1982, providing for an option to transfer the holding to successors (since 1982) and waiving the principle of one pension allocated per married couple, contributed to increased numbers of pensioners using the opportunity.<sup>18</sup> Farmer's pensions became ever since a real competition to the life annuity agreement, being the traditional social security institution for the countryside elderly population.<sup>19</sup> Still in 1974, according to the estimations proposed

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<sup>17</sup> Łopato, 'Społeczna kwestia', 52, Tab. 6.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this subject, see Barbara Tryfan, *System emerytalny w opiniach ludności wiejskiej* (Warsaw, 1978), 7 ff.; Aleksander Lutyk, *Sytuacja społeczna ludności rolniczej w starszym wieku* (Warsaw, 1984), 113–41.

<sup>19</sup> According to Edmund Spirydowicz, life annuity agreement was first regulated in Poland in 1933, in a code of obligations, following a research on inheritance customs among the peasantry; then, the relevant provisions were laid down in the Polish Civil Code of 1964. As per the code, the concept consisted in the farmstead proprietor – the life annuitant – undertaking to transfer his possession to another person in exchange for lifelong financial support. A relevant agreement was usually concluded within the family, in the form of notarial deed (otherwise being null and void, legally ineffective), enumerating in detail the obligations of the farmstead's purchaser. Otherwise, with such obligations not being detailed, it was assumed that the purchaser was obligated to accept the life annuitant as member of his family (house) community, providing him with accommodation, clothing, and food, and ensure assistance and nursing in case of illness. After the life annuitant's death, the contractual party was obligated to organise a funeral, in line with the local customs. See Edmund Spirydowicz, *Ziemia i prawo* (Warsaw, 1977), 107–10; Aleksander Oleszko, *Rola umów w stosunkach wiejskich w świetle praktyki sądowej i notarialnej* (Warsaw, 1988), 25–7, 46, 72, 76. A very interesting analysis of the old age security systems in the Polish countryside between the 19th century and 1939 is offered by Bartłomiej Gapiński in his study *Ludzie starzy na wsi polskiej od schyłku XIX wieku po rok 1939* (Poznań, 2014), 91–108, 341–69.

by Aleksander Lutyk, a total of 656,000 people in rural areas were dependent on their families, including 337,600 on an annuity basis.<sup>20</sup> As determined by Barbara Tryfan, in turn, in the 1970s some 50 per cent life annuity agreements remained unimplemented, which was reflected in court trials for overdue benefits.<sup>21</sup> This latter datum forms an important premise for hypothesising that the fate of the elderly was not infrequently intricate, and their family relations adversarial, particularly in the countryside.

These tensions are attested by the letters received by Polish Radio editorial teams from elderly parents who were outrageously treated (beaten, famished and humiliated) by their adult sons or daughters<sup>22</sup> as well as numerous reportages – for instance, analysing legal actions.<sup>23</sup>

Bearing in mind these limitations in drawing conclusions, let us try and identify the major distinguishing features of elderly people's material situation, using to this end, in the first place, the findings concerning the so-called subsistence level.<sup>24</sup>

According to Andrzej Tymowski's calculations, in 1966, as many as over 70 per cent pensioners received benefits that would not cover the needs of the subsistence level reckoned for that year. The 1968 pension reform brought about a certain improvement. What this meant is that early in the 1970s, when retiring, a vast majority of old-age pensioners (nine out of ten) had their pension afforded

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<sup>20</sup> Lutyk, *Sytuacja społeczna*, 124–5.

<sup>21</sup> Tryfan, *System emerytalny*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Warsaw, Archiwum Dokumentacji Aktowej Polskiego Radia i Telewizji (hereinafter: ADA), 1050/28, Biuro Listów Komitetu do Spraw Radiofonii “Polskie Radio”, ‘O sytuacji starych ludzi w rodzinie’, *Biuletyn* (Warsaw, 1959), no. 5, 19 Jan.

<sup>23</sup> See, i.a., Barbara Tryfan, *Ziemia i ludzie* (Warsaw, 1971), 68–84, 156–66; Ludwik Staszyński, *Notatnik wiejski* (Warsaw, 1973), 140–5; Józef Grabowicz, *Pejzaż wiejski z Temidą* (Warsaw, 1965), 37–46, 159–72.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the history of studies on the subsistence level in Poland, taking account of the changeability of the assumed criteria (income/expenditure) and methodological differences, see Helena Góralska, *Dochody i konsumpcja ludności żyjącej w niedostatku* (Warsaw, 1984), 10–13; *eadem*, *Minimum socjalne. Metody obliczeń i interpretacja* (Warsaw, 1986); Henryk Zarychta, *Minimum socjalne w polityce społecznej (problemy metodologiczne i próba analizy)* (Łódź, 1982), 30–6; Jan J. Rutkowski, ‘W kwestii kryterium ubóstwa’, *Praca i Zabezpieczenie Społeczne*, 9 (1988), 24–6; Lucyna Deniszczuk, ‘Minimum socjalne i minimum kryzysowe a warunki życia rodzin robotniczych’, in Przemysław Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki bytu robotników* (Warsaw, 1984), 213.

at a level ensuring satisfaction of their basic needs. However, only one out of five of those who had begun receiving the benefit in 1958 or before, received a payment in excess of the 1970 subsistence level.<sup>25</sup>

Studies conducted by Michał Winiewski have shown that as of 1975, almost two-thirds of Polish pensioners received benefits below the minimum subsistence level. This situation was further worsened by the fact that a considerable, though indeterminable, number of those people supported another person with the thus low pension. It was in their families, along with numerous or incomplete families and people affected by stroke of fate – that poverty tended to concentrate.<sup>26</sup>

Other studies have estimated the index of pensioners with unsatisfactory current income as follows: 1975 – 54.6 per cent, 1980 – 38.8, 1982 – 40.6, 1983 – 59.3 per cent. For the working population, the respective rates equalled: 16.4, 13.8, 26.9, and 32 per cent.<sup>27</sup>

The findings related to the percentages of low-income people by type of household, as for the period 1980–9, are detailed in Table 3 – based on the CSO statistics for households, used in analyses of family budgets.

As can thus be seen, the rate of households with old-age pensioners with per-capita income below the subsistence level fluctuated, while amounting to minimum 23 per cent of them in the period 1981–6. Based on the quoted study, it appears clear that in the last decade of what was the People's Republic of Poland, the income crisis reached its bottom in 1983.

Importantly, in the years 1981–5 the pensioner household income was lower than the income for worker households, and the distance between them was still widening (in 1984–5). The former constituted 80 per cent of the latter in 1981; the 1982 figure was 84.5 per cent (which was related to compensations for increased prices of foodstuffs,

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<sup>25</sup> Andrzej Tymowski, *Minimum socjalne. Metodyka i próba określenia* (Warsaw, 1973), 95–7.

<sup>26</sup> Michał Winiewski, *Doskonalenie systemu rentowo-emerytalnego: uwarunkowania demograficzne i ekonomiczne* (Studia i Materiały – Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, 18 [54], Warsaw, 1976), 25 (cited by Helena Balicka-Kozłowska, *Sytuacja życiowa i potrzeby ludności starszej* [Studia i Materiały – Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, 7 {104}, Warsaw, 1979], 20–2).

<sup>27</sup> Deniszczyk, 'Minimum socjalne', 221; Bogumiła Szopa, *Podział dochodów a poziom życia ludności (na przykładzie Polski)* (Zeszyty Naukowe – Akademia Ekonomiczna w Krakowie. Seria Specjalna, Monografie, 122, Cracow, 1994), 73, Tab. 12.

fuel and energy of 1 February 1982), for 1983 – 80.2, 1984 – 79.1, 1985 – 78.6 per cent.<sup>28</sup> According to the findings for the year 1989, 10 per cent pensioners were exposed to marginalisation, for the income earned by them were below 70 per cent of the subsistence level.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 3.** Percentage of low-income people per individual, by type of household, in Poland in 1981–9

Year	Income (low), in thousand zł per month	Households				
		Total	Worker	Worker-peasant	Peasant	Pensioner
1981	2.5	14.2	10.6	16.4	16.9	23.3
1982	5.0	20.0	16.8	22.1	21.7	27.7
1983	6.0	27.2	22.3	25.0	31.9	40.9
1984	7.0	24.4	19.6	23.7	33.0	37.7
1985	8.0	22.6	18.5	21.1	30.3	34.9
1986	9.5	21.3	17.9	20.6	29.8	29.9
1987	12.0	25.3	24.1	23.9	31.9	26.9
1988	20.0	20.0	17.9	16.6	24.9	28.4
1989	70.0	16.3	13.7	12.3	22.3	26.4

Sources: Bogumiła Szopa, *Podział dochodów a poziom życia ludności (na przykładzie Polski)* (Cracow, 1994), 74, Tab. 13; Jan Kordos, 'Pomiar ubóstwa w Polsce', *Wiadomości Statystyczne*, 11 (1991), 4; Helena Góralska, 'Sytuacja materialna emerytów i rencistów w latach osiemdziesiątych', in Przemysław Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia i problemy ludzi starych* (Warsaw, 1986), 148, 391–5; AAN, KC PZPR, Wydział Polityki Społeczno-Ekonomicznej, LXX/133, Stanowisko Komisji Polityki Społecznej i Ochrony Zdrowia KC PZPR do opracowania pt. 'Warunki życia ludności w latach 1981–1986', Warsaw, 21 May 1987, p. 157; GUS [CSO], *Zróżnicowanie dochodów kosztów utrzymania i spożycia w 1980 r.* (Warsaw, 1981), 27; GUS [CSO], *Warunki życia ludności w latach 1981–1985* (Warsaw, 1986), 32–3.

<sup>28</sup> Helena Góralska, 'Sytuacja materialna emerytów i rencistów w latach osiemdziesiątych', in Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia i problemy*, 391–5; Lidia Beskid, 'Ekonomiczny i społeczny wymiar przemian warunków życia w latach 1980–1985', in *eadem* (ed.), *Warunki i sposób życia – zachowania przystosowawcze w kryzysie* (Warsaw, 1989), 40 – estimates that the 1973 per-capita income for pensioner households amounted to 88% of the blue-collar worker income; the proportions for the following years was: 1975 – 83%, 1978 – 87%, 1980 – 90%, 1981 – 86%, 1982 – 89%, 1983 – 84%, 1984 – 84%, 1985 – 84%.

<sup>29</sup> Bogusława Urbaniak, *Praca zawodowa po przejściu na emeryturę. Społeczno-ekonomiczne przesłanki powrotu emerytów do aktywnego życia zawodowego* (Łódź, 1998), 154.

The considerable poverty in this group, as implied by the quoted research results, combined with increasing range of social security recipients, greatly influenced the income ratios for retirement-aged population in its totality. Albeit varying as to details, they generally tend to indicate that households of elderly people were particularly exposed to suffer low income.

Studies of retirement-pensioner and disabled-pensioner budgets by territory seem to attest that the provinces with the dominant agricultural function were the domiciles of the least well-off people. Early in the 1970s, these voivodeships included: Lublin, Białystok, Warsaw, Łódź, Kielce, Cracow, and Rzeszów. At the other extreme were aged inhabitants of the most affluent areas and townships, such as Warsaw, Poznań, Cracow, Łódź, Wrocław, and Voivodeship of Katowice.<sup>30</sup> Such income distribution was an effect of several crucial factors – the primary one being that the largest cities concentrated more well-educated and well-paid specialised workers and professionals compared to the predominantly farming areas. It was there that large establishments were situated run by the heavily invested sectors, in line with the economic policy priorities. This trend proved to reappear in the following years as well. The spread of the farmer pension system did not hinder it, as the pension money was considerably lower than the occupational pension.

Low income conditioned the consumption profiles, in the first place. As the Piotrowski team found in 1967, asked about their most troublesome expenses, the polled – a cohort aged sixty-five and above – pointed to clothing and footwear (30%), farm management (18%), foodstuffs (17%), and medical care (12%). Those living on pension, performing work other than agricultural, or supported by their children found it the hardest to afford clothes and foods and, subsequently, to pay for their fuel, electricity and gas. From the most farming-oriented countryside areas through to large cities, those consumers found it increasingly difficult to satisfy their needs as regards food, clothes, and accommodation. Studies have confirmed that the primary difference in income was set between farming and non-farming population.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> GUS [CSO], *Analiza wyników jednorazowego badania ankietowego warunków bytu ludności (Dochody. Warunki mieszkaniowe. Wyposażenie gospodarstw domowych w przedmioty trwałego użytkowania)*. 1972 r. (Warsaw, 1975), 24–31.

<sup>31</sup> Nadolski, 'Sytuacja materialna', 355–7.

A CSO study of pensioner household budgets, first made in late 1971 and early 1972, showed that the average spend on amounted to 56.7 per cent of income, with 10 per cent allocated to arrangement and maintenance of dwellings, 9.6 per cent – clothing and footwear, 6.6 per cent – fuel, heating and electricity, 5.7 per cent – cultural and educational purposes, tourism and recreation, 4.2 per cent – hygiene, sanitation and healthcare purposes. 65 per cent of the total income was expended on food within the lowest-income group.<sup>32</sup>

The improved material situation of Polish society as a whole, including pensioners, in what is termed ‘the Gierek decade’ (1971–80), was reflected in the expenditure profiles of the following years. Based on the CSO research, the spend on the major item, which is foodstuffs, was at 52–53 per cent for the said groups of households – the rate for worker households being 34–36, peasant 41–45, worker-peasant 38–40 per cent.<sup>33</sup>

This positive trend faced a cessation later in the 1980s. In 1981, the share of food expenditure in pensioner households equalled 47.8 per cent – against 36.5 per cent for their worker peers and 42 per cent in worker-peasant ones.<sup>34</sup> However, as for 1982, the pensioner household figure amounted to 57.3 per cent (50.8% for worker households) and for the following three years, 54.4 to 55.1 per cent (worker: 42.5–42.9%).<sup>35</sup> Consumers facing economic shrink and shortages withdrew their potential, refocusing on ensured consumption of indispensable goods – foodstuffs, whose prices were growing, were primary among them.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> GUS [CSO], *Budżety domowe rodzin emerytów i rencistów w roku 1971/72* (Warsaw, 1973), 15–16.

<sup>33</sup> GUS [CSO], *Zróżnicowanie wydatków konsumpcyjnych gospodarstw domowych w grupach społeczno-zawodowych w latach 1974–1975* (Z Prac Zakładu Badań Statystyczno-Ekonomicznych, 103, Warsaw, 1978).

<sup>34</sup> Frąckiewicz, *Karta praw*, 91.

<sup>35</sup> Górska, ‘Sytuacja materialna’, 397 ff. Somewhat different estimates, but generally concordant in trend, are shown in Szopa, *Podział dochodów*, 58, Tab. 9. According to this author’s findings, the 1988 food spend share in total expenditure was 48.0% for pensioner households, the respective values for worker and peasant counterparts being 38.1% and 39%; the corresponding rates for 1989 were 58.7%, 45.8% and 45.3%. A similar regularity in the distribution of income was shown for the years 1988–9 by the research conducted and described by Zofia Zarzycka and Jan Więcek, *Przemiany w konsumpcji gospodarstw domowych w Polsce w okresie transformacji (w latach 1988–1992)* (Łódź, 1996), 50, Annex 11.

<sup>36</sup> Beskid, ‘Ekonomiczny i społeczny’, 23–4; Róża Milic-Czerniak, ‘Adaptacja konsumentów do warunków kryzysu ekonomiczno-społecznego w pierwszej połowie lat osiemdziesiątych’, in Beskid (ed.), *Warunki i sposób życia*, 118–21.

In most studies concerning the spheres of shortage in the People's Republic of Poland, the category of subsistence level was applied, calculable with use of income criterion. What is worth bearing in mind is that low income was not always identical with shortage. It happened in the 1980s that low-income households were furnished with durable goods, cars included. In the situation where accessibility of goods was based not only on price but also, and sometimes prevalently, on complicated, often informal, rationing systems, such discrepancy could be of relevance. The low consumption, rather than low income, criterion was first applied by Helena Górska for the periods 1974 and 1980–2. Her studies showed that for one-member pensioner households the surplus of consumption over income fluctuated between 4 per cent as of 1974 and 7.4 per cent in 1980–2; for indigent households, the span amounted to 7.8 per cent and to 30.4 per cent. In four-member worker households, which were researched for comparison, the 1974 surplus of income over consumption equalled 8.7 per cent, both factors striking a balance in 1982. Whereas the surplus for indigent worker households amounted to 2.5 per cent in 1974, it turned into an estimated deficit of 10.5 per cent by 1982. What this tells us is that, even during the 1970s' heyday, pensioner households had to make use of additional sources of consumption; with the exacerbating crisis, the trend became solidified, if not deepened. These extra sources were, primarily, the fast-liquidated savings and financial assistance from relatives and/or acquaintances (living at home or abroad).<sup>37</sup>

The search for additional sources of consumption assumed, moreover, yet another form. Studies on lifestyles in Polish urban areas evidenced that between 1974 and 1982 income based on allotments increased ninefold in retirement-pensioner households, and fivefold in worker ones. Their share in total revenue increased in the former group to 4.3 per cent in 1982, up from 2 per cent in 1974; for the latter, the growth was 1.4 per cent into 1.7 per cent. As of 1982, the proportion of goods yielded by the consumer's own allotment in food expenditure was approximately 10 per cent for retired households and 5.3 per cent for worker ones (the rate for households run by retired with primary and incomplete primary education was as high as 20%). In parallel, 17.4 per cent

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<sup>37</sup> Górska, *Dochody i konsumpcja*, 9–37.

retired households and 16 worker households declared a kitchen garden holding.<sup>38</sup>

The need to assign such a considerable portion of the income for food resulted in drastic savings made on other expenditure; this led to the elderly finding it difficult to buy clothes or footwear. The only study focused on this problem that I am aware of was carried out in 1973 by CSO and the Instytut Handlu Wewnętrznego (Domestic Trade Institute) – based on a sample of households featuring retired pensioners – proved that elderly males possessed, on average: 6.7 shirts, 2.4 suits, 2 pairs of trousers, and 1.9 sweaters; females had 4.8 dresses, 4.3 blouses, 2.8 skirts, 2.1 sweaters, 1.9 suits. As for heavy clothing (overcoats, jackets, pelisses), the mean personal assets was one per person. The average Polish pensioner owned two pairs of footwear, at the utmost.<sup>39</sup> With all its shortcomings, these particular averaged data make an outline of problems shared by the elderly population more feasible and reliable.

Housing was another important component of the picture. The situation in this respect was catastrophic in early post-war period, as confirmed by a 1948 study of pensioner populations in working-class areas of Lodz and Warsaw: overpopulation of less than three persons per accommodation space unit (typically, a room); the available living space was 5 to 7 sq. m per person.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Piotr Gliński, 'Ekonomiczne aspekty życia codziennego', in Andrzej Siciński (ed.), *Style życia w miastach polskich (u progu kryzysu)* (Wrocław, etc., 1988), 286; Róża Milic-Czerniak, *Sposoby ochrony wzorów konsumpcji w miejskich gospodarstwach domowych w okresie kryzysu*, in Lidia Beskid (ed.), *Warunki życia i potrzeby społeczeństwa polskiego 1982: raport z badania* (Warsaw, 1984), 68. Kazimiera Guraj-Kaczmarek and Zofia Zarzycka, 'Dochody ludności w starszym wieku w Polsce na podstawie budżetów gospodarstw domowych', in Ewa Frączak et al., *Wybrane uwarunkowania i konsekwencje procesu starzenia się ludności Polski* (Kształtowanie Procesów Demograficznych a Rozwój Społeczno-Gospodarczy Polski, 10, Monografie i Opracowania – Szkoła Główna Planowania i Statystyki, 223, Warsaw, 1987) – present somewhat different estimations (100–1), specifying the allotment-based income as 3.1% of the total income of the Polish elderly people in 1980, the figures for the following years being 3.8% – 1981, 4.6% – 1982, and 7.3% – 1983.

<sup>39</sup> GUS [CSO], *Charakterystyka dochodów i stan posiadania odzieży i obuwia osób pobierających emeryturę* (Informacje. Materiały statystyczne – Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warsaw, 1974), 24–6.

<sup>40</sup> Wacław Szubert, 'Badania nad społeczną rolą rent ubezpieczeniowych', *Studia i materiały z historii ubezpieczeń społecznych w Polsce*, 3 (1985), 129.

According to the findings of Piotrowski's team (1967), 39 per cent old-aged households were run separately and 61 per cent on a shared basis (thereof, 90% together with offspring), including in agricultural sector – 27 per cent separately and outside agriculture – 49 per cent.

The tendency to run husbandry on one's own was fading with age. Almost 40 per cent polled households occupied overpopulated accommodation units (the criterion being: 1 room per 1 resident for one-room flats; 1 room per 2 residents in case of larger flats). 75 per cent elderly people slept in a bedroom, approximately 25 per cent in a kitchen; 85 per cent of them had a separate bedding (shared bedding being more frequent in farmer households). The furnishings varied primarily by residential area (urban vs. rural). The highest-standard facilities (electricity, water supply, sink or basin, restroom, bedroom) were supplied with 26 per cent of non-agricultural old people and merely 1 per cent for agricultural (electricity alone was provided to 41 and 70 per cent of these consumers, respectively). 32 per cent of the polled elderly people used water-supply facilities, a mere 20 per cent using a restroom available within their dwelling. The percentage of the elderly listening to the radio totalled 68 per cent (75% and 59% beside and within agriculture, respectively), watching television – 24 per cent (36% and 11%), using washing machine – 39 per cent (49% and 27%).<sup>41</sup>

The 1970s and 1980s saw a bettering of the standard and furnishings of old people's accommodations – as testified, for instance, by a general census of 1978 (Tab. 4.)

The ratios describing the furnishings of elderly residents' dwellings performed lower than for the population at large. In urban areas, the share of people aged 15 or more whose dwellings were equipped with bathroom and central heating was higher by, respectively, 8.3, 16.1 and 17.0 than the percentage for senior citizens. It is worth to add that in 1978 some 75 per cent of all households managed by persons aged 65 and above used their accommodation units on an autonomous basis whereas 25 per cent shared their dwellings with other households.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Danuta Kozińska, 'Sytuacja i potrzeby mieszkaniowe ludzi starszych', in Piotrowski and Kordos (eds.), *Miejsce człowieka starego*, 287–302.

<sup>42</sup> AAN, Rada ds. Ludzi Starszych, Inwalidów i Osób Niepełnosprawnych, 1/44, Danuta Kozińska, 'Warunki mieszkaniowe seniorów', in 'Materiały konferencji

**Table 4.** Amenities in accommodation units of the elderly (65+), 1978

	Total	Urban	Rural
Aged 65/65+, thous.	3,512	1,793	1,719
Dwellings furnished with:	Per cent		
water supply	54.4	80.7	27.0
restroom	37.3	60.8	12.8
bathroom	36.2	54.4	17.1
central heating	25.4	39.2	11.0
hot water	31.8	47.3	15.7
gas	39.5	62.6	15.3

Sources: AAN, Rada ds. Ludzi Starszych, Inwalidów i Osób Niepełnosprawnych, 1/44, Danuta Kosińska, 'Warunki mieszkaniowe seniorów', in 'Materiały konferencji naukowej "Ludzie starsi w Polsce, ich warunki i potrzeby", zorganizowanej przez Komitet Problemów Pracy i Polityki Społecznej PAN i Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, Warszawa, 12 maja 1982', 287–98.

A 1985 study showed that 61.7 per cent of the elderly (60+) used their flat or apartment on their own, whereas 31 per cent resided not self-reliantly, occupying at least one room each; 7.2 per cent dwelled in a part of the room or in a connecting room. Much more frequently than the other groups, older people inhabiting pensioner households tended to live on their own (82%); the share of self-reliant urban elderly individuals much outgrew the one of their rural peers; those aged eighty and more formed a definite majority in this respect. A half (51.3%) of the old-age population used an accommodation unit up to 39 sq. m in floor area. As for the same year, 99 per cent elderly households were equipped with electricity installations, 74 per cent with water-supply facility (incl. peasant households – 46.9%; pensioner – 80.1%); 39.5 per cent with central heating (24.4%/40.3%); 72.7 per cent with sink or basin (44.6%/77.8%), 60.5 per cent with lavatory (31.3%/65.7%); 54.4 per cent with bedroom (32.7%/56.2%); 55.1 per cent with gas supply (25%/60.7%); 14.4 per cent with a telephone set (3.3%/17%). The furnishings of households of the elderly who once were white-collar workers were optimum, in every respect.

naukowej "Ludzie starsi w Polsce, ich warunki i potrzeby", zorganizowanej przez Komitet Problemów Pracy i Polityki Społecznej PAN i Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, Warszawa, 12 maja 1982', 287–98. For the corresponding estimates of 1972, see GUS [CSO], *Analiza wyników*, 60–6.

Most of the aged people (67.8%), dwelled in accommodation units located at the ground-floor level – particularly those of peasant (99.1%) and worker-peasant households (97.8%). Standard household appliances were increasingly widespread – with 87 per cent households having a black-and-white TV set, colour TV appearing with 7.2 per cent of them, table or portable radio set – with 76.9 and 39.0 per cent, respectively; washing machine and electric centrifuge – 85.2 per cent, automated laundry device – 12.4 per cent, vacuum cleaner – 65.3 per cent. In this respect, again, households of former white collars were in the lead.<sup>43</sup> The comfort of residential conditions was influenced by yet another factor: as of 1984, residential facilities built before 1945 were inhabited by every third Polish household, a half of older people's households being represented in this category.<sup>44</sup>

The results of these studies seem to reflect a significant trend: the elderly tended to more frequently live on their own in the late years of Edward Gierek's rule, compared to the 1960s. This trend came to a close in the 1980s – possibly due to the economic crisis, manifested by declining ratios in housing construction industry and the ageing of the entire population under analysis. This intensified the necessity for elderly people requiring care to cohabitate. This being the case, sharing the flat with children coming of age, or grandchildren was practiced more and more often. Albeit the housing standard available to the elderly was improving, it still remained, not surprisingly, behind the one for younger professionally active. After all, new apartments furnished with facilities and utilities were received by the latter group, rather than pensioners.

At an older age, the people tended to change their lifestyles, their social activities diminished with the passage of time. In most cases, retirement-aged people ceased to work (which was more common in urban than in rural areas), which in many a case gave rise to mental problems.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Daszyńska, 'Warunki bytu', 380–8.

<sup>44</sup> Danuta Kosińska and Anna Lutostańska, 'Gospodarstwa domowe prowadzone przez osoby w wieku 60 lat i więcej oraz ich warunki mieszkaniowe (w latach 1978 i 1984)', in Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia i problemy*, 445–53.

<sup>45</sup> This is confirmed by Wanda Białecka, a social care worker from Warsaw, in her memoirist essay on the 1960s, based on the long years of her experience: "I meet less and less impecunious people these days. There emerges a need, instead, to extend special care to those who have lived and worked up to their seniority

This, in turn, normally implied that their social contacts shrank considerably. A rapid financial degradation, ensuing from retirement or becoming a social pensioner, also had a say in the process; their position deteriorated with age as the benefits were not adjusted. Numerous studies have confirmed that low income was an essential reason for breaking or loosening interpersonal contacts by the retirees and by many disabled; this factor also prevented them from establishing such contacts. The sense of isolation and loneliness was deepened by deaths of the spouse and/or other family members, friends, and peers.<sup>46</sup>

For these reasons, elderly people became even more 'family-centric'. Their relationships with their children usually extended to reciprocal aid, the elderly proving more active in this field. If the CSO research of 1985 is to be trusted, such assistance mainly consisted in grandchild-minding, offering accommodation space, sporadic financial help or aid in kind, and household running.<sup>47</sup>

What old age meant for daily time budget is specified, i.a., by the studies conducted by CSO since 1969. Those from the 1970s and 1980s tell us that the time spent on physiological activities (mainly, sleep) was extended. Old-age pensioners in the mid-1970s slept over nine hours a day, on average, which was approximately 1.5 hours in excess of the sleep time of active workers. The time budget was much diverse for the sexes: as attested by a 1976 study, with older retired-pensioner families the share of males in doing housework was rather insignificant – save for home equipment repairs, coal carrying,

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and now are going to retire. But this retirement seems to be the hardest period in their lives. They find it so hard to accept that there is no labour discipline they would have to observe; they have been placed outside the circle of those in demand, as it appears to them. In a word, they often go to pieces.”; see *eadem*, ‘Sztuka współdziałania dla dobra ludzi’, in Władysław Milczarek (ed.), *Pamiętniki opiekunów społecznych. Konkurs redakcji “Biuletynu Opiekuna Społecznego” w roku 1969* (Warsaw, 1971), 58–9. Other memoirist sources confirm this description; see, i.a., Ireneusz Łapiński (ed.), *Pierwszy rok na emeryturze* (Warsaw, 1981). For the related research, see Krzysztof Zagórski, ‘Sytuacja zawodowa’, in GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja życiowa*, 39.

<sup>46</sup> Balicka-Kozłowska, *Sytuacja życiowa*, 23–4.

<sup>47</sup> Halina Worach-Kardas, ‘Różne koncepcje starości’, in Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia i problemy*, 25–31. The role of old-age pensioners in succouring their offspring in household chores had once been pointed out by Andrzej Tymowski, ‘Świadczenia spożycia społecznego a budżet czasu’ (paper delivered at a National Statisticians Conference, Sopot, 21–22 September 1973), 6.

and the like. Household and off-household activities of female old-age pensioners took them, on average, six hours per day, while men were busy doing their housework three hours in a day. Preparation of meals was the job of 93 per cent female and 27 per cent male retirees; washing up dishes, tidying and cleaning was done by 89 per cent and 22 per cent of them, respectively. This durable pattern of male/female household activities was also reflected in the leisure-time budget (pensioners had about three hours more of time-off available than active workers), specified as eight hours a day for male and six for female old-age pensioners. Such time was mainly spent on watching television (men did it for longer hours than women). Cinema or theatregoing, sports or tourism were rare activities among that population; walking or strolling was almost the only form of active leisure.<sup>48</sup> A similar study carried out in 1984 showed no visible change in the elderly people's planner – save for one important element: the time they spent outside home, including doing shopping or gardening work at the allotment. This would generally coincide with a popular image of Polish old-age pensioner of the crisis-marked 1980s' decade.<sup>49</sup>

The research concerning the psychophysical condition of the elderly generally tends to emphasise a sense of isolation as typical to this group. Their living on their own is regarded as enabling their proper functioning (as long as possible, due to health constraints) – yet, as they ceased doing regular labour, this very factor could have an adverse bearing on their psyche. The problem was more exacerbated with those living on their own, when, resulting from the post-war migration and urbanisation processes, the children and their ageing parents departed from each other, often at considerable distances. A 1978 estimate had it that 6.1 per cent elderly males and 18.2 per cent females supported themselves financially and lived alone (which was particularly true for widows and widowers).<sup>50</sup>

Considerable difficulties faced by the elderly and their malaise was also caused by living in too dense groups. The situation in this respect was different in countryside areas, owing to the prevailing housing

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<sup>48</sup> GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja ludzi starszych*, 15–16. Also, see Lucjan Adamczuk (ed.), *Budżet czasu mieszkańców Polski* (Statystyka Polski – Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 97, Warsaw, 1978).

<sup>49</sup> Joanna Błasińska, 'Domowy budżet czasu osób starszych', in Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia i problemy*, 490 ff.; Beskid, 'Ekonomiczny i społeczny', 28.

<sup>50</sup> GUS [CSO], *Sytuacja ludzi starszych*, 42 ff.

model (increasingly roomy houses – albeit not as well furnished with utilities systems as in urban areas).

The malaise and fading social activity were also caused by deteriorating health. The studies of Jerzy Piotrowski (1967), Jacek Putz (1978–9) and Joanna Staręga-Piasek (1981–2) have shown that the mobility ratios for the elderly did not essentially change in that period. The estimated proportion of the physically fit within this group was 62–64 per cent, not completely fit – 26.9–27.7 per cent, those unable to leave their house – 6.1–7.44 per cent, bedridden – 3.9–1.9 per cent.<sup>51</sup>

The tough situation of the elderly population was further deepened by the deficits of the social assistance and care system functioning at the time. Poland had in 1960 a total of 42 so-called pensioners' houses,<sup>52</sup> whose number grew to 77 by 1970 and to 101 in 1988; the number of inmates grew, for these years, to 3,583, 7,160, and 8,559, respectively;<sup>53</sup> yet, the actual needs were much greater. A system of specialised social assistance organisations emerged in Poland in 1969, with the first social care worker centres established, affiliated to district outpatient clinics. Before then, from 1959 on, a network of volunteer social care workers was formed, thus resuming the solutions instituted as obligatory in pre-war Poland (since 1928).<sup>54</sup> There were scarce places which old-age pensioners could visit to primarily satisfy their need to enter into social contacts, such as seniors' clubs.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Jerzy Piotrowski, 'Zdrowie i sprawność ludzi starszych', in Piotrowski and Kordos (eds.), *Miejsce człowieka starego*, 53–4. Also, see Barbara Bień and Wojciech Pędich, 'Stan zdrowia ludzi starych i ich potrzeby zdrowotne', in Wójcik (ed.), *Warunki życia i problemy*, 42–59.

<sup>52</sup> Poor conditions prevailing in pensioners' houses (called 'oldsters' houses') were attested, for instance, by letters sent to the Polish Radio in late 1956; see ADA, 1050/15, Biuro Listów Komitetu do Spraw Radiofonii "Polskie Radio", *Biuletyn* (Warsaw, 1956), no. 25, 19 April, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> *Rocznik Statystyczny 1971* (Warsaw, 1971), 555, Tab. 30 (784); GUS [CSO], *Ochrona zdrowia* (Roczniki statystyczne – Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warsaw, 1996), 142–3, Tab. 1 (83).

<sup>54</sup> Janina Szumlicz, *Pomoc społeczna w polskim systemie zabezpieczenia społecznego* (Warsaw, 1987), 51; Joanna Staręga-Piasek et al., *Pomoc społeczna w Polsce*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1984–5), i, 61.

<sup>55</sup> L. Frąckiewicz has found that there were 747 such institutions in 1975 (1,543 in 1989), see *eadem*, *Karta praw*, 124.

#### IV CONCLUSIONS

Based on the remarks made in this essay, it appears that research on old age in what was the People's Republic of Poland is not rooted in 'burnt soil'. Rather much is known about the material, or financial, situation of elderly people functioning under the pension scheme: the credit primarily goes to the findings of specialised scholarly institutions and the Central Statistical Office, based on their research done between the late 1960s and the late 1980s. The primary research needs in this respect concern a few basic questions.

First of all, it is necessary to analyse the authorities' altered policy with respect to the elderly population and old age. The pattern of drawing conclusions in this matter based mainly on exegesis of subsequently issued legal acts should be quit. Instead, in-depth source query is necessary, focused on searching for and identifying the origins of the accepted solutions whose effect has been the enacted legislation. What is needed in the first place is a critical analysis of the social policy and social security system.

Second, studies on life strategies of senior citizens in communist Poland have to be extended. The research in this respect has so far been mainly focused on their professional activities; we know rather little about their positions in their families, frames of mind, and how they were treated by the younger generations.

Thirdly, the lifestyles of those people is the area almost completely absent in social studies. The ways in which the universe of their social contacts was changing (shrinking) are worth considering, as are their interests and ways of participation in culture.

Fourthly, the issues of healthiness and healthcare in the context of the elderly population is worth dealing with on a broader scale.

Fifthly, it is worth to reconstruct their emotional world where sense of loneliness played the crucial role, and finding reasons for satisfaction appeared to be a difficult task.

Sixthly, and lastly, the research programme outlined above should be delivered not only through looking for official and reporting-oriented sources and 'digesting' the outcomes of analyses carried out. It seems necessary to refer to individual or personal sources, such as memoirs, diaries, letters, and complaints. Reportages and audiovisual

sources call for broader use – to possibly enable us to regard the old age in communist Poland also through the eyes of those who once experienced it.

*trans. Tristan Korecki*