

Untapped Resource Potential of Older Persons in Russia: Evidence from Expert Assessments in Tomsk Region

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Abstract— The article presents the discussion on the terminology and definition of the resource potential of older generations. The paper provides the working definition, the structure of the human potential and approaches to assess the untapped human potential, including the human potential of older persons. In addition, the study provides evidence from Tomsk Region, Russia, on expert understanding and assessments of the resource potential of older persons basing on the study of focus groups including individuals who already reached retirement age and professionals from institutions whose primary objective is to work with the senior generation.

Keywords— *resource potential, older persons, untapped potential of older people, Russia, human capital, Tomsk Region, senior generation*

I. INTRODUCTION

A new round of interest to the concept of active longevity arises in the wake of the global demographic crisis of the 1990s, when the proportion of people of the third (60+) and, especially, fourth (75+) age is steadily growing, while the share of working-age population and children is decreasing. This leads to a significant increase in the burden on all socio-economic institutions related to the realization of human potential and contributes to the development of a scientific approach that recognizes the high importance of the productive longevity of the older generation through realization of the untapped potential of old persons.

This study is aimed at describing the term of the resource potential within the framework of the human capital theory. In addition, the paper analyzes expert understanding and assessments through focus groups which included representatives of the old generations (individuals who already reached retirement age) and professionals from institutions whose primary objective is to work with the senior generation.

II. DEFINITION OF THE RESOURCE POTENTIAL OF ELDER PEOPLE

In order to explore the untapped resource potential of the older generation, in the first place, it is necessary to operationalize the term itself or to formulate a working research definition of the term. In general, studies in this area are not uniquely new. The idea of the untapped resource potential has been developed in the framework of the theory of human capital as a special type of intangible wealth on the individual and societal levels. This resource potential is being accumulated throughout a person's life and yields returns as both tangible and intangible benefits to an individual, companies, and a society as a whole.

The resource potential of a person is defined as a set or a combination of the individual qualities or a special integral quality that contributes to the realization and self-realization/self-actualization of the individual. The resource potential determines and ensures the effective implementation of all types of activities throughout the entire life course [1]. According to the systems thinking, we are able to distinguish the components or subsystems of the resource potential of an individual. These subsystems represent groups of basic indicators to assessing the quality of a potential resource of an individual (see Table 1).

The potential of any socio-economic system is based on the cumulative resource potential of its people. Here, the role of institutions is to reveal, enhance and develop this potential. Consequently, a great challenge needs to be addressed, i.e. of the role of various institutions in the formation of resource potential. Moreover, it is the question of correct and transparent assessments of the returns on the use of the resource potential at the level of the individual, company, and society that becomes relevant.

TABLE I. THE SYSTEM OF RESOURCE POTENTIAL OF THE INDIVIDUAL

System of Resource Potential of the Individual	
<i>Subsystem of Qualities and Competences</i>	<i>Description</i>
Intellectual and psychological qualities	Characteristics of intelligence, cognitive abilities, values and attitudes, level of claims, focus of interests, etc.
Communication	Abilities to establish contacts, to communicate and socialize, to exchange information, to convince people.
Organization and leadership	Internal integrity and determination, leadership capacity, discipline, exactingness to oneself and others.
Personal integrity and ethic	Adherence to moral principles and standards of professional ethics, reliability, diligence, ambitiousness.
Socio-psychological competence	The ability to interact with others, the ability to navigate in social situations and conflicts, adequate social reflection and empathy.
Professional competence	The ability to perform professional tasks, required level of skills, professional general and specific knowledge.

^a. The table is compiled by the authors basing on [1].

In the context of the human capital development theory, it is customary to differentiate human potential and human capital. The potential of the individual is defined as the inactive/untapped reserve of the individual, the unused opportunities for the realization of the individual in the economy and society.

Despite the fact that often social and economic studies do not distinguish the concepts of human potential and capital, one should, nevertheless, understand the potential as the possibility of realization /self-realization of a person, and not as a fact of realization.

In this regard, the Human Development Index (HDI), proposed in the 1990s by the United Nations, represents an exemplar case of human potential [2]. This composite index estimates the level of human development through three sub-indices: (1) an income sub-index, including gross national income per capita; (2) education or literacy sub-index, consisting of two indicators - the average number of years of schooling and the expected years of schooling; (3) a health sub-index that includes an indicator of life expectancy at birth. In fact, this composite measure characterizes the cumulative human potential of a country or a geographical territory. However, it is a common practice to pronounce the position of a country in the ranking table as the national achievements in human capital development. This case illustrates that the boundary in understanding the terminology of human capital and human potential is often misinterpreted. This fact does not underestimate the importance of distinguishing the difference between two essentially different phenomena in order to develop public policy and governance practices, when an incorrect interpretation is fraught with development incorrect

programs resulting in incorrect social support measures addressed to the wrong target groups.

The Human Capital Project launched in 2018 by the World Bank represents a logical step in the human capital studies. The Human Capital Project introduced a new cross-country metric - the Human Capital Index (HCI) [3]. With its help, the World Bank intends to measure on the annual basis the amount of human capital that a child born today can expect to accumulate by age 18 (adjusted for the risk associated with inadequate quality of health and education in the country where this child lives). The HCI includes three components:

- The survival rate of children from birth until they reach school age (age 5).
- The expected number of years of schooling (adjusted for the quality of this education).
- The health status assessed by stunting rates and adult survival rates).

The integral score of the HCI for each country (in 2018 assessments were carried out for 157 countries) reflects the potential volume of human capital of the future generation, compared to a reference (equal to 1) value corresponding to good health and the best level of education.

The framework for assessing an individual resource potential may include factors of the internal environment (micro level) - such as the level or the degree of development of existing individual qualities and competences, the degree of desire or motivation to achievements, as well as the opportunities provided by the institutional environment, or environmental factors (macro level). For example, we can identify the following categories that can be used in assessing the resource potential of an individual:

1. Micro-level as the level or the degree of development of personality traits: professional capacity and engagement (if working capacity is not significantly limited); education (higher education, incomplete higher education, secondary specialized, etc.); wealth/welfare as an individual socio-economic position (low-income, middle-income, high-income), etc.
2. Micro-level as the degree of aspiration / motivation to achieve: desire to acquire new knowledge and skills; motivation for self-sufficiency; motivation for employment; motivation to volunteer or help other people, etc.
3. Macro-level as the possibilities of the institutional environment: an opportunity in difficult life situations to get help from friends, relatives, children, neighbors; an opportunity to receive help from social services departments and other organizations; accessibility to assistance from public organizations, etc.

In the context of the study of the resource potential of the older persons, it is possible to apply a holistic approach proposed by Dobrokhleb V.G. (Institute of Socio-Economic Population Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Laboratory of Gender Problems, Moscow, Russia), which assesses the resource potential of the senior generation as the mean of six components: health potential, age potential,

motivation potential, material potential, social potential and institutional capacity [4].

III. RESEARCH METHODS

In order to study problems associated with the realization of the resource potential of the oldest generation, in June 2019, the Lifelong Wellbeing Lab of National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (Tomsk Russia) held a series of scientific expert seminars using the method of focus groups. The first seminar was attended by representatives of the Council of Veterans of the Leninsky District of the city of Tomsk, volunteers of the social room and the veteran organization from the village Rybalovo (Tomsk Region), members of the senior group of ballroom dancing club “TPU Diamond” in the city of Tomsk (Group 1). All the members of Group 1 are retirees who are not employed and normally live on pension.

The second seminar (Group 2) was attended by leaders and representatives of educational institutions of the city of Tomsk, heads of public and volunteer organizations, and representatives of government bodies. These representatives are seen as experts due to their professional activities associated with the fact that all those invited (by virtue of their professional activities) fully understand the reasons for the incomplete realization of the resource potential of the older generation. This Group 2 is thought being capable to assess the demand for life and professional experience, knowledge and competencies of the older generation, the degree of expression problems of insufficient involvement of people of older age in socio-economic activities.

The overall objective of the seminars was to formulate practical recommendations for organizations and authorities on increasing the demand and involvement of the untapped resource potential of the older generation in society. Therefore, the tasks for the focus groups activities were formulated as follows:

1. To assess the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation.
2. To identify and specify signs manifesting the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation.
3. To build a verification matrix for assessing the degree of implementation of the resource potential of the older generation.
4. To determine subjective and objective factors contributing to an increase in the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation.
5. To formulate recommendations on activities that can enhance the realization of the resource potential of the older generation.

In the beginning of the expert seminars, the participants were presented with several approaches to the definition of the realization of the resource potential of the older persons. During the initial discussion about a potential definition of the term, the participants agreed that in order to achieve the main objective of the seminars, the resource potential of the older generation should be understood as a set of personality traits that determine

the activated and dormant reserves of the individual, ensuring the full and harmonious implementation of all activities throughout the human life course.

The participants of each focus group followed instructions on each consecutive stage of the scientific expert seminars: (1) criteria formulation for a correct quantitative assessment of the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation; (2) identification of the main obstacles to enhance realization of the resource potential of the older generation; (3) generation of recommendations to increase realization of the resource potential of the older generation; (4) assessment of the degree of realization of the resource potential of older persons. A total of 45 people participated in the seminars.

IV. RESULTS

The degree of realization of the resource potential of older persons was assessed through the question “How do you assess realization of the resource potential of older persons on a scale from ‘very low’ to ‘high’ (very low, below average, average, above average, high)?” Participants of two groups were asked the same question.

The organizers and facilitators of the seminars noted that in the first and second groups of participants the dominant assessments fall within the categories of average and below average realization of the resource potential of older people (Fig.1 and Fig.2).

Further, the participants had to develop constructive proposals (recommendations) that could contribute to increasing the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation.

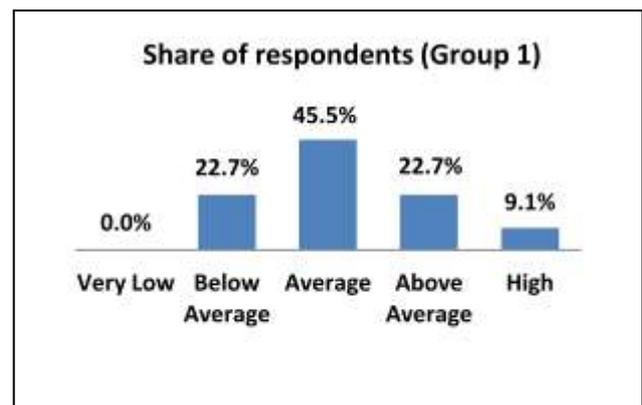


Fig. 1. Assessments of the resource potential realization of older persons by participants of Group 1

The participants were asked to identify five criteria that, in their opinion, make it possible to objectively assess the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation and offer quantitative estimates that allow evaluating the level of each of the selected criteria in the range from critically low to high values. Group 1 selected the following criteria (in order of priorities ranked by the participants of Group 1): (1) number of cultural events attended; (2) proportion of time devoted to physical activity; (3) number of trips per year; (4) time allotted

for gardening (maximum - 150 days); (5) proportion of time allotted for communication via the Internet.

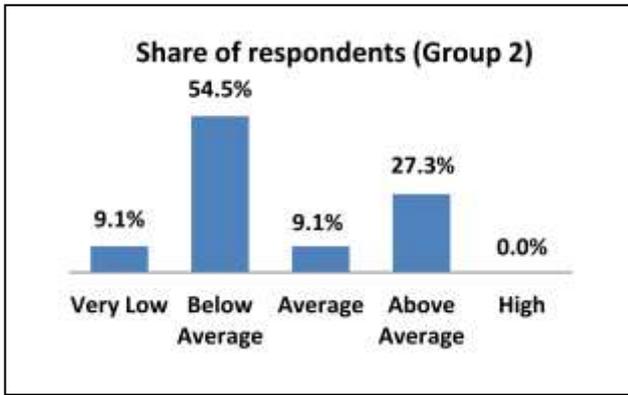


Fig. 2. Assessments of the resource potential realization of older persons by participants of Group 2

TABLE II. THE MAIN FACTORS HINDERING REALIZATION OF THE RESOURCE POTENTIAL OF OLDER PERSONS (RESULT OF GROUP 1)

The main factors hindering a fuller realization of the resource potential of the older generation and the necessary changes (Group 1)	
The main factors hindering a fuller realization of the resource potential of older people	Necessary measures to increase the degree of realization of the resource potential of older people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income • Lack of will • Mentality (passivity) • Social status during the working period • Psychological state • Marital status • Laziness • Disease of the loved ones • Lack of information on government assistance and activities • Restrictions imposed due to capacities of the territories and regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of information • State financing of social rooms, events, programs • Creation of additional recreation places by the governmental authorities • Presence of a leader • Improving health care services • Raising pensions • Creation of conditions: provision of premises, tutors, trainers (coaching trainers) • Creation of places for communication close to the place of residence • Personal financial opportunities • Support for activities by employers represented by professional and trade unions

For participants of Group 2 of such criteria were (in order of priorities ranked by Group 2): proportion of free time allocated to physical activity; (2) share of free time spent on socially significant and cultural events; (3) share of free time devoted to intellectual self-development (master classes); (4) time for professional employment as a share from free time; (5) proportion of life situations that the older generation decides independently.

TABLE III. THE MAIN FACTORS HINDERING REALIZATION OF THE RESOURCE POTENTIAL OF OLDER PERSONS (RESULT OF GROUP 2)

The main factors hindering a fuller realization of the resource potential of the older generation and the necessary changes (Group 2)	
The main factors hindering a fuller realization of the resource potential of older people	Necessary measures to increase the degree of realization of the resource potential of older people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional and professional burnout • Health status • Weak social adaptation (insufficient integration in modern communities) • Poor infrastructure • Scarcity of information (immunity to information) • Institutional constraints • The statistical base today does not reflect the reality • Rejection of one's own age, laziness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergenerational communication activities (aimed at increasing the self-esteem of the older generation) • Creating the conditions for professional reorientation • Information alerts • Word of mouth • Media publication about active people of the older generation • Annual education events for the older generation • Development of a strategy to increase the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation • The annual contest of maturity, grace and intelligence "Real Woman" (for women 55+)

At the next step both groups of were asked to identify the main factors (objective and subjective) that impede the full realization of the resource potential of the older generation and offer recommendations to improve the current situation, introduce changes with the hope for positive results. The opinions of each expert group are presented in Tables 2 and 3. The obstacles and potential desired changes are ranked according to assessments that prioritize the degree of their significance.

V. DISCUSSION

Modern approaches to assessing the potential of a person and the possibilities of its implementation actually reflect the development of the basic ideas of the founders of the theory of human capital. G. Becker emphasized the importance of such factors as education and training, health care, parenting (including in the family) [5], which, of course, will affect the quality of human potential and human capital in socio-economic development. Therefore, we assume that the resource potential of any generation can be characterized through numerous multi-faceted approaches. This diversity of aspects is limited in assessments in our study due to poor statistics collected by national bodies. Group 2, which included professionals working with older persons, explicitly indicated significant limitations due to this factor in Russia.

In recent years, the concept of silver economy [6-7] has merged with the wider scientific paradigm of the economics of aging [8-10], which studies a wide range of interactions between demographic and economic changes. These changes are manifested in the areas of labor economics, family economics, health care, social security, income distribution, social mobility, migration, productivity, structural changes, economic growth and development, and changes in social

policy. The results of the study show that older persons (Group 1) understand and consider opportunities offered by labor market, social institution, and governmental bodies. Nevertheless, they distance themselves from employment opportunities – they are retirees and they do not think about going back to work. This fact corresponds to the ideas formulated by participants from Group 2 about emotional and professional burnout of the old persons in Russia as one of the factors that hinder realization of the resource potential of the senior generation. At the same time, while being inactive at the labor market through employment, still participants of Group 1 are very active socially as they engage themselves in sports and physical activities (gardening, exercising, etc.), cultural activities, and volunteering. In 2015, David Eatock in the report of the European Commission gave a universal definition of the silver economy as the use of opportunities in a period of aging as well as meeting the growing number of needs of a new market for services for older people [11]. In our study we observe that participants of Group 1 formulate needs and wants as well as an increasing readiness to buy goods and services that previous generations in Russia were not able either to afford or had no desire to acquire.

The EU strategic document “Europe for All Ages” [12] outlines four threats to demographic change: an increased demand for social services, growing spending on pensions and social guarantees, increased needs of older people, inequalities in access to resources and a variety of social risks for the older generation. Inequalities in Russia for older persons may arise due to differences in health status, poor infrastructure and scarcity of information, institutional limitations, marital status, and low income. Both groups formulated limitations for realization of the resource potential of older persons that can be grouped in micro-factors (within the capacity and own free will of an individual) and macro-factors (affected by external forces, i.e. institutional environment).

The results of the study obtained from two different focus groups are complementary and provide a powerful insight into understanding of the resource potential of older persons by two groups. Group 1 represented by older persons manifests self-identity characteristics with possibilities offered by the institutional environment. Group 2, on the other hand, demonstrates how participants of Group 1 limit themselves and do not use already existing opportunities.

VI. CONCLUSION

Conducted focus groups seminars demonstrated that the problem of realizing the resource potential to the fullest extent of the older generation is very important. This is a challenge that is insufficiently addressed in modern social policy in Russia and in the practice of social interactions within Tomsk Region. The above estimates of the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation, the factors identified

by the participants of two groups that impede the realization of the resource potential of the older generation and the proposals formulated for the necessary changes manifest a request in society for adjusting social policy measures in this area. It is necessary to develop and implement socio-economic solutions aimed at increasing the degree of realization of the resource potential of the older generation.

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