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**Irina Grigoryeva, Lyudmila Vidiysova, Alexandra Dmitrieva, and Olga Sergeyeva. *Elderly Population in Modern Russia: Between Work, Education and Health*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019. 164 pp. ISBN 978-3-319-96618-2.**

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Do you sometimes think ahead and try to prepare for old age, or are you afraid of getting old and thus do not want to contemplate this stage of life? If you belong to the first group of people, *Elderly Population in Modern Russia: Between Work, Education and Health* might be of interest to you. Otherwise, rather than reading this book, you might be better off looking for the next antiaging remedy. There is considerable academic and practical demand for research on aging driven not only by questions of continued physical functioning in older age but also by concerns about sustainable sociocultural development of the aging society in its entirety and the aging individual in it. This book provides a sociological approach to rethinking the meaning of old age and different manifestations of older people's relationship with society, such as age policy, old-age social exclusion, ageist attitudes, accumulated inequality during the life course, and so on.

Therefore, a critical study of the condition of older people living in Russia, the results of which are available in English, is very welcome. The book is an attempt to contribute to the discussion about the construction of a new concept of old age, more precisely, about filling the idea of the third age with content. In other words, using the terms of Paul Higgs and Chris Gilleard (2015:viii), the authors of this book are looking for the new "cultural template for old age." The research question is not a new one (see, e.g., Gilleard and Higgs 2002, 2005; Gilleard et al. 2005; Higgs and Gilleard 2015; Lasslett 1991, 1994), but it is based on unique empirical data from the northwestern region of Russia: the city of Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast.

An international team of four authors represents three research institutions: ITMO University (Saint Petersburg, Russia), Alliance for Public Health (Kyiv, Ukraine), and St. Petersburg State University (Saint Petersburg, Russia). All four are experienced researchers whose expertise includes sociology, social policy, and gerontology, who have numerous previous publications that examine the concept of aging, the quality of life and inequality of older people, and their relationship with digital technologies, and who have demonstrated proficiency in both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The volume presents the results of the research project "Models of Interaction between Society and the Elderly: A Study of Opportunities for Social Inclusion," carried out in 2014–2015 in one region of Russia. As the authors disclose, this edition is a translation of the book's Russian version that was published in 2016.

The authors call for a conscious reexamination of the concept of old age to help people make sense of their lives' later stages. I see three dominant ideas that the authors develop sincerely and consistently throughout the entire book. The first idea relates to ensuring equal rights for older people in contemporary aging societies as an absolute imperative. The authors call to recognize the absolute value of human life, regardless of whose life it is—a baby or an older person, a man or a woman. The second idea shows the authors' concern about the harm of old-age exclusion and a whole host of its specific expressions: ageism and age discrimination, disengagement, loneliness, and helplessness of older people. Finally, the authors consider the ambiguous roles of digital literacy and labor market in the social inclusion of older generations.

In terms of content, *Elderly Population in Modern Russia* consists of ten chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. I would say that several first chapters (chapters 2 through 6) serve to contextualize this study: they place theoretical frameworks related to the topics of aging and the elderly in the particular context of contemporary Russia. These chapters help to establish a critical perspective for the reader. In dialogue with classical and modern scholars of the sociology of aging and critical social gerontology and based on the secondary analysis of various available surveys, this part of the book includes a wide range of topics, such as the definition of aging in general and in the context of Russia in particular, the borderline between employment and retirement, and concepts of poverty and social exclusion in old age (chapter 2). In chapter 3 the authors are preoccupied with searching for specific boundaries of advanced age; they discuss age periodization schemes and arguments why they should be revised. The authors continue the topic in chapter 4 by postulating more humane and sensitive aging policy that would include people with diverse life scenarios, trajectories, and types of self-identification, as well as acknowledge more "rights to authorship" for older people. In chapter 5 the researchers examine what constitutes the "health of older people." Here they discuss risks of health loss as a result of aging, the role of mass media in depicting older people's health status, and a shared responsibility for a healthy lifestyle between a person and a doctor. Finally, in the last contextualizing chapter (chapter 6), the authors analyze the specifics of social services for older people in Russia and the shortcomings that are not conducive to the social inclusion of older people. Among such limitations Russian sociologists have especially stressed the bureaucratic and soulless attitude toward older persons, as well as a perception of them as passive subjects to whom the government "offers kindness."

Hereinafter the authors turn from contextualizing to the presentation of findings of their original research. In chapter 7, based on qualitative data (30 interviews with attendees and teachers of a computer class), the researchers discuss the level of digital literacy in older population; goals, motives, and challenges of attending training classes; the content and quality of teaching; and the practices of use of computers and the internet in the daily life of older people. Chapter 8 examines different spheres of life where older people could be active online. It includes using educational services designed specifically for the people of "the third age," searching for

information online, socializing with significant others (such as remotely living family members and friends), using e-government and e-health services, and political and civic activities (signing of petitions, etc.). In chapter 9 a syntagmatic structural text analysis developed by the Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp (2001) is employed not only to reveal the emotional images of seniors but also to trace the vectors of developing romantic relationships between them, as well as to show the spectrum of romantic feelings (dis)allowed to the older generation and the generalized standards of love and sexuality prescribed to them. The analysis covered 16 Soviet and post-Soviet Russian popular films, made between 1971 and 2005.

*Elderly Population in Modern Russia* develops a dialogue with important scholarship relevant in the field, published in both Russian and English languages. It provides empirical facts illustrating the ambiguous social status of older people in Russia. The book encourages reflection and provokes thoughts on the critical role of principal binary oppositions traditionally applied to depict old age. Do we think of old age as a fit, healthy, productive, and inclusive life stage or a life stage of ill health, inabilities, neediness, and disengaging? Furthermore, to what extent are we able to see the variety of halftones (that exist in real life) between these two extremes?

As the book's second important contribution, I would mention the critical attitude and sociological courage to sensitively capture the country's socioeconomic transformations and accurately observe how the sociocultural construction of the age is becoming more and more confusing and contradictory to the reality. In its essence, this is a doubly critical text. It not only speaks about the need to review critically public attitudes toward older people but also demonstrates criticism of government actions toward them that are sometimes merely imitative or have signs of patriarchal ageism. The book provides thoughtful and interesting insights into a specific Russian way of sociological thinking about the social meanings of old age and aging.

If I think about what could have been done better in this book, I would say I missed a little more personalized approach in the presentation of research results. For example, the researchers did not illustrate their narrative with authentic quotes from informants (although I can imagine that it could be challenging to translate accurately authentic speech). Moreover, the authors presented their findings only in the most general way. They did not depict experiences of old age and social exclusion of specific subgroups of older people, such as people living in the remote countryside; having different levels of education, socioeconomic backgrounds, household statuses; people with disabilities or people of various ethnicities and genders. On the other hand, when it comes to the concept of old age in Russia and public attitudes toward the older generations, limiting the field of research to one region of the country significantly narrows the scope of the professed representativeness.

Comprehension of the text is somewhat hampered by the insufficient skills of the translator, who, sadly, seems to be neither a native speaker nor a specialist in social gerontology. Therefore translation of some familiar concepts or theories from Russian back into their original language introduces inaccuracies. For instance, it seems that the "liberation theory" (p. 37) is in fact the disengagement theory cre-

ated by Elaine Cumming and William E. Henry; “Klyajnenberg” (p. 154) is the well-known American sociologist Eric Klinenberg. Sometimes the book fails to avoid reproducing ageist and normative approaches to older people, in particular when it uses such terms as dependent load, the burden of those unable work (p. 12), demographic burden (p. 14), economic burden (p. 16), elderly burdens (p. 18); or with the phrase “We emphasize that from the ‘European’ point of view, aging *should be active*” (p. 13; emphasis added). I think the authors would agree with me that no older person should be compelled to behave in one way or another. The most favorable situation for an older (as for any-age) person is when he/she is free to choose the type and intensity of activities he/she prefers at that moment. Unfortunately, there are also some grammatical errors left in the text: for example, “distat learning” (p. 136) instead of “distant learning” and “Internat usage” (p. 137) for “internet usage,” to name just a few.

Nevertheless, in general the authors manage to convey their concern for the older generations’ quality of life (not only in Russia) under the conditions of the often-negative public attitudes toward older people. It is a provocative attempt to add knowledge to the conceptualization of the third age in international and national academic and public discourse. The book would be of special interest for sociology, social policy, and social work specialists, like students in these fields and members of any nongovernmental organization working with and for older people.

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