SUCCESSFUL AGEING
A SURVEY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THEORIES

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Abstract: The issues of good and successful ageing are the subject of scientific research. Successful ageing is the attempt to achieve a state of inner satisfaction and happiness in spite of the negative effects associated with old age: loss, external and internal destabilization, etc. Successful development in old age has many forms. It can generally be defined as an attempt to achieve the greatest profit with the smallest loss. The problem is establishing the universal criteria of successful ageing. It is possible to restrict the study to the observation of individual factors which are either objective or subjective, long-term or short-term, specific or universal or static versus dynamic. The problem is creating a theory that will explain all the processes and consequences of old age—none of the theories has so far succeeded in doing this. Life satisfaction as a subjective criterion of successful ageing has been most emphasized in two contradictory theories: activity theory and disengagement theory. Other theories are: growth theories, cognitive theories, dynamic theories, SOC model, cultural anthropological theories, the interaction model of longevity, etc.

Keywords: old age; ageing; successful ageing; theories of ageing; life satisfaction.

Gerontology has been concerned with the study of successful ageing and ageing well for several decades. Both within the theory and practice, ageing well is understood to mean optimal, positive or successful ageing (Baltes, Mittelstraß, Staudinger 1994, 24). On the basis of the research carried out on the process of ageing and old age, different theories have been created, criteria have been defined and factors have been identified that help us better understand the process of ageing.

In the conception of ageing well or successful ageing, some authors have seen social Darwinism or the dangerous mentality of competition and/or of western capitalist traditional thought (ibid.) play a role. The linking of old age and success may seem contradictory and paradoxical at first sight. Old age is usually allied with loss and the nearing of the end of life; and success, on the contrary, means profit or a favourable balance. A deeper insight shows, however, that the contradiction is only apparent and the concept of successful ageing relies on an analysis of being and the naturalness of human existence in old age. The point is neither to worry about growing old nor to passively accept it as a natural phenomenon; people should actively engage with it, they ought to try to achieve something that they have not yet been able to achieve. The criteria for achieving "success" in old age are different from those applicable in youth (Baltes, Baltes 1989b, 85-105).

The concept of "successful ageing" was described by R. J. Havighurst as a state of inner satisfaction or happiness. With retirement, children leaving home, the loss of our nearest and dearest and the onset of disease, life changes to a greater or lesser degree and that leads to

physical and mental imbalance. Life satisfaction is within this context an indicator of how a person copes (Lehr 2007, 56-57).

The theory of successful ageing is founded on the realistic perception of old age as life experience. On the other hand, it is natural that the organism seeking to achieve life satisfaction tries to regulate the imbalance. Life satisfaction is the best indicator of coping with personal needs and expectations on the one hand and the social and personal situation on the other (Lehr 2007, 57). W. Zapf studied successful ageing on the basis of the level of satisfaction. Zapf argues that satisfaction consists of two components and it is the extent to which they function together that determines the overall life satisfaction of an individual. The first component is objective representing life conditions and the second is subjective focusing on well-being, welfare and the feeling of satisfaction. The so-called "paradox of satisfaction" takes place when an individual in spite of poor life conditions in objective terms expresses and experiences a subjective feeling of happiness. By contrast, the "dilemma of dissatisfaction" occurs when an individual, despite having objectively good life conditions, experiences a negative feeling (Zapf 1984, 25). Some authors seek to complement or replace this subjective criterion by an objective one.

Life satisfaction as a subjective criterion of successful ageing is most accentuated in two theories: activity theory and disengagement theory. The question as to which form of old age is optimal, most positive, most successful and most satisfying for people, produces contradictory views (Lehr 2007, 57). There are also other theories and views on good and successful ageing, such as: growth theories, cognitive theories, dynamic theories, the selection, optimization and compensation (SOC) model, cultural anthropological theories, the interaction model of longevity, etc. A concise survey of the most important theories of ageing well will be given below.

Activity Theory

Activity theory was formulated by R. Tartler in the 1960s. Tartler claimed that activity brings performance that fulfills a certain function in society. Maintaining an active life and training abilities are therefore important. R. Tartler maintains that he who does not work, begins to seize up, but he also argues that those who do not relax, become exhausted. Humans should fulfill certain tasks within a society but they also ought to have adequate space for relaxation and comfort (Tartler 1961 in Nigg, Steidl 2005, 34).

Activity theory is based on the assumption that human happiness and satisfaction in old age depend on how elderly people are able to influence the events around them and the extent to which they can be useful to others. Activity and the feeling that other people need them thus constitute happiness and satisfaction. If the elderly feel that they are of no use or that they have no function within society any more, they will be unhappy and discontented. Activity retards the ageing process and makes people feel satisfied with their lives; this is why people should preserve the active phase of life as long as possible (Nigg, Steidl 2005, 34).

Social relations that are associated with social roles and positions have a special meaning. Social life assumes performance and brings recognition. Havighurst argues that in addition to an active lifestyle optimal old age presupposes that people will strive to resist the limitations which arise because of weakening social contacts. Humans try to find substitutes for their dead friends and loved ones (Lehr 2007, 57).

Upon reaching the required age, people may stop working and retire. Retirement might coincide with a loss of social relations and roles. Those who age well try to carry forward

activities from their earlier life and to replace those they had to abandon. They approach these losses actively and try to regulate them. They are able to replace their daily work routine with leisure activities, new social relations and roles. Those who find themselves in the opposite situation are at risk of feeling lonely (Schulz, Heckhausen 1996, 702-714).

In their theory, Lemon, Bengtson and Petersen (1972, 511-523) argue that the activities associated with different social roles have an impact on the self-image of an elderly person. A positive self-image is the most important prerequisite for life satisfaction and thus also for successful old age. In their research, Longino and Kart (1982, 713-722) studied the theory of B.W. Lemon and recommended activities be differentiated as follows: 1. informal, contacts with friends, relatives, neighbours; 2. formal, e.g. being a member of a club or association, 3. solitary, hobby-related activities or work carried out at home alone. Research findings showed that the greatest life satisfaction comes from informal activities, followed by formal activities and lastly activities conducted at home alone. Contact with family and friends (including neighbours) was shown to be the most important contact, confirming Havighurst's theory. However, this theory has also been criticized because not every old person has close friends or relatives or a person may lack the motivation to look for new ones after having lost old ones (Atchley 1989, 183-190).

One of the possible consequences of overestimating activity in old age is incorrect identifying retirement as the onset of old age. Nowadays, society offers elderly people many opportunities to alter their social roles, accept new roles and establish new social relations. After retiring from a demanding job, elderly people may even face new energizing activities (Nigg, Steidl 2005, 34).

Disengagement Theory

Old age implies a natural withdrawal from active roles and obligations. An elderly person may feel ready to step back both from relationships and his or her social setting. This process of disengagement is a natural process in human life. Loss and the breaking of ties represent a natural, indispensable and irrevocable process. It is the process of preparing for the end of life. Within society a space opens up for the permanent renewal of relationships, roles, functions, and performances. Old age is thus part of continuous social change (Nigg, Steidl 2005, 34-35).

In contrast to activity theory, the theory of disengagement states that if neither activity nor performance is required of older people, they are happier and more content. Sociologists query the fact that a rich active life guarantees older people satisfaction within society. An older person is under pressure to conform to the expectations of others in society. The stereotypes that exist about old age within a society affect older people and whether their approach to life will be positive or negative. Older people refer sometimes to old age as an excuse for their withdrawal from activities that cause them difficulties. It is not true, however, that elderly individuals automatically lose the ability to be actively engaged with life (Nigg, Steidl 2005, 35).

Disengagement theory was formulated on the basis of 172 interviews with people aged between 50 and 70 in the USA. The rationale behind the theory was that there was a need for a process of disengagement and the termination of relationships between those ageing and other members of society. The relationships that persevere in old age undergo qualitative changes. There is a reduction in the number of social contacts and interactions and the process of extricating themselves from social norms opens the door to freedom for ageing people (Cumming, Henry 1979, 211).

Disengagement theory is built on the assumption that some people wish for a certain form of social isolation, a reduction in social contacts so that they will then feel happy and satisfied. It is argued that activity theory is oriented more towards middle age since that is the period of life when relationships form a significant part of it. H.D. Schneider maintains that the idea of active life is not compatible with the end of life, with dying, and with death, which is, on the contrary, perceived to be natural in disengagement theory. A person who is encouraged to remain active will face a conflict when his or her life comes to an end (Lehr 2007, 59). Humans cannot, however, deny the fact of death. They can postpone it, avoid it or refuse to give in to it, but they can do nothing about mortality. People can take preventative measures against heart attacks, high blood pressure or cancer. They can lose weight, give up smoking and do exercise, but in spite of all these activities they continue to age and have to die at some stage. Z. Bauman claims that people who try to prolong their lives cannot transcend death per se (Přidalová 1998, 351). Disengagement theory takes into consideration the circumstances of the individual and society as well as that universal fact—the reality of death.

Cumming and Henry (1979) query whether 'having a function' or 'being useful' contributes to an older person's satisfaction. Simmons argues that the feeling of being needed helps people to feel certain and mitigates the fear of being cast aside and of being powerless. If those around are able to guarantee safehood and sufficient care for elderly people, then the elderly do not have to engage and they withdraw. Some research findings show that people who have cut social ties are more satisfied than those who are still strongly anchored in a social network (Lehr 2007, 59).

Modification and Variations of Disengagement Theory and Activity Theory

More than forty years have passed since disengagement theory was first introduced and over time further discussions, modifications and variations have emerged. For instance as early as in 1964 W.E. Henry saw the disengagement process simply as an exchange process between the individual and the environment. He underscored inner conditionality in lessened social roles activities. Additional modifications have occurred and have been surveyed by U. Lehr (2007, 60-63), E. Dreher (2008, 31-35), B. Nigg, S. Steidl (2005, 34-35) and others.

Compensatory-engagement Hypothesis

Gerontologist R. J. Havighurst attempted to integrate both theories and developed a new one entitled the compensatory-engagement hypothesis (Nigg, Steidl 2005, 35). According to this hypothesis, satisfaction in old age is a subjective feeling produced through the act of decision-making, both in active and passive terms. Passivity, forced about by society or the continual hectic search for new activities is not part of the true image of good old age. In his approach, Havighurst accentuated the qualitative aspects of disengagement theory. He argued that a quantitative decrease in the number of contacts is not so important in ageing as are the qualitative changes. These imply a change in engagement, a change in the extent of social role activities. Positive, successful old age is a result of satisfaction both with the current situation and with the past. Important individual factors also have a role to play in the process of ageing well. Whether people withdraw from or stay integrated in social life depends on each individual and on their personality. People who were previously passive and oriented more towards home life are grateful when they can withdraw from social life as they become older. A reduction in the amount of social contact and social duties comes as great relief. By contrast, for those people who enjoy an active social role, it is important that they are able to maintain their

lifestyle and these roles when they grow older as well. Havighurst also mentions "compensatory engagements" which implies that the reduction of activities in one area, e.g. at work, may lead to an increase in activity in another area, e.g. within the family (Havighurst, Neugarten, Tobin 1964, 24).

Temporary Disengagement

Research findings from the Bonn Institute of Psychology showed a higher level of satisfaction in persons who have less intense social contact. The term temporary disengagement (vorübergehendes Disengagement) (Lehr 2007, 61) was introduced to suggest that an elderly person may also react to stress by temporarily withdrawing. The tendency to which a person is active in old age or withdraws depends on the strategy used to cope with conflict. Munnichs drew similar conclusions and argued that it is highly probable that coping with the end of human life is linked to a renewed engagement. Whether disengagement theory is perhaps inappropriate for a short life span as compared to the whole period of ageing has been the topic of much discussion. Research findings indicate that women in their forties limit social contact but then increase it while in their fifties. Humans may react in a similar vein when they retire by withdrawing for some time (Lehr 2007, 61; Nigg, Steidl 2005, 35).

Research Disputing Disengagement Theory

At the Sixth International Congress of Gerontology held in Copenhagen in 1963, intense discussion was devoted to disengagement theory. The discussion generated the idea of conducting research in Germany, England, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Poland and the USA (Fröhlich et al. 1969, 18-34). The research focused on social roles, such as those of employees, colleagues, spouses, parents, grandparents, neighbours, acquaintances, friends, club members and citizens. Research findings showed different levels in activity and in particular social roles between the various countries. There was a high correlation between a higher level of activity and a higher degree of satisfaction and a relationship between a low level of activity in terms of social role and a higher level of dissatisfaction was shown to exist as well. The research is evidently at variance with disengagement theory (Schrank, Riley 1971).

Criticism of Disengagement Theory

G.L. Maddox (1965, 117-130; 1970, 17-27) criticized disengagement theory and stated that it was artificially produced. He himself analyzed the outcomes of a longitudinal study of ageing involving 182 respondents aged sixty and over, at the University of Duke (The Duke First Longitudinal Study of Ageing). Maddox points to a correlation between low social activity and an optimistic frame of mind in only 11-15% of respondents and between higher social activity and a pessimistic outlook in only 15%. Disengagement theory was thus confirmed to be valid by only 26-30% of respondents. By contrast, activity theory was confirmed by as many as 74% of respondents (a correlation between a high level of activity and optimism was shown in 45% respondents and in 26% of respondents there was a correlation between a low level of activity and pessimism). The activeness of respondents decreased with age and satisfaction remained at a relatively stable level (Maddox, Eisdorfer 1972, 235). Discussions about disengagement theory should be perceived within their historical context. In

the 1950s, the situation of elderly people in relation to income status and public opinion was much worse in the USA; therefore, the philosophy of disengagement might have been more relevant to people then than it is today.

*Dependence of the Validity of both Theories on the Personality
of an Individual and their Actual Social Situation*

Bonn's gerontological longitudinal research BOLSA (Bonner Gerontologischen Längsschnittstudie) was carried out over 15 years and showed that the validity of both theories depends on the specifics of a particular individual and on their particular social role. As with the previous research, this research confirmed that there was a decrease in activity with the onset of increasingly old age, however a decrease in activity was not accompanied with a corresponding decrease in satisfaction. This would seem to corroborate disengagement theory. A group of respondents who saw a connection between high levels of activity and low satisfaction supported this theory. On the contrary, a link between a high level of activity and high rate of satisfaction was confirmed by another group of respondents. This would support activity theory. Also other findings show that the statement that satisfaction depends on activity cannot be generalized. For example in their relationships with their children and grandchildren as much as 3/4 of respondents are more satisfied when they are more active. By contrast, educated, professional healthy persons show a tendency to decrease their level of activity as parents. In terms of being a grandparent, about half of the respondents confirmed disengagement theory. The second half supported activity theory. In social roles outside the family, the overwhelming majority backed up activity theory, particularly in their relationships with friends, acquaintances or neighbours. In relation to club associates, half of the respondents supported the activity theory and half the disengagement theory. The more active, more intelligent individuals and the wider their interests, and the better their health, the more they were satisfied with having less contact within a family and more contact outside the family: their behaviour within the family was in the spirit of disengagement theory and that outside the family supported activity theory. By contrast, the behaviour of the more passive individuals and those of lower intelligence, with fewer interests, worse health and financial problems was in accordance with the spirit of activity theory within the family and the spirit of disengagement theory outside the family. The criticism of both theories is based on the fact that they cannot be generalized in terms of the individual. The reaction of an elderly person depends on their personality structure and his or her life situation (Lehr, Minnemann 1987, 91).

Dynamic Theories

There are also assessments of life satisfaction (well-being) based on older adult perceptions of personal goals and their achievements that enter into the discussion about the model of successful ageing (Lawton 1985, 501–519). C. G. Jung (1994) maintained that he observed that goal-oriented life is in general better, richer and healthier than a life without specific aims. What is important is not only the achievement of long-term goals but also the process of accomplishment itself. A long-term goal has a positive function for people: it organizes and affects human behaviour over a longer time in different situations and gives meaning to their lives (Frankl 1985, 110; Tavel 2004, 574; Tavel 2007, 26). Good behaviour cannot be judged only on the basis of static criteria (since it is not simply the final state) but must also be based on the dynamic process.

Since aims affect human behaviour and contribute to the feeling of meaningfulness, it is very important for successfully ageing people to have personal goals and to seek to achieve them regardless of whether or not they will be able to accomplish them. This adds another dimension to the perspective on good ageing—the static dimension becomes a dynamic dimension. We are not simply concerned about whether an older person's achievements are positive, such as having good health or good life conditions, but also about whether their attempts lead to a maximizing of profits and minimizing of losses and whether they are balanced with gains (Freund, Li, Baltes 1999).

In successful ageing it is not only the particular end point or state but also the way in which it is reached that is important. If the achievement of goals requires little effort, it is questionable as to whether it is a success: efforts to achieve financial security at the cost of long-lasting suffering in unsatisfactory and boring employment can serve as an example. A dynamic approach points to another so far unanswered question—the time frame (Freund, Riedger 2003, 612).

E. Diener argues that a good life simply cannot be judged on the basis of life conditions and comfort at a given moment as is the case with the static approach. It does not matter whether an older person is doing well at that very moment; the point at issue is long-term status in different areas. A bottle of wine can help a person relax and feel good for a short time. But drinking on a daily basis can be harmful to one's physical and mental health so that the losses will probably prevail over short-term benefits (Freund, Riedger 2003, 612).

Importance of Correct Setting-out the Aims

Correctly setting-out one's life aims can be an important factor in protecting against the onset of depression in old age. As people age, they may realize that some goals are unattainable for them. At the emotional level, it may lead to disappointment, dissatisfaction even depression, mainly when the unachievable goals are still attractive to the individuals. Elderly people are blocked, frustrated in a way, particularly when they stick to their goals. It can be illustrated by a depressed patient who said "I can't do it any more but I want to do it anyway" (Melges, Bowlby 1969, 694). One of the ways in which the individual can extricate themselves from this situation is to re-evaluate the aims. Another possibility is that of replacing them. The latter is often a better solution even if it is at the expense of limiting the possibilities and options (Brandtstädter, Greve 1994, 62).

Successful Ageing as Selective Optimization with Compensation (SOC model)

P. B. Baltes and M. M. Baltes (1989a, 6) did not consider satisfaction a sufficient indicator of successful ageing. Subjective criteria should be supplemented by objective ones because subjective criteria are often deceptive and unable to identify either the state of emergency of an individual or a society or the potential for development. P. B. Baltes a M. M. Baltes (1989b, 96-100) formulated a model of successful ageing and called it the selective optimization and compensation (SOC) model, which is a universal model for adaptation. Optimization implies that a person optimizes life, discovers reserves and increases profits that will help him or her to enhance the quality of his/her life, and that he/she uncovers areas in which development is still possible. Selection implies that elderly persons concentrate on the areas which are of high priority to them and which may start to decline. It is selection since an older person cannot focus on all areas. Compensation means that limitations and reductions can be replaced. It

presupposes some flexibility. We may consider the compensatory attempt to improve memory through the use of various aids or impaired hearing through hearing aids as examples.

There have been objections to the SOC model. One of them is the point that the SOK model underrates subjective factors, which it regards as deceptive and insufficient (Baltes, Baltes 1989a). Watching objective tests, examining medical records or observing performances in games of chess are not sufficient on their own for they study of successful ageing. A study on older adult perception of successful ageing may serve as evidence. Ninety-two percent of respondents answered that they understand successful ageing to be optimism and a feeling of happiness. Spiritual strength, which, in spite of deficiencies, may lead to harmony and happiness in the lives of older people, is equally important to successful ageing as are mental and intellectual competences (Lehr 2007, 66).

Growth Theories

In addition to the theories that underscore deficit, there are theories based on the finding that as people age, they become more mature and wise. C.G. Jung is the father of this idea. He argues that thanks to the crisis accompanying ageing, people integrate both emotionality and motives and thus open up new opportunities. Jung claims that ageing people know that life does not ascend or expand, but that the internal process forces upon them the merciless difficulties of life, it is their duty and obligation to take proper care of the complete self (Jung 1994). H. Thomae (1951) maintains that older people review their failures, disappointments, ideals, hobbies, habits, and their very existence. This theory has been further developed by E. Rothacker, K. Goldstein, A. Maslow, R. N. Butler and P. Coleman (Lehr 2007, 67; Clayton 1982, 315-321).

C. D. Ryff introduced a new conception. He claimed that there are five conditions that should be fulfilled in order to stay healthy and for further successful development in old age. It is necessary to accept oneself, to establish positive relationships with other people, to have autonomy and control over the environment and to feel that life is meaningful. Human development is constituted in the struggle to achieve these five qualities. Preliminary studies devoted to human development show that older adults have a real sense of the self and the link between ideals and reality. Research on women's psychological health one year after they moved from their house to an apartment in a retirement home showed that women who accepted the transfer negatively had lower mental health values than those whose wish to move had been fulfilled. The opportunity to choose where they live appears to be a significant factor in older adult development (Ryff, Essex 1991, 167).

Any attempts to achieve a specific kind of wisdom and a specific type of knowledge in old age are also associated with growth theories (Ardelt 2003, 275). Wisdom is reflected in everyday life and in the quest for the meaning of life. J. E. Birren defines the wisdom of old age as a link between the experiences collected through life and the tendency to react automatically and impulsively to incentives or jeopardy. He sees wisdom as a result of the evolution that is conducive to the survival of descendants, tribes or clans. L. Orwoll and M. Perlmutter considered elderly people wise thanks to a high level of integrity of the self in the sense that H. E. Erikson did and also as a result of having achieved the highest degree of personal maturity. J. D. Sinnot also underscored the relation between integrity and wisdom. He defined wisdom as the ability to achieve harmony between the various demands and dimensions of a particular world (Lehr 2007, 68).

P. B. Baltes and U. M. Staudinger (1993, 75-80) link old age with wisdom related to life, knowledge gained from practical life, with the relativization of values and with the ability to

cope with ignorance. They examined levels of wisdom in old men by asking questions such as 'imagine a friend of yours rings you and tells you she wants to commit suicide. What should you do?' The respondent has five answers to choose from (multiple choice). Similar questions are: 'Imagine you are at the bus stop and a passing car splashes you. What is your reaction?' Wisdom in older people is linked to a specific way of thinking. A wisdom scale has been developed and verified by M. Ardelt (14-item three-dimensional wisdom scale 3D-WS). The scale contains both cognitive and emotional components of wisdom. Ardelt used the scale for testing a sample of 180 older adults (age 52-plus). Results showed that the 3D-WS can be considered a reliable and valid instrument for measuring wisdom in the older population (Ardelt 2003, 275).

Various studies have examined specific ways of thinking in the elderly. Differences in thinking were studied at the Duke University of Arizona using a sample of 299 undergraduates aged 17-25 years (average 18.8 years) and a sample of 189 older adults aged 58-79 years (average 69 years). Respondents were given three possible choices: A, B, C. It was assumed that if the respondent chose option B, for instance, then s/he would again choose B out of the following two possibilities A, B. Conclusions showed that the decisions of older people are wiser than those of students. The results were confirmed in a study conducted in Milan, Italy with 250 students and 120 older persons and a repeat study with 128 students and 121 older individuals. The interpretation of the results by the authors of the study was unambiguously favourable in terms of the elderly (Tentori et al. 2001, 87-96).

A comparison of cultures in the area of older people's wisdom shows that it is perceived according to the basis of traditional codes or models and not on the basis of wisdom acquired at the individual level (Rosenmayr 1990, 250). If wisdom is an attribute of old age, no objective concept of wisdom in old age has been developed so far (Ardelt 2003, 275).

The theory of gerotranscendence states that human development is a process extending into old age and is characterized by orientation towards a cosmic or transcendental view of the world (Wadensten 2007a, 289-294; 2007b, 295-301; 2007c, 302-314). Human development implies changes in the definition of time and space, an increasing affinity to earlier and future generations, and a disappearing fear of death and the "mystery dimension" of life. At the level of the self, a decrease in self-centredness and a shift to altruism and the integration of the self in the spirit of H. E. Erikson occur. At the level of social relations, people become less interested in superficial relations and in material things, and exhibit a growth in self-reflection and an increasing need for solitude. Previous studies showed that development towards gerotranscendence is influenced by cultural context. Cross-cultural studies showed that modern culture characterized by secularization and individualism does not support development towards gerotranscendence or the view that personal growth culminates in old age (Ahmadi 2001, 395).

Cognitive Theory of Ageing

The last few decades have seen a number of modifications to the cognitive theories of behaviour and emotions or social interactions. One characteristic they have in common is that the determining factor is not the stimulus or 'objective' quality of a situation but rather it is the interpretation or representation that is important. The best known theory in psychogerontology is the so-called theory of generalized expectations that is concerned with the influence of generalized expectations regarding human behaviour (Rotter 1975, 56). In studying old age-related problems it is the cognition (becoming aware of a feeling or an experience) of "personal control" that is decisive (Rodin, Timko, Harris 1985, 3-55). A strengthening of conviction and

control through at least some aspects of the mental situation can fulfill a pressing need for help and thereby improve the mental state. Experiencing control over the situation may enhance a feeling of competence. The cognitive representation of the situation is decisive in terms of feeling contented (Heckhausen, Schulz 1995, 284-304). Research carried out in a retirement home in 1977 by I. Schick at the University of Bonn showed that life satisfaction does not depend on the objective qualities of the home (as determined by experts) but on cognitive representations of the people.

According to Lehr and Thomae it is not age so much that is decisive in ageing but rather the tasks people have to fulfill over the course of their lives and through which they develop. Development is a life-long human assignment and does not depend on age. Personality qualities play a unique role as do the surroundings. The optimal harmony of all factors allows people to solve constantly emerging conflicts. M. Krohn (in Otto 1994) argued that ageing implies people have to continually cope with new situations and constantly re-orientate themselves. The concept of 're-orientating oneself' is of great importance in this theory and expresses the ability to adapt to changing situations. People who have not developed this ability sufficiently experience difficulties as they age. The ability to change, however, is not only required of an elderly person but also of their social and cultural setting. The social and political background should create conditions for older people to adapt themselves more easily to new situations. Older people can age successfully when they experience harmony between their needs and reality (Nigg, Steigl 2005, 35).

Continuity Theory

The sociologist R.C. Atchley (1989, 183) formulated the theory of continuity. He argued that the surest way of coping with the transition to old age is to maintain the inner and outer structure. Atchley employed well-established strategies and the environment. Using one's own initiative and pressure from the surroundings constitute motivations. Inner continuity refers to the concept of maintaining the mental state, ideas, temperament, affections, experience, hobbies, and abilities. External continuity is connected with the preservation of the social world, familiar surroundings, the upkeep of behaviour and interaction with those known to us. With regard to changes in old age, continuity fades away unwillingly and that affects identity.

Cultural and Anthropological Theories

Ethnological and sociological factors also have a bearing on the human psyche and some theories take this into account. The first is the so-called modernity theory of D. O. Cowgill and C. D. Holmes (Martin, Kinsella 1994, 356). It states that the position of elderly people and the care available for them worsens, the more modern the society. In this theory the level of modernization is determined by the level of industrialization and urbanization. Demographic and economic factors, medical technology, social organization, urbanization, education, religion and climatic changes are interlinked, according to D.O. Cogwill, with the lowering of the status of elderly persons. The image of the human being is very negative. The ideas and expectations related to old age that the elderly hold are, however, more positive than in less developed societies. Some authors have criticized this theory and state that in Japan, for example, in spite of it being a highly developed society, the image of old age is still very positive (Bengston et al. 1975, 688). Regardless of the validity of this theory we have to admit that thanks to a study into intercultural differences, more attention was devoted to the relation between cognition and old age.
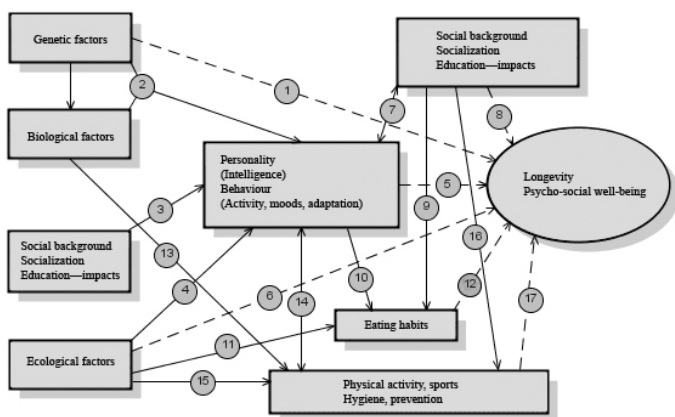
Fig.1. Factors of longevity and relations between them

Interactive Model of Longevity and Healthy Ageing

Some theories agree that satisfactory old age and longevity are the result of many physical, mental and social factors. Within a wider context, genetic, physiological and ecological factors also have an impact on longevity. None of the factors causes longevity and satisfactory old age on its own. U. Lehr (1982, 102) set out results from international research that uncovered interesting relations (Fig. 1). Genetic, physiological and biological factors have a direct impact on longevity (1) and on the personality development of an individual (2). Development is also affected by the process of socialization—education, parents, school, social background—(3) and ecological factors—an indication of environmental simulation, climatic conditions (4). Some research findings confirmed that longevity is also directly influenced by ecological factors (6). Personality has an impact on education and occupation and thus also on social status (7) and this is reflected in personality development. Statistics and research confirmed the effect of social status on longevity (8). Social status (9), personality (10) and ecological factors (11) have a bearing on eating habits. It is assumed that eating habits impact on longevity. Life style and healthy living—physical activities, hygiene, prevention (17) all affect longevity. Life style (healthy living) and genetic and biological factors (13) and personality (14) affect one another. Healthy living is influenced by ecology (15), education and social status (16). The model certainly does not take all influences and relations into consideration. Further research will bring new modifications and differentiations.

Conclusion

At abstract and general levels, successful ageing can be defined as the attempt to achieve the highest possible gains and, simultaneously, incur the lowest possible losses. It is difficult to establish criteria for successful ageing that would be concrete, universal and generally accepted. Attempts to create a theory that would account for all processes and consequences of old age are thus unrealistic. Within the research on old age, it is possible to focus on the observation of individual factors only, such as: objective or subjective, short-term or long-term, specific

or universal and static or dynamic. Although this will not explain the whole phenomenon of ageing, it will contribute to its clarification (Freund, Riedger 2003, 612).

Successful development in old age can have many different forms; as Pulkkinen puts it (2000, 278) "successful development is not uniform but polyform!". We can state that none of the theories succeeded in presenting a satisfactory image of old age and ageing. If according to K. Popper a theory is a net in which we try to catch the world, the theory of ageing is a net of many holes (Freund, Riedger 2003, 612).

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