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The process of successful aging in rural areas – an analysis of the phenomenon in south-eastern Poland

INTRODUCTION

In Poland, the aging process of the population is noticeably slower than in other European countries (Bogusz, Ostrowska, 2016, pp. 82–90). Although the data related to the aging of Polish society includes rural areas, the rate of aging in these areas varies slightly from that occurring in large urban areas. Both the demographic and the socio-economic situation of the elderly in rural areas also differs in many aspects from the situation of the elderly in urban areas, particularly large cities. It is also worth noting that, although the aging process of the population will continue to take place simultaneously in both of these environments, it is forecast that the countryside will remain “younger” than the city.

Therefore, the question arises: how is aging in Polish rural areas proceeding at present? Does the situation of the elderly in rural areas fit the concepts of successful aging? Is this concept actually a reaction to the social exclusion of older people? The aim of the present paper is an attempt to answer questions of this type. The analysis of the situation of elderly people in the rural areas of south-eastern Poland will take account of subjective factors, such as assessing the perceived

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attitude of the environment towards elderly people, the vocational situation of the respondents, satisfaction with their material status, health condition, relations with individual family members, level of self-sufficiency, and the market of services and products aimed at them. Elements of this type are consistent with the concept of successful aging within the group of definitions from the area of “life satisfaction”, “mental resources” and “biomedical theories”.

It should be mentioned that the term “successful aging”, which is discussed in more detail later in this paper, should refer to elderly people who live longer than the average life span for their demographic group, and whose level of life quality is clearly higher than average. Furthermore, as described by Zadworna-Cieślak and Finogenow (2012, p. 122), *“such people lead a lifestyle stimulating good aging. They experience happiness, fulfillment and good health in old age as a result of positive choices concerning their lifestyle and good behaviours”*.

AGING THEORIES

The aging process of organisms, in the solely biological perspective, is treated as a natural phase of development and as a “multi-layer and multi-dimensional process, dependent on many concurrent factors, internal and external (genotype and phenotype – namely the impact of the environment), characteristic of the entire living world – all living organisms” (Szarota, 2013, p. 12). This mainly consists in the declining possibilities for the structure to regenerate as well as for self-regeneration capabilities of tissues and it is a situation in which “involution processes dominate over the evolution processes”. In the case of humans, aging may progress variously, depending on individual differences. This is associated mainly with lifestyle, habits and genetic factors.

A better understanding of the problem of how individuals and society age can be achieved thanks to psychosocial concepts of old age. It is worth focusing on several of these. On the grounds of sociology, we can refer to the **activity theory**, compliant with the structural and functional concepts of Havighurst, Albrecht and Cavan, assuming that an individual perceives himself/herself from the point of view of the performed social roles (Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2012, p. 103). The process of aging results in changes within the previously performed roles, although it may also create an opportunity for their continuation. It is important to note that for old age to be satisfying, it must go hand in hand with activity, preferably long-term and of various types. This obviously depends strongly upon the health condition of the elderly people, and also applies to those who were active previously. On the other hand, the limitation of activity can lead to marginalization and social exclusion on various levels.

The **disengagement theory** of Cumming and Henry is immediately related to changes in performed social roles. Disengagement from performing certain roles

may result in the weakening of emotional bonds with the environment (Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2012, p. 103). A measurable assumption of this theory is the belief that the exclusion of elderly people may generate benefits, both for them as well as for society, such as those connected with the labour market. This is associated with two issues: an elderly person does not feel the pressure to “be productive” and, at the same time, vacates a job position for a younger person (Kowalska, Niedziółka, 2016, pp. 45–55).

The *aged subculture theory* of Rose is to some extent connected with the previous ones and should be associated with the interactionist trend. According to this concept, elderly people form the “third age” subculture, included in the group of “disengagement subcultures” (Niezabitowski, 2007, p. 99). This is associated with the exclusion of elderly people from the performance of middle age roles, as well as from contacts with other age groups. The formation of subcultures may be fostered by nursing homes, day care centers, clubs for elderly people and various kinds of associations (Klimczuk, 2012, p. 25).

Another concept connected with the functioning of elderly people in society is the *social breakdown theory* (also known as the labeling theory or the competence theory) of Kuypers and Bengtson. According to this theory, an individual perceives himself/herself the way the environment reacts to them, which, in turn, is reflected in this individual behaving according to the expectations of the environment in which they live. Such a situation may result in the development of a dependence on the labels they are assigned, e.g. useless people (Szopa, Ślęzak, 2013, pp. 282–283).

On the other hand, the *modernization theory* of Cowgill and Holmes describes the historical factors defining attitudes towards the problem of old age on the macro scale. This concept is based on the opinion that the process of transfer from pre-industrial to modern societies modified the social roles performed by elderly people, and, which is particularly important, reduced their status. They gradually lose their advisory role and cease to be authorities for younger generations (Klimczuk, 2012, p. 28). This is associated with socio-economic transformations, which in the opinion of Cowgill are related to four aspects: development of medicine, technological progress, process of urbanization, and popularization of education (Jurek, 2012, p. 29). These changes have an adverse impact on the way old age is perceived, as well as on the determination of the place and role of elderly people in society.

It is also worth drawing attention to the *exchange theory*, which is based on the assumption “of the transactional nature of the social whole, meaning the commonness of phenomena consisting in giving and taking, except for activities taken under compulsion and altruistic activities” (Żurek, 2002, p. 27). The process of aging is in this context defined as a period when the value of the resources of an individual – both health and material related – decreases with age. From the point of view of the effectiveness of exchange, this means its limitation, and hence a decrease in participation in social life (Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2012, p. 104). The

exchange process is intergenerational and refers not only to the economic sphere but also to the psychological or social spheres (Szopa, Ślęzak, 2013, p. 280).

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the *age stratification theory* according to White-Riley, Johnson and Fonner. In their opinion, age is similar to a social class or layer, and hence may constitute the basis for discrimination of groups of people. Society is divided into age groups, and being affiliated with a certain group determines the roles that the individual performs, as well as the individual's social status or position. Furthermore, age may affect the level of respect an individual receives, although this has to be placed in a strictly cultural context (appointing the place of elderly people in society) (Szopa, Ślęzak, 2013, p. 282).

Another category of the concept of aging covers the economic sphere, although remaining strictly related to the psychosocial aspects. The main and most frequent strategy characterized in the subject literature is the *“silver economy” strategy*. In the opinion of Wunsch, the aging process of the population, apart from the obvious drawbacks, may have a positive impact on the economy. This is associated especially with new products being aimed specifically towards elderly people. They are treated here as an “active, productive and socially useful group” (Szarota, Kijak, 2013, p. 30), since they contribute to the development of new segments of the services market, including the tourist and leisure segments (free time market), facilitating everyday life, or related to care, rehabilitation and financial services adjusted to age (mainly within the scope of consulting and training, covering management of the possessed funds (Szukalski, 2012, p. 4).

Another concept of an economic nature is the *theory of the political economy of aging*, as specified by Estes, Walker and Guillemard, among others. This refers to the theory of conflict and political economy of Marx (Klimczuk, 2012, pp. 4–5). It is associated with the functioning of economic and social differences in society and remains strictly related to the phenomenon of *ageism*, namely age-conditioned discrimination. The starting point for this theory lays in the interrelations between elderly people and society, e.g. through limitation of income or access to goods (Klimczuk, 2012, pp. 25–26).

A separate group consists of the *concepts of successful aging* of the individual, which, as an issue tackled in this paper, will be discussed in the next chapter.

THE CONCEPT OF SUCCESSFUL AGING – A REVIEW OF DEFINITIONS

The term “successful aging” is believed to have been created by Havighurst and Albrecht, who first used it in 1953 (Halicki, 2008, p. 13), while Rowe and Kahn popularized this term (Zadworna-Cieślak, Finogenow, 2012, p. 122). The simplest way to define this notion is as a “well-progressing process leading to the subsequent stage of life, namely old age” (Mamak-Zdanecka, 2015, p. 19).

The starting point for the concept of the successful aging of an individual is the distinction of aging into normal, pathological and successful aging. Normal aging, otherwise known as physiological aging, is a process that assumes changes related to the passage of time as it affects the body, but which progresses gradually. On the other hand, pathological or abnormal aging progresses rapidly and is usually associated with disease processes. Finally, successful or optimal aging is not only gradual (similar to the normal process) but is also accompanied by certain positive phenomena. Characteristic features of this form of aging process include long life, social competences, mental and physical health, control over one's own life (according to Baltes and Baltes (1990)), good health and satisfaction with life (according to the concept of Palmore), good health condition, activity and mental acuity (according to Bromley) (Zajac-Lamparska, 2012, p. 91).

Prior to discussing the definitions construed by various authors, it is worth referring to the division proposed by Bowling. She split the definitions into five groups, each with a dominant category: area of social functioning, life satisfaction, mental resources, biomedical perspective, and the common perception of successful aging (Halicki, 2008, p. 13). Definitions from the area of social functioning refer mainly to such issues as social commitment, participation, activity and social contacts, and social roles. Successful aging understood in this way should be associated with good health and fitness, both mental and physical. In turn, definitions related to the area of life satisfaction should be associated with defining the quality of life of elderly people. The feeling of satisfaction in many aspects, well-being in the psychological and social meanings, and the sense of control over one's own life are all factors that need to be considered in this perspective (Bałandynowicz-Panfil, 2010, p. 114).

On the other hand, the perspectives of successful aging being part of the area of mental resources should be associated with creativity and personal development, the independence and autonomy of an individual, and the sense of self-esteem and having a purpose in life. The next group of definitions of successful aging consists of biomedical theories, which describe this process as the "optimization of the expected life span while minimizing the physical and mental losses" (Halicki, 2008, p. 13). In other words, when determining successful aging, additional factors are taken into account, which constitute the basis for a satisfactory life "in the medical perspective, in the form of mental and physical health, including the functionality of a given person" (Bałandynowicz-Panfil, 2010, p. 114). Factors taken into account with these definitions include: longevity, active life, lack of disability or other disorders, high level of cognitive and mental functions, etc.

The last group of definitions covers the common perspectives, where the criteria are determined by elderly people themselves. This type of approach is often used in empirical studies and allows models devised by researchers to be compared with subjective assessments presented by elderly people (Prus, 2010, pp.

39–40). Sometimes clear discrepancies appear, as elderly people may believe that they are aging successfully, even though this is not confirmed by the biomedical classification (Halicki, 2008, p. 13).

One of the most popular approaches to the issue of successful aging is presented by Ryff (1982, pp. 209–2014), defining it as “positive or ideal functioning related to developmental work over the life course”. It is defined slightly differently by Palmore, who pays attention to the fact that it is a “combination of optimal survival capability, good health and the feeling of life satisfaction” (Zadworna-Cieślak, Finogenow, 2012, p. 122). According to the concept of Freysinger (1990), “a variety of factors have been examined as predictors of these states, such as age, socio-economic status, health, activity and social interaction, marital status, race, employment and residence”.

One variety of the concept of successful aging is “optimal aging”, which according to Robert D. Hill (Zadworna-Cieślak, Finogenow, 2012, p. 122) is a form of aging “based on inborn biological or genetic predispositions fostering longevity”, or “positive aging”, namely “a person’s use of the available resources for the purpose of optimization of the experience of aging” (Konieczna-Woźniak, 2013, p. 191). According to this approach, there are some resources that may be used to age in a positive way. These include specific inborn predispositions (mental), individual characteristics such as personality, exhibited attitudes or beliefs, and environmental conditions associated with medical procedures and access to medical and care services, as well as housing conditions, type of work performed, etc. (Konieczna-Woźniak, 2013, p. 191).

Finally, it is also worth noting that the shaping of the relations between elderly people and their environment and mental comfort is influenced by many psychosocial factors. A. Pierzchalska and P. Klag (2008, pp. 3–4) deemed the following factors to be the most important:

- Sudden change in living conditions and the environment, especially that related to retirement. It may be accompanied by a decrease in prestige, the breaking of social relations and a change in place of residence.
- Solitude resulting from loss of friends and relatives.
- Social isolation, being the cause of difficulties in adapting to a new environment or related to specific personality traits.
- Decrease in wealth, especially when it takes a form threatening the fulfillment of basic life needs and the sense of safety.
- Excess of free time and lack of possibility to use it in a satisfactory manner. This is often associated with a lack of specific interests.
- Monotony, boredom and emptiness often leading to affective disorders, e.g. depression.

Furthermore, the authors also indicate “incorrect attitudes towards aging displayed by the elderly people themselves, as well as towards them by their environment” (Pierzchalska, Klag, 2008, pp. 3–4).

THE PROCESS OF SUCCESSFUL AGING IN THE RURAL AREAS OF SOUTH-EASTERN POLAND – RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

As mentioned above, the basis of this paper is an attempt to compare the situation of elderly people living in rural areas of south-eastern Poland with the concept of successful aging. The starting point is the attempt to answer the question of whether the situation of elderly people in rural areas is compatible with the concept of successful aging. The analysis was conducted with the use of subjective factors, such as the attitude of the environment towards elderly people in the opinions of the respondents, their professional situation, satisfaction with their material status, health condition or relations with family members, whether they are self-sufficient and their assessment of the market of services and products aimed at elderly people.

The main source of information comprises the results of surveys conducted on elderly people from the districts of Nowy Targ and Myślenice, both located in the Małopolskie province. These districts were selected based on specified variables, providing information on the phenomena studied. The database for the statistical calculations was the GUS 2016 study. A correlation coefficient was used to verify the relationship between variables. Variables with a correlation above 0.7 were omitted. To examine the relationships that may occur between the studied traits in the general population, the χ^2 independence test was used. The study was conducted in 2017 on a sample of 150 people aged 60 and over, using a questionnaire designed specifically for the age group and taking into account its specificity.

The group of definitions for successful aging related to the social functioning of elderly people referred to how elderly people are perceived by the environment and what role they play in society. It is also worth drawing attention to what Kędra (2011, p. 201) refers to as “the characteristic feature of contemporary civilization”, namely the exclusion of elderly people from performing social roles. However, the results of the study conducted in the districts of Nowy Targ and Myślenice seem to contradict the above. Nearly two-thirds of the people aged 60+ deemed that the oldest generation is necessary for society, while only a few people stated that it is more of a burden. Additionally, a vast majority of the respondents stated that the attitude of the environment towards elderly people is positive.

Undertaking a professional activity at a late age is very important. It usually has a positive impact not only on improving (or maintaining at the previous level) of the financial situation of the elderly person and their family, but, equally importantly, it may perform a therapeutic function. This function may consist of an increase in self-esteem or the feeling of being needed, and may help alleviate the effects of sudden retirement. Unfortunately, elderly people in Poland relatively rarely decide to undertake professional work after reaching the retirement age. In the case of rural areas, those who are farmers are more likely to continue with such an activity, and rather than giving up the farm, they prefer to continue farming (Wojewodzic et al., 2015). Although there are many reasons for

such a situation, the most important are the relatively limited labour market for the elderly, individual choices of a life model and the society's attitude towards working retirees. Sometimes the attitude is negative, and the elderly people may be perceived as "taking jobs away" from people at a productive age. All these factors (and many others) mean that people relatively rarely work after retiring.

It is important to note that this situation will probably change over time. This is associated with the shaping of the retirement system, directly dependent on the demographic situation of the country, but also with the gradual arrival of people from younger age groups to retirement age, who quite commonly declare the will to remain active on the labour market after reaching the retirement age. However, it is assumed that the realization of these plans may be hampered by the relatively low educational activity of the future retirees as well as by the level of unemployment, mainly long-term, which is particularly problematic as it may lead to labour exclusion (Urbaniak, 2013, pp. 181–183).

Since the undertaking of professional work by elderly people involves many positive effects, it appears that it is worth examining the situation in the case of the surveyed people aged 60+.

Table 1. Structure of respondents by education and professional activity

Education	Respondents		Total
	Professionally active	Professionally inactive	
	%	%	
Primary	3.6	28.6	32.2
Basic vocational	7.0	30.1	37.1
Secondary	9.2	7.6	16.8
Post-secondary	5.0	0.3	5.3
Higher	8.1	0.5	8.6
Total	32.9	67.1	100.0

Source: own study.

Only one-third of this group of respondents declared a professional activity, both in the form of supporting themselves through work and making extra money to supplement their pension. The lowest level of professional activity was demonstrated by elderly people having finished or unfinished primary education (approx. 4% of the group), while a slightly greater amount of activity was declared by graduates of basic vocational schools (almost 7%). It is important to note that few people with higher education did not work. Thus, we may see a clear relation – the occupational activity of elderly people grows alongside with the growth in the level of education (Table 1).

The level of satisfaction achieved in various aspects undoubtedly impacts both the quality of life of elderly people and the way they perceive the period of old age. As part of the study covered by this paper, people aged 60+ were asked

to identify their degree of satisfaction with regard to three areas of life, namely: individual family relations, health condition and housing condition. Assessments of this type seem to be important and directly influence identification of the subjective life quality of elderly people (Table 2).

Table 2. Respondents' degree of satisfaction with regard to relations with family members, health condition and housing situation, by gender (%)

Areas of life	Degree of satisfaction	Relations with family members	Health condition	Housing situation
Respondents	high	79.6	17.0	22.5
	average	18.1	59.6	62.1
	low	2.3	23.4	15.4
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: own study.

The respondents gave the highest ratings to relations with family members, with almost 80% of them defining the degree of satisfaction as “high”, and only a few people defining it to be “low” (2%). For the assessment of their own housing condition, “average” (62%) ratings were dominant, although “low” ratings were also significant (15%). For the assessment of health condition, there were fewer ratings of “average” and noticeably more of “low” (their share grew along with age). In this case, it is worth emphasizing the gender-dependent differences: nearly one-fifth of women and almost one-fourth of men were not satisfied with their health condition.

At this point, it is also worth mentioning another issue which affects the subjective assessment of the quality of life by elderly people, namely the savings they possess that may be used for their own purposes. In the case of the surveyed people aged 60+, the main intended purpose was to supply the household budget (almost half of the respondents spent their savings on daily living), followed by the purchase of their medications.

One problem remains directly connected to their satisfaction with their health condition, one particularly important for people at advanced age, namely that related to the ability to perform the activities of daily living. These possibilities enable or limit the activities of elderly people in almost every area of life. Half of the surveyed people aged 60+ had occasional difficulties with independently performing various kinds of daily routines. However, it is important to note that few of the people in the entire sample had continuous difficulties in this respect. When asked to indicate to what specifically their restrictions apply, they claimed that they had the greatest problem with cleaning their homes and with handling various matters away from home. Furthermore, for some (mainly men) it was sometimes difficult to prepare meals independently and to do the daily shopping. On the other hand, independent washing of their bodies or dressing was a problem for few elderly people.

In the case of those elderly people declaring difficulties getting around in their everyday life, the most numerous group used the assistance of family members (almost half of all answers) and neighbours. On the other hand, it was exceptionally rare to find answers relating to support of this type being provided by representatives of charity organizations (e.g. Caritas) or by social workers or health visitors. It is also worth mentioning that the respondents used the assistance of third parties relatively rarely, approximately once a month or less frequently. There were a few elderly people who declared the need for more frequent support, e.g. more often than once a week.

It is worth adding that the respondents, when indicating their concerns pertaining to further life, especially until late old age, mostly mentioned health concerns. The greatest fears among the elderly were: illness, infirmness, loss of memory, and other concerns to some extent related to health condition, namely pain, dependence on others and being a burden.

Despite problems with performing the activities of daily living and, in some cases, the need for assistance of third parties, the elderly would like to live in nursing homes in the future only to a small degree. The optimal situation would, in their opinion, be to remain in their own places of residence but with the possibility to use the emergency assistance of family members, friends and neighbours.

One of the economic concepts of aging, i.e. the *silver economy theory*, assumes that aging societies can be treated as an opportunity for the economy, rather than only as a threat. However, a condition that needs to be fulfilled is cooperation between elderly people, entrepreneurs and other business partners, as well as local administration and non-governmental organizations. Stimulation of the economy should also include the development of production and services intended specifically for the elderly.

This is why it was decided in the course of the study to check the needs and expectations of elderly people, and which services and products are missing from the Polish market, in their opinion (Table 3).

Table 3. Services and products for the elderly which are missing from the Polish market, according to the respondents (%)

Services missing from the Polish market, according to the respondents	%
Activities for elderly people in the local community	20.4
Discounts, season passes for elderly people to cinemas, theatres, museums	14.4
Radio and television programmes	12.3
Care services	10.2
Employment agencies for the elderly	9.1
Household appliances adapted to elderly people	8.9
Sport activities for elderly people	4.9
Educational offer for elderly people	4.2
Tourist services adapted to a specific lifestyle	4.1
Others	5.2

Source: own study based on: (CBOS, 2009, pp. 15–16).

The respondents' opinions clearly indicate that what they missed the most were activities in the local environment prepared specially for people of advanced age (a problem for one-fifth of all the elderly people), as well as discounts and subscription cards to cinemas, theatres, museums (constituting more than 14% of the answers in the entire sample). Subsequent places in the ranking were taken by radio and television broadcasts (approx. 12%) and shortages with regard to care services (significant for this group, and indicated by one-tenth of the respondents). A distant place in the ranking was occupied by tourist services adjusted to a specific lifestyle (approx. 4%) and by sports activities for elderly people (less than 5%) or educational classes (approx. 4%). It is questionable whether the relatively small percentage of answers indicating this type of shortage was associated with the broad offer addressed specifically to elderly people within the examined counties, or the more likely scenario of the low interest taken in such forms of activity.

In the case of shortages in availability for the elderly, it is worth emphasizing the differences depending on the gender and education of the respondents. Women more often than men missed access to discounts and subscription cards for elderly people, activities in the local environment, and household appliances adapted to the elderly. On the other hand, men would like to have more sports activities intended specifically for the elderly. The level of education of the respondents affected the way they answered questions on access to care services (a lack thereof was indicated mainly by the elderly people with finished and unfinished primary education), as well as employment agency services for elderly people (especially for people with vocational education).

CONCLUSIONS

The process of successful aging may be discussed from many perspectives and cover many areas of elderly people's life. It may have biological, psychological and social dimensions. This concept can also be a method of combatting the social exclusion of older people. A broad approach to this matter was applied to a group of people aged 60+ from south-eastern Poland. The results of this study indicate that the subjective quality of life of elderly people in villages of the Małopolskie province was at an average level, which affects the possibility of drawing conclusions on the moderate course of the process of successful aging in this environment. The respondents perceived themselves as necessary for society, and they defined the attitude of the environment towards them as clearly positive. At the same time, they exhibited a rather moderate activity in the professional sphere (only one-third of them worked professionally, with people with higher education working the most frequently) and were rather satisfied with their life in the three main aspects: individual family relations, health condition and housing condition. They were relatively the least satisfied with their health situation,

which was undoubtedly associated with certain restrictions with regard to their ability to perform the activities of daily living, as well as with their concerns about the future based on their health. In the event of problems with getting around in everyday life, the respondents used mostly the assistance of their families and neighbours. Additionally, the respondents noticed large shortages in the services and products offered on the Polish market aimed specifically towards elderly people, which, in their opinion, were necessary for their efficient functioning in the local environment and for raising their quality of life.

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Summary

In Poland, the aging process of the population is noticeably slower than in other European countries. The aging of Polish society concerns both municipal and rural areas. However, this process varies between these environments, both in terms of the pace and the scale of the problem. However, it is particularly significant that the forecasts indicate that rural areas will remain “younger” than urban areas in the future. The aim of the present paper was to attempt to answer

the question whether the situation of elderly people from the rural areas of south-eastern Poland fit the concepts of successful aging. The paper is based on the results of a study conducted in 2017 among a group of 150 people aged 60+, living in the districts of Myślenice and Nowy Targ. On this basis, it is possible to state that the respondents are rather happy with their contacts with the environment, and express a moderately high degree of satisfaction with their health condition, are not very professionally active, and notice high shortages on the Polish market in terms of services and products aimed especially at elderly people. Thus we may assume that the subjective quality of the life of the respondents in the villages of the Małopolskie province is at an average level and that it creates the possibility of drawing conclusions on the moderate course of the process of successful aging in this environment.

Keywords: aging theories, successful aging, rural areas, elderly people.

Proces pomyślnego starzenia się na wsi – analiza zjawiska na obszarze Polski południowo-wschodniej

Streszczenie

W Polsce proces starzenia się ludności przebiega zdecydowanie wolniej niż w innych krajach europejskich. Fakt ten może cieszyć. Ale jednocześnie nie należy zapominać, że systematyczny wzrost udziału osób starszych w społeczeństwie to aktualnie jeden z najpoważniejszych problemów demograficznych, społecznych i gospodarczych w naszym kraju. Starzenie się polskiego społeczeństwa dotyczy zarówno terenów miejskich, jak i wiejskich. Jednakże proces ten przebiega w odmienny sposób w obu tych środowiskach, zarówno pod względem tempa, jak i skali problemu. Jednakże, co szczególnie ważne, w przyszłości według prognoz wieś pozostanie „młodsza” od miasta. Celem prezentowanego opracowania była próba odpowiedzi na pytanie o to, czy sytuacja seniorów z obszarów wiejskich Polski południowo-wschodniej wpisuje się w koncepcje pomyślnego starzenia się. Podstawę stanowią tu wyniki badań przeprowadzonych w 2017 roku na grupie 150 osób w wieku 60+ z terenu powiatów myślenickiego i nowotarskiego. Na ich podstawie można stwierdzić, iż respondenci prezentują się jako osoby raczej zadowolone z kontaktów z otoczeniem, o umiarkowanie wysokim stopniu satysfakcji w odniesieniu do swojego stanu zdrowia, niezbyt aktywne zawodowo i dostrzegające duże braki na polskim rynku w zakresie oferty usług i produktów kierowanych specjalnie do seniorów. Można więc uznać, że subiektywna jakość życia badanych seniorów z małopolskiej wsi jest na średnim poziomie, a to przekłada się na możliwość wnioskowania o umiarkowanym przebiegu procesu pomyślnego starzenia się w tym środowisku.

Słowa kluczowe: teorie starzenia się, pomyślne starzenie się, obszary wiejskie, osoby starsze.

JEL: J14, R11, Z13.