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ECOSYSTEM OF URBAN SERVICES (EUS): PRIORITY NEEDS FOR SOCIAL (DIGITAL) SERVICES OF THE OLDER GENERATION

This article is based on the ideology of the International Madrid Plan for Active Ageing and its Active Ageing Index (AAI), which prioritizes the employment of the elderly. The concept of 'active ageing' is fully in line with the framework of classical and contemporary activist sociology. The article briefly analyzes the social services for the elderly in Russia, which have been developing since the late 1980s and were standardized and incorporated into federal law in 1995. In 2004, the implementation and financing of social services were delegated to the regions of the Russian Federation. However, there are still few studies that specify the exact services that the elderly themselves need. State pension insurance and provision are also being developed, addressing the question of what benefits are provided to citizens, at what age, and under what conditions. Employment services were established in the early 1990s, but older workers were often offered low-skill, low-wage jobs. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the needs and capabilities of the 'older generation' are undergoing significant changes, and that the existing approach to social service provision, which largely took shape in the 1990s, is outdated. Our research question is whether the proposed digital ecosystems (services) are consistent with the provisions outlined in the Madrid Plan. Many older people want to continue working or volunteering, including adapting to the digital environment. Therefore, an additional question is whether the needs of older people in terms of employment are considered by digital and traditional providers of social services. The empirical

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material is the St. Petersburg Administration's project on digitalization of services provided to citizens, including the elderly, based on their needs (Electronic Government Services – EGS St. Petersburg). This project is currently undergoing rapid development. The article is analytical and polemical in nature and concludes that social services should support the achieved normative status of older people as independent adults and preserve their autonomy and dignity.

Keywords: older people, pension system, social services, digitalization of services, continued adulthood and employment, ecosystem of urban services

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Presently, people aged 60 years and over are referred to by various terms: old-age pensioners, unemployables, mature, people of the third or silver age, and young old. In recent years, researchers, specialists and professionals in the helping and medical fields have focused on the position that old age can be dignified, active, and delayed. Old age is not a 'post-retirement survival period.' For the first time, new technologies, achievements in science and medicine make it possible to experience this stage differently from previous generations.

In the industrial society, former peasants were 'processed' into industrial workers, incorporated into uniform temperament and turned into the 'calculable workers' needed for industrial production. As Foucault argued, 'To observe individuals, to correct them (in both senses) is to punish, train, and discipline them' (Foucault 2005). In the context of industrialization, migration, and urbanization, which have destroyed the traditional multigenerational family, older people have become increasingly 'disciplined.' The issue of providing for older people when they are no longer able to engage in hard factory labor was addressed in the 1880s with the introduction of the pension insurance system, conceived by the Chancellor of Germany Otto von Bismarck. The system implied that pension contributions were made throughout all periods of employment. It was essential to determine the spatial and financial standards, i.e. how many years an employee should work (time in employment), what is the required amount of benefits for a certain pension period (post-retirement survival period), and at what age an employee gets the right for 'old-age pension' (disability due to 'old age'). By the end of the 19th century, almost all of Europe had adopted, with occasional modifications, the system that can be unambiguously described as disciplinary. In Protestant countries, the introduced retirement age was 65 years. There were variations in Catholic countries, but nowhere was the retirement age below 60–62 years. Thus, at the governmental and pan-European level, it was legitimately established that old age starts with retirement and pension.

Modernity is changing the trends and understanding of old age. Alongside the fact that the majority of older people already receive pension, we observe the development of social services for older people, i.e. social care.

Moreover, it is acknowledged that people of the same age may require completely different services. Thus, we have the urgent need to reconsider our approach to old age. In this regard, the UN developed the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) (UN 2002) and on its basis the Active Ageing Index (AAI) (Sidorenko, Zaidi 2013). The idea of 'active ageing' is in line with classical and contemporary sociology, from Max Weber to Jurgen Habermas and Alain Touraine, with their recognition of the importance of labor, independence from the state and other forms of subjectivity and self-organization.

In Russia, home-based social services started to develop in the late 1980s as assistance with food delivery and 'redeeming' food stamps in queues. In 1992, the long queues gave way to high prices and the need to find cheaper places. This form of activity was often beyond the capabilities of older people. Moreover, the rate of pension could not keep up with the rise in food prices, which reinforced the idea that the elderly were weak and needed outside help. This view was the basis of the Russian legislation, and in the 1990s, free services partly compensated for the low incomes of older people (FZ 1995). Home-based social services in the form of food delivery to the elderly rapidly developed. It was an innovation at that time, because until the late 1980s, the only options for older people living alone were institutional care or assistance from family and relatives.

Modern-day Russia has inherited the social services system of the USSR, including services for older people. In 1995, social services for older people were unified and introduced into federal law. In 2004, social services and their financing were transferred to the regions of Russia. Despite the reform and development of professional social work since the 1990s, there is still a lack of research on what services older people themselves need. Even with the digitalization of social services, the issue of their availability and compliance with the needs of older people is unresolved. More than a decade ago, researchers have discovered a significant discrepancy between the services older people want and those provided by social services (Kupriyanova 2012). Employment services were established in the early 1990s, but older people were often offered low-skilled and low-paying job opportunities.

In 2013, a new law allowed NGOs and commercial organizations to provide social services, which allowed them to considerably diversify them. Yet, in our opinion, the current approach to service provision has become outdated as age has been pushed back by 10–15 years and many older people not only continue to live independently, but also continue to work in the Western hemisphere and Russia. In this regard, some older people act at their discretion, but in accordance with the ideas of active ageing and the Active Ageing Index. Russia officially uses the Active Longevity Index (Order of the Ministry of Economic Development 2019) to measure the well-being of older people, which was introduced after a year of discussions regarding possible adaptation of the AAI. In the name of the index, 'ageing' has been replaced by 'longevity,' which does not have negative connotations. Yet, the introduction of the Index

and the expansion of the statistical data collected to assess the well-being of older people in the AAI format have not changed the approach to social services, nor have they affected the public recognition of the concept of ageing with preserved independence.

It is believed that after the age of 75, many older people require periodic or constant assistance or technologically equipped housing (smart home) to maintain independent living. There are such homes in Petersburg and Moscow, as well as in several other cities in Russia. Nevertheless, there are not enough smart homes and not all older people are aware of their existence. As a rule, such homes have a nurse on duty at all times and basic medical equipment (Manuilskaya et al. 2021). However, in this case, it is the conditions of an older person that matter rather than their age. To continue to work, receive a wide range of social services, and preserve independence, a smart home should be equipped with devices connected to the Internet, while older people should have the skills to formulate a request to obtain necessary information or order services.

Ecosystem of Urban Services (EGS): Priority Needs for Social (Digital) Services of the Older Generation

Currently, around 90% of the Russian population are Internet users, which is approximately 130 million people, who spend up to eight hours a day online. Today's young people will eventually age, yet they will not leave the World Wide Web, which to most has become the place where they satisfy day-to-day, social, economic, and recreational needs. The number of older people who actively use the Internet is gradually and constantly increasing. As of 2022, the share of Internet users in the 65+ age group amounted to 13% and continues to increase due to external reasons (Finexpertiza 2022). The Internet is no longer a space only for the young.

Despite the growing proportion of older people among Internet users, we observe a very slow adaptation of the Internet to the needs and specifics of today's older people. The digital environment has developed a discriminatory stereotype of older people as passive consumers. This stereotype is rooted in the paternalistic policy of social care and society's attitude to older people as 'children again' and was adopted by the Internet services market. Contemporary Internet environment, based on the model of individualism and orientated to a rapidly changing environment, essentially ignores the needs of older people, thereby reinforcing the stereotype of old age and reproducing it through irrelevant approaches to the development of services intended for the older generation. This imposes certain restrictions and specifics that should be taken into account when prioritizing the needs of older people and designing services for them.

Older people do not have an urgent need to go on the Internet and spend much time there, as there are not so many services available to them. Most websites and platforms targeted at older people are not adapted to the most

popular format of Internet content consumption among older people, i.e. from their mobile phones. For example, older people search for and compare prices looking for the best offer. Yet many applications or price comparison websites are less user-friendly in the mobile versions (Meidascope 2022: 4). The lack of adaptation of desktop versions to mobile format comfortable for older people can be extrapolated to the use of the Internet in general. The development of websites and platforms for older people implies intuitive navigation, user-friendly interfaces and minimalist design, which does not stimulate interest in the development of special services for older people. The e-commerce sector does not perceive older people as active consumers of digital goods and services, not because of the stereotype that older people are not Internet users, but rather due to the stereotype that older people are not actively engaged in consumption of goods and services.

Retirement prompts interest in other activities other than employment. We suggest that services should be differentiated, and for the 'active elderly,' they should focus on providing opportunities to continue adulthood, improve professional skills, and maintain employment and independence, thereby delaying ageing. Those older people who believe that retirement is the time to rest should be offered other services and opportunities. These can be leisure services, sports, wellness, and hobbies. Such older people take particular interest in information about events they receive on various digital platforms and applications (Orlov 2021, Parfenova 2022), for example, the ability to filter and enable push notifications about upcoming events. Meanwhile, the intricacies of using an application require a relatively high level of digital literacy, and the lack of necessary skills can be an obstacle to the development of digital social services (Arkhipova, Borodkina 2021). Older people, often confused with the variety of information on the Internet, require services that provide complete and detailed information about available activities.

Another issue for older people interacting with the digital environment is the high learning curve for using, for example, entertainment platforms. In addition to government services, there are many multiage digital leisure services, such as online cinemas, video games, Internet portals for communication, social networks, and digital arts and culture. Similar to other digital services, they often disregard the needs of older people. For instance, in dating applications, they will have difficulty finding a partner of the same age, online games are mainly oriented towards younger audiences, movie theaters tend to have a complicated interface and no discount system (for example, for comments and reviews), and their subscriptions are not always affordable for pensioners. . Digital arts and culture also require a high level of technical expertise from their audiences, which older people often do not have. Such expertise is developed through regular activities in the digital environment, which for older people is further complicated by other barriers.

Thus, when we analyze older people's priority needs for digital services, we face problems at several levels, i.e. the consideration of older people's needs in mobile applications, the digital literacy of older people that enables

them to take advantage of available opportunities, the need to digitize many services intended for older people, and the high learning curve.

Presently, Saint Petersburg has developed an ecosystem of urban services (EUS), which is a new model for informing citizens about available services aimed at integrating the existing online service on a single platform (navigator) and distributing services based on the needs of different target group within their EUS role model (for example, the role 'I am a pensioner'). It was planned to be introduced in 2021–2022, but it has not been completed yet. According to Vice-Governor S. Kazarin, citizens of St. Petersburg will be able to satisfy up to 80% of their needs with the help of electronic services united in a single system. Entrepreneurs, who had tested the new model, compared it to a marketplace. However, they added that it would be quite difficult to fully implement the ecosystem with all the services announced by the Vice-Governor (RBC 2021).

It is important that the EUS will be friendly to users and not just convenient for its developers. Currently, a big oversight of the EUS developers is the lack of employment services for older people. The role 'I am a pensioner' included in the EUS combines various digital services with which older people can receive governmental services, up-to-date information, help in organizing life, and satisfying basic needs. Yet this filter in the ecosystem is based on the traditional view of idle older people and does not consider their interest in finding a job.

Currently, the role 'I am a pensioner' on the EUS website has the following options:

- Sign up for free events and courses;
- Sign up for physical therapy courses;
- Sign up for financial literacy courses;
- Sign up for digital literacy courses;
- Buy or book tickets to cultural events with discount;
- Receive benefits: where to apply, list of required documents;
- Receive social services;
- Compare prices of vital and essential medicines;
- Learn how to protect yourself from fraudsters;
- Learn about active recreation for pensioners.

As we can see, the role 'I am a pensioner' mainly considers the educational and recreational needs of older people. Still, given the trends for longevity and the provisions of the Madrid Plan, it would be appropriate to include those needs whose satisfaction will promote the inclusion of older people in a more diverse social life and ensure their decent standard of living. These two needs bring us back to the issue of employment for older people. From our point of view, the services provided by the current social security system, even considering their free-of-charge basis or low prices, still do not compensate for the loss of income when retiring. At the same time, there are refitted libraries, discount theater tickets, community centers, and free excursions for recreational activities of which the elderly are often unaware. Also, there are amazing programs implemented by

NGOs such as Russian grannies (2023), which is a marketplace of handmade goods and services provided by the older generation, where the elderly not only work and profit but also engage in communication with young volunteers who help organize online commerce.

In its turn, the employment of older people (or legal protection of the possibility to extend it) not only resolves the issue of quality of life by providing older people with a stable income, but also contributes to the integration of older people into social interactions, allowing them to establish new social relationships with colleagues both in digital and traditional forms of employment. There are a lot more older people who continue to work than those who receive social services or leisure services. Officially employed older people cannot claim social services from organizations listed as social services providers. Digital ecosystems offer a wider choice of social and leisure services outside the state social security system, as well as opportunities to continue to work. In this context, digital ecosystems are more flexible than traditional job search sources. Digital job search services offer a wider range of possible vacancies and a variety of forms of employment. The inclusion of these services can reduce the number of older people who continue to work unofficially in the 'grey' sector of the economy, thereby reducing the risks of their precarisation.

Compared to traditional services providers, digital ecosystems can be more responsive to changes in the needs of older people. Ecosystems, such as the EUS, can be an alternative to the state system in the provision of leisure and educational services, if the Madrid Plan is taken into account. By continuously monitoring current services, ecosystems can offer options to older people without limiting them to specific needs, allowing them to create an individual path of ageing based primarily on the wishes of older people themselves.

Continued employment from older people's perspective

Improving the well-being of the older generation and promoting their employment is a priority goal of the 2nd stage of the Strategy of Actions on Older People (Russian Government Executive Order 2016). This goal signals a change in the societal and government's view of older people, who have long been convinced that retirement is the period of well-deserved rest. Despite the fact that in the last decades many older people continue to work, employment after 55/60 years of age was necessitated by a low pension rate rather than the needs of a higher level. Economically, the increase in the number of employed pensioners was often conditioned by the mismatch between the pension rate, the length of employment, and the wage level (Sinyavskaya 2017). There have been regular publications stating that pensions compensate no more than 20–30% of lost income, while the international standard is at least 40% (the International Labor Organization Convention 1952). We can rightfully claim that 'theatricalization of social debt' with regard to pensioners (Debord 1999) was

successful, and for a long time, older people were the electoral base of trust for the authorities. However, this trust was destroyed by the pension reform.

The motives of older people themselves for continuing to work were little studied and reduced to the fact that 'pension is not enough.' In this regard, a dramatic turn in the interaction between older people and the state happened not even in 2018 when the pension reform was introduced, but some time earlier, in 2016, when the government ceased recalculation of the insurance component of pensions. This immediately triggered a restructuring of the labor market and an apparent decrease in the number of employed pensioners from 14325 thousand people in 2014 to 7765 thousand people in 2021 (Russian Federal Statistics Service 2022). The Statistics Service explains that the decrease in the number of employed pensioners compared to January 1, 2016 is due to the enactment of the Federal Law (2015) that canceled the indexation of pensions of employed pensioners. We are fully confident that a very significant proportion of older people who have left their employment have moved into informal, 'gray' employment, performed 'by agreement' with employers. This situation can be interpreted as a win-win since older people became entitled to the pension recalculation they were looking for, while employers saved money on pension contributions, which are quite considerable (Federal Tax Service 2020). Employees of pre-retirement and retirement age are further motivated to leave employment according to Federal Law No. 422 (2018). According to this law, a pensioner has the status of unemployed (meaning that they have their pension recalculated, which results in a significant increase!), and preserves all due benefits of unemployed pensioners. At the same time, they lose the right to paid medical leaves and annual vacation, which are also substantial losses.

Among the pensioners who have kept official employment are either public sector employees who are not in a position to negotiate with employers, or highly qualified specialists, for whom the loss of work means not only the loss of income, but also a huge blow to status, quality of life, and self-actualization. Several studies have shown that older people see work as the source of self-actualization (Parfenova 2023, Kozlova 2017). Hence, we think it is essential that services for older people should not be limited to leisure services, but should also include services which will enable older people to find employment on favorable terms, because 'older people want convenient working hours, a shorter work day or week, a longer vacation' (Klimova 2022). According to the Statistics Service data for 2019, the share of self-employed people in Russia is about 5%. Among the inactive, there are more men than women in all groups by type of employment (including the self-employed).

Yet, in the same group there are twice as many women over 70 years of age as there are men, specifically 2278 women for 1000 men (Statdata 2021). According to the data of the Center for Labor Market Studies of HSE (Higher School of Economics), the main reason why older people prefer self-employment is the desire to find more convenient working hours (Roshchin, Solntsev 2020).

Nevertheless, there are not enough studies into what older people can offer to employers, for instance, a more tolerant attitude to working in the evening or at weekends in contrast to adult people with families, or something else. It is clear that the labor market is rapidly changing and transforming (Sizova, Grigorieva 2019). At the same time, it is very regionalized and heterogeneous (Sizova et al. 2022). Yet, perhaps many people are still looking for stability and permanent employment, although such aspirations are increasingly difficult to realize.

Presently, it is unclear whether the government needs older people as workers or not. Alongside the repeated mantra of labor shortages, neither the state nor businesses are doing anything to keep older people in their jobs, even those that do not require high skills but can be filled by migrants. Indeed, migrants do get employed in these job positions, since the state is not concerned with the costs of migrants' pensions and medical care, while employers are interested in cheap labor. In a resource-based economy, education and skills are worth little and do not guarantee anything, while pension rights are violated. To reiterate, the state's attitude to employed older people is most evident in the economically ridiculous and politically unfair decision to cancel the recalculation of the insurance component of the pension.

In our opinion, the concerns that older people occupy job positions fit for young people are unfounded. A considerable number of young people are not aspiring to work in offices anymore as they work from home, online, and in the streets. This 'advanced group of employed' is joined by older people who appreciate flexible working hours and opportunity to manage their time. It is time to dismantle many of the stereotypes about older people that we have written about repeatedly (Grigorieva, Kelasev 2016). Moreover, the new trends in the labor market clearly do not indicate a conflict over job opportunities between the elderly and the young.

Many older people, including those residing in the West, continue to work past the retirement age which, as it was already noted, is gradually reaching 67 years of age in several countries. Older people start their own businesses or capitalize their skills and hobbies. All this contributes to the feeling of freedom and self-assurance, which is much more appealing than the feeling that 'people are looking through us' that many older people note. Whereas in their 50s and 60s, when asked 'What goal do you pursue in life?', people gave clear and definitive answers in the categories of 'happy family life': build a house, buy a car, give children a good education, then in the early 90s many adopted a different vocabulary, appropriately vague, and talked about 'self-fulfillment', 'search for identity,' and 'development of personal abilities' (Beck 2000: 143).

Conclusion

The policy of the Russian economy leads to the accelerated withdrawal from the labor market of employees of pre-retirement and retirement age, even

though among these people there are those who are qualified and have skills required for remote work. However, while maintaining social and economic independence, people extend their 'adulthood,' which can be called 'late or extended,' and do not become elderly despite reaching the age of 65 and over. Today, they are more in demand, as the labor market has a shortage of workforce in most industries. This issue was discussed at the 7th International Labor Forum in Saint Petersburg in the spring of 2023. Thus, as of September 1, 2022, the number of young employees 20–24 years old decreased by 265,0 thousand people, while the number of 25–29 years old decreased by 560,0 thousand people (7th International Labor Forum 2023). In several regions, the number of vacant positions considerably exceeds the number of applicants.

At the same time, in recent years, we have seen a sharp increase in the number of self-employed, up to 6,78 million people by 2023. Moreover, it is known that pensioners/older employees prefer self-employment due to more flexible and convenient working hours. Considering that some self-employed people keep a low profile, the estimates of their number range from 8% to 11%. There is also an increase in 'platform employment' used by people with digital access (Eremicheva 2023). Many 'late adults' regularly invest in their education, especially 'digital' education. Among these people are highly qualified older people who remain employed in science, education, medicine, and technologies. Many who have mastered the Internet technologies are already developing a 'silver economy' in commerce and production of goods and services.

When we talk about the services included in the 'pensioner role' in the EUS, we recommend renouncing the straight-forward 'helping approach,' as it moves older people down the social ladder and increases inequality, which does not conform to the standards of a social state. It should be taken into consideration that different groups of older people have different priorities and their interests may vary from home service to searching for work or active leisure activities. We should ensure that the mass media spread awareness of the capabilities of these services. It is unfortunate that even 30 years after the introduction of the social services system, some older people do not know that it exists or how to apply for services. Perhaps, some still enjoy seeing themselves as the 'victims' of the system devoid of state care (Bogdanova 2006). Or, perhaps, the communicative management of social services is still poorly organized, relying too much on the activity and self-responsibility of users, which older people often lack.

At the same time, we can note that the concerns of digitalization are often justified, specifically for older people. However, discussion of the prospects for addressing 'digital segregation' requires a separate article.

Lack of awareness often results in a high learning curve for older people. Few are aware that the National projects include a large number of educational programs, virtually free of charge, that allow people either to learn a new profession or upgrade existing skills. These programs can also help older people

gain self-confidence and improve their demands on their CVs, which are currently quite humble (Sizova et al. 2022: 52–54). Digital platforms can contribute to the active social life of pensioners, as well as to their activities in small businesses. Digitalization should be considered an investment in various population groups that can produce controllable results. What these results might be is a question we need to ponder rather than dismiss it as a complicated issue.

Today's services for older people, offered both by the state and NGOs, are developed along the lines of social investments in employment and improvement of the quality of life of older people, yet these trends would benefit from more media attention. And, of course, the EUS should introduce the role of the 'Older employee' with options for traditional and unconventional employment.

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