

Comparison of senior volunteering and intergenerational programmes in Denmark in the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

Danish society encourages seniors to volunteer. Authorities support one-off and long-term programmes for the senior community. The main focus is on the senior – an active Denmark citizen who helps his/her peers or other adults. There is a complete lack of activities in Denmark where seniors regularly meet youngsters in intergenerational programmes. In Czechia there are a number of intergenerational programmes at both local and national level, organised by non-profit organisations and supported by municipal or state authorities. The author has compiled the results of field research in Denmark and the Czech Republic and compared the situation in both countries.

KEYWORDS: seniors, intergenerational relationships, volunteering, intergenerational programmes, active seniors, Czechia, Denmark

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Introduction. Aims of research. In Scandinavia, it is said that the citizens of these countries are supposed to be active on many levels. They should play sport because sport is an important prevention against ageing. They should be involved in volunteer activities throughout their lives because it is good to do something for their environment. In this analytical text we will focus on the senior community in Denmark, where there are 1 200 000 inhabitants aged 65+, 940 000 of whom are organised in one large senior organisation that coordinates volunteers throughout Denmark. What do seniors volunteer for? What do municipalities organise for the elderly? And why is there an almost complete lack of long-term intergenerational programmes where Danish seniors meet regularly with children or teenagers? Let us compare the situation in Denmark with the situation in the Czech Republic, where senior volunteering does not have such a long tradition as in the Nordic countries. We will find out why there are long-standing intergenerational programmes at local and national level in Czech society and why, on the contrary, there are hardly any such programmes in Denmark.

In the Czech Republic, senior volunteering has been developing systematically only since the regime change in 1989, when Czech society went through a period of transformation. The basic starting point was the idea of a civil society based on cooperation and mutual solidarity of full and free citizens. Societies and associations such as the YMCA, Sokol and Scout-Junák were restored. In a short time, they managed to recreate a nationwide network of organisations based to a significant extent on the voluntary work of their members. Many non-governmental non-profit organizations have emerged that build their activities on the enthusiasm for the cause and on the help of volunteers. I have not found a single comparative text in the literature that deals with the situation in the Czech Republic and Denmark in the field of intergenerational relations.

The public image of the elderly in Denmark was the exact opposite of what I knew from the Czech Republic, where active seniors are rarely "visible". According to my experience, and also based on my twenty years of journalistic work in the media, the prevailing image in the Czech Republic is the elderly who are a passive part of society and who mainly need help not only from their surroundings, but also from institutions. It is emphasized that they are more and more dependent on others, and it is rarely written about seniors as active independent citizens in our society. It is often mentioned that elderly people have a problem: they have become victims of so-called scammers, they have health problems or they are dealing with a lack of funds for basic life needs.

However, apart from the public image of active seniors in Denmark, I was interested in the almost complete absence of intergenerational programs that regularly connect children or teenagers with seniors. During this pilot phase of my research project, the following questions became more and more important: Why are active seniors so "visible" in Denmark, but they are almost never presented in intergenerational programs? And why, on the other hand, are there several long-standing regular programs in the Czech Republic that support the linking of generations?

My research, in which I originally focused on intergenerational relations (and this topic, as I stated above, proved to be impossible without a deeper knowledge of the cultural and social context), I therefore focused on the above-mentioned problems and questions, which I tried to formulate as follows:

What factors are related to the fact that seniors in Denmark are presented as active, active individuals who are part of the community?

What does help or care look like for those whose self-sufficiency is limited?

What factors are related to the fact that in the Czech Republic, seniors present themselves more as individuals who need help?

How does this presentation match reality?

Obviously, these questions are very broad and I do not have ambitions to fully clarify them. However, with my research, I would like to contribute to their partial clarification and also to the formulation of other partial questions that could become a starting point for other researchers.

Literature Review

There are professional works that deal with, for example, the activities of seniors, the media image of seniors, intergenerational relations, projects that connect children and seniors (Jerabek, 2013; Petrová, 2012; Kolibová, 2012; Hasmanová Marhánková, 2018). Czech professional literature, publications mainly deal in more detail with the senior community. According to the author of the publication *Motivational elements when working with the elderly*, the model of the 1960s still persists in our society, which saw successful aging in spending free time in the peace of the home, as well as in the willingness to accept changes in social roles, voluntarily bear social loneliness in old age, and gradually also give up social and life roles and rest at home with the thought "I deserve it, I've worked hard enough" (Klevetová, 2017, p. 14). In 2002, the National Program for Preparation for Aging was approved, the main goal of which is not only to support active aging, but also to increase awareness of the needs of the oldest generation (Klevetová, 2017). The question is, what exactly can be imagined under active aging?

How does society perceive this topic, and how do the seniors themselves? A central theme in the debate on population aging is life satisfaction, framed by the concept of active aging as a way to improve quality of life despite aging. Activity is primarily associated with social and economic productivity, participation and agent optimization of individual potential and social opportunities. These ideological documents and the policies and measures derived from them create societal expectations that seniors, if they want to be recognized and labeled as those who are aging actively, should prolong their economic activity, engage in volunteering, continue their education, be role models for younger generations, and cultivate various forms of personal development and self-care.

An important document that should contribute to increasing support for active seniors and awareness of these activities is the National Program of Preparation for Aging in the Czech Republic for the period **2008-2012** (MPSV.CZ). It implies that citizens of all ages should play an active role in determining the nature and quality of services provided to them. We mainly need more options for an active and self-sufficient life in old age, not just more residential facilities for the elderly.

We need age-friendly facilities that provide more opportunities for social activities and valuable leisure time. We need community centers providing support and flexible services to senior citizens and families. According to Tošnerová, there are not too many natural connections between individual generations (Tošnerová, 2009, p. 17). As if society is diversified: those who are seen and heard the most get a voice. So we look at the world through the eyes of a thirty-year-old man and his values, through the eyes of the majority society. If we respect his values, old age is difficult to classify as "it will be too long". The child has known his beloved grandmother since childhood, but she is someone different to him than "the old lady across the street". Kindergarten children go to sing in retirement homes, where they see poor old women who delight them with their singing. They carry the image of old age further into their lives, they see the sick, the wrecks dependent on the care of the institution. Instead of a skilled older carver coming to the nursery school to show how to work with wood or a senior lacemaker presenting her work applicable to current fashion. It is appropriate for a person to have his own leisure activities in addition to his earning activity and interest in his children and grandchildren. And that throughout life, not just in old age. Leisure activities lead to associational or club activities with an intergenerational character. A number of groups in the senior age willingly play for listening even at dance parties. Sport, DIY, cooperation with museums, writing chronicles... working with computer technology for a number of elderly people who have difficulty walking, the PC is already becoming an intermediary for communication. Thus, it is never too late to learn something, if there is an effort to educate oneself, learn something, and then have the opportunity to apply the knowledge. This is better when meeting in a group, where mutual help plays a role, a common goal, fulfilling a sense of belonging. All this leads to a better old age, to experiencing it.

Tošnerová (2009, p. 17) is thinking about the possibilities of intergenerational connection within the local community. In a publication from 2009, he suggests places where generations could naturally meet. In addition to libraries, which often already function as intergenerational centers, they also talk about "smelly" museums, where the visitor can only read something on a panel, is not allowed to touch anything, must be sacredly silent. Tošnerová states that a number of respondents in her book sighed at the current state, when there is nowhere to sit in similar establishments. At the same time, a number of retired teachers are a rich source of knowledge, and they can also pass it on appropriately. They can also be involved in the role of guides or informants as part of volunteering. Tošnerová also mentions places where intergenerational activities could take place, such as falconry (2009, p. 224). A number of homes were already built as part of the local community with large common halls where exhibitions or other events could be organized. The meeting place can also be municipal offices, which

can be used as a space dedicated to the history of the municipality, for example occasional exhibitions for anyone from the local region. Then the church, parish, or local school (Mlýnková, 2011, p. 76).

In the Danish professional literature, researchers do not ask the question whether and how the elderly should be active, but are primarily concerned with how active the elderly are within the community. The key is a comparative study that analyzes the activities of Danish seniors – volunteers in the years 1997–2017 according to the classification of volunteer activities (ASAU.ORG.UK) In 2017, respondents were asked about their volunteer behavior in 14 areas corresponding to the International Classification of Non-Profit Organizations (ICNPO). The analysis showed that the share of people aged 67–77 doing voluntary work in Denmark increased by approximately 12% points (from 24.9% to 37.0%) from 1997 to 2017, which corresponds to an almost 50% increase (Amilon, 2020). So why does Denmark consistently manage to recruit more and more older adults – including those with fewer resources – to volunteer, despite stagnant trends in the US, for example?

As pointed out by Henriksen et al. (Amilon, 2020) the strong egalitarian principles underlying the Danish model of the welfare state (free access to education) and equality of outcomes (e.g. progressive taxation) mean that resources are distributed more evenly among the Danish population than, for example, among the American population, potentially leading to lower barriers to the entry of groups with a lower status into civil society, including voluntary activities. Indeed, in the US in 2015, less than 10% of the adult population with less than a high school education volunteered, while in Denmark it was 25%. Furthermore, the type of welfare state regime – along with the country's civic culture – plays a role in shaping the structure of opportunities for volunteering. A greater share of government social spending (as a percentage of a country's gross domestic product) is positively associated with older adults' volunteer involvement. Also, high economic equality and strong and well-functioning welfare state institutions mean that the public sector in Denmark handles the more demanding aspects of care work. As a result, older adults in Denmark spend less time on informal caregiving tasks, which have been shown to crowd out the volunteer work of older people in Australia and the US. Amilon argues that this is why older adults in Denmark may be largely engaged in activities of personal interest, including volunteering, rather than having primary responsibility for dependent family members. While civic engagement in the American context is characterized primarily by educational activities to help others in need, volunteerism in Denmark is dominated by collective self-organization in a wide variety of areas such as sports, culture, and hobby activities (more than half of volunteer organizations are active in these areas).

In addition to the favorable political and organizational context, the increase in volunteering in Denmark may have been facilitated by the structural, technological and socio-cultural changes that took place between 1997–2017. For example, while internet use expanded rapidly worldwide during the period under review, in Denmark the share of users increased from 11% in 1997 to 97% in 2017 (Amilon, 2020) – a development significantly greater than in many other European countries, especially among older adults. With increasing numbers of older adults becoming Internet users, barriers to finding and joining a volunteer organization have probably been reduced or eliminated in Denmark to a greater

extent than in many other countries. The removal of barriers through the increase in Internet use has also probably contributed to the increase in the size and influence of interest groups in older adult organizations since 1997.

Amilon (Amilon, 2020) writes that one of the key reasons why Danish seniors are more active is the increase in the number of seniors who use the Internet and can easily find information that is relevant to them there – not only about health or social services, but also about the various opportunities for senior volunteering generation. According to Eurostat, in 2020, Denmark ranked first for the number of people aged 65–74 who use the Internet. In Denmark, it is 94% of people in this age category. The situation in the Czech Republic is diametrically different, as can be seen from the analysis of Seniors in the data prepared by the Czech Statistical Office. The share of people over 65 who use the Internet has increased from 28% in 2015 to 48% in 2022. At the same time, 35% of seniors use the Internet daily. We also find big differences between younger and older seniors. In the category of younger seniors (between 65 and 74 years), there is no such mistrust of the Internet, 61% of them use it. These users know the Internet from work or earlier life. In the over 75 age group, on the other hand, only 30% of people still use the Internet (EC.EUROPA.EU).

As in the Danish professional literature, I did not find a comparative study in the Czech professional literature that would compare the situation of seniors and intergenerational programs in the Czech Republic and in Denmark. I contacted the representatives of these organizations with the request if I could visit their programs and record semi-structured interviews with the organizers.

Definition of Intergenerational programmes

The definition of an intergenerational programme is based on the fact that it links at least two generations. However, the way in which the youngest and oldest generations are involved varies. There are programmes that emphasise the needs of the elderly and are met by the younger generation helping them. These include workshops where seniors learn how to use the Internet, how to spot fake news, etc. Other programmes involve the generations equally, i.e. they learn from each other and create something together. This could be a joint art or photography workshop. A third type of programme helps the children to learn something and the seniors help them. This can be classes where seniors help children who have reading problems or seniors teach them handicraft skills such as woodworking or textiles.

There are three types of intergenerational programs, namely those where the older generation assists the younger generation, where the younger generation assists the older generation, and programs where both generations work equally towards each other or for the benefit of others. (Hermann, 2005) Another possible division of intergenerational programs is by type of activities, where a distinction is made between education, training and learning; mentoring; prevention of violent behavior, conflict and problem prevention; social participation, active citizenship; employability; mediation of history and

memories and preservation of cultural heritage through oral history of living witnesses; health promotion; entertainment and active leisure; or environmental protection. Crawford categorizes intergenerational programs by interactivity, where one generation follows the other generation (for example, senior concerts or theater), short-term joint activities, and long-term programs where a deeper relationship between generations is created. Rabušicová structures programmes according to their thematic focus into three groups: cultural; social and supportive; and educational (Rabušicová, 2012).

Methodology

The field research took place between 2020 and 2023 in Denmark and the Czech Republic. In the winter semester 2020–2021 I completed an internship at Aarhus University in Denmark. My main focus was on documenting programs for the elderly organized by Danish town halls and non-profit organizations. I filmed semi-structured interviews with representatives of public institutions and NGOs in large cities (Copenhagen, Aarhus) and smaller cities (Horsens, Herning, Naestved, Odense). In total, there were 20 semi-structured anonymised interviews with representatives of social welfare departments. I also visited the Solund senior home in central Copenhagen, the Activity Centre for the Elderly in Skjern, the community centre in Odense, the community library in Aarhus and other places where seniors and younger generations meet. The recorded interviews were in English. I have translated the transcripts of the interviews into English.

In the Czech Republic, from February 2021 to August 2022, I recorded semi-structured anonymized interviews with representatives of 10 town halls, homes for the elderly and non-profit organizations in large cities (Prague, Brno) and smaller cities (Melník, Litvinov, Prácheň). We visited senior homes in Prague, Melník, Prácheň. I talked with participants and organizers of intergenerational programs in the above mentioned cities. In the interviews I focused mainly on a detailed description of the activities for seniors in a particular locality and the reasons why they organize intergenerational programs or, on the contrary, why they do not have such programs. I informed all Danish respondents about intergenerational activities in the Czech Republic and all Czech respondents about senior activation in Denmark, because I was interested in whether they would be interested in possibly linking up with each other so that the proven methodology from Denmark could be applied in the Czech Republic and vice versa.

Based on the interview transcripts from both countries, I compiled a content analysis by theme. I divided the content of the texts according to four basic categories:

- 1) what a particular institution/organization does for the elderly;
- 2) why it has / does not have intergenerational programmes;
- 3) what are the benefits of these programmes;
- 4) what they are planning next in the field of intergenerational programmes.

Denmark

The public image of the elderly in Denmark clearly promotes activity and encourages the oldest generation to engage in a wide range of volunteering activities. Denmark has just under 6 million inhabitants, 20% of whom are aged 65+. Aeldre Sagen, Denmark's largest non-profit organisation for the elderly, has almost 940,000 members and has branches all over Denmark. The organisation has long motivated seniors to volunteer in public institutions or in the private sector. Representatives of the organisation also comment on senior issues in regional and national media. Media analyst Christa Lykke Christensen (Christen, 2019) examined the visual image of seniors in this organisation. According to her research, images of smiling seniors playing sports together or engaging in other leisure activities with their peers predominate. Her research found an almost complete lack of photos of seniors in the company of children or teens.

During my field research I documented the situation in 20 Danish cities. I included the two largest Danish cities (Copenhagen, Aarhus) and county towns such as (Naestved, Herning, Horsens) in order to find out what the town halls organise for the elderly and what activities there are in each municipality that connect the oldest and youngest generations. From all the interviews it became clear that the involvement of senior volunteers has a long tradition in Denmark. Volunteering is seen as something that is quite common in Denmark at every age: from children to parents of children to the elderly. "Seniors in Denmark are constantly presented as active members of society. Which is certainly good, but sometimes it's overdone. Just look at the pictures of Danish seniors in the media or in advertising. During my interviews with Danish seniors, I often encountered that they were shy to talk about the fact that despite their active life, they have various health problems. The pressure to look and function at 100 per cent in old age is quite high. You are expected to be fit all the time," says Respondent C, who initiated the international Growing Old project. This project looked at how seniors perceive their own ageing in Denmark and how their relatives and friends view them. The project also included an analysis of this topic in other European and non-European countries.

The complete opposite of senior volunteering in Denmark is intergenerational networking. Seniors are commonly involved as volunteers, but this activity is rarely linked to activities for children or adolescents. Respondents in Denmark from town halls or non-profit organisations mostly talked about one-off activities such as visiting kindergarten-aged children in a home for the elderly during Easter or Christmas. This was always a programme that was not of a long-term nature. In Denmark at the time of my research, there were no intergenerational programmes operating at a national or regional level. "We don't have centralised social or health care. Each Danish municipality coordinates such activities according to its own needs," says Jakob Nielsen, director of Healthcare Denmark, an organisation dedicated to mapping innovative health and social programmes across Denmark and evaluating them.

Reasons for the absence of intergenerational links

None of the Danish town halls interviewed has a regular programme that involves pre-school or school-age children equally with the elderly. Respondent D from the Social Department of Aarhus City Hall explains the absence as follows: "In recent years we have started to focus on this and we know that much more can be done. Most of the time these are more one-off events, for example one school organises a concert for the elderly in a nearby home or directly in a community centre. But these are local activities, we don't have anything for the whole city. Occasionally I hear about an activity where, for example, young people go to read to seniors in a home. I know there were a couple of times where seniors and children read together, it was something about the war and then the seniors told the children their memories."

Respondent D from Aarhus City Hall explains his lack of interest in such programmes by the fact that Danish teachers are busy teaching, and also mentions the recent school reform, which has increased the amount of responsibilities that pupils have at school. He believes that this is one of the main reasons why teachers are reluctant to get involved in additional projects beyond the regular curriculum. "If every once in a while an intergenerational activity succeeds, it is more of an initiative on the part of the nursing home staff to really try to connect the nursery or school in the neighborhood. I remember years ago when we opened one of our 37 community centres, there was a concern from seniors that young people would come to the centre and maybe smoke marijuana or vandalize the place. But none of that has happened. I guess it's also about stereotypes on both sides, that seniors are prejudiced against young people and vice versa. The only program that I know of that has been working for a long time is at HeartWork, a non-profit organization in the community of Herning. There, they really manage to connect teenagers and seniors. But we don't have anything like that in Aarhus yet." Says respondent D from Aarhus City Hall.

During the field research, it was repeatedly mentioned in interviews that another reason why intergenerational programmes are not common is the difficulty of linking school teaching with programmes with the elderly. "Danish teachers are so busy with what they have to teach that they don't want to do other activities beyond teaching. We don't have one intergenerational programme in all our senior homes where children go regularly. It is very individual, but it always requires a lot of activity on the part of the senior home," says respondent D about the situation in Aarhus. Respondent E, who is an employee of Skjern municipality and works in the management of the Skjern Senior Community Activity Centre, has a similar experience: "We had a programme for children who were between ten and twelve years old. They came to us twice a week during school hours. In recent years there has been a reform in Danish schools that has been very disjointed. The teachers had more responsibilities, so they told us that they didn't have time for anything else and the program was over."

Other town halls are either at the stage of considering intergenerational programmes or have experience with a one-off event, but initiated by the schools, not the town hall. If they have such programmes, it is usually on this basis: seniors bake gingerbread with children, children read to seniors

or play cards together. When asked why there are so few intergenerational activities, Respondent A from the Social Department of Herning City Hall replies: 'We have a lot of institutionalised care. People are just used to it: you put your children in kindergarten, that way your parents can work, and in old age you rely on what the town hall provides for you. And maybe that's the problem in a way, that we have to learn how to connect different generations. We are trying to do this, for example, by incorporating a new nursery or school into the design when we plan to build a care home. In addition, we have a very good collaboration with HeartWork, a nonprofit organization that has been connecting teens and seniors since 2016.' The situation is similar in Copenhagen, where city hall staff do not coordinate any regular intergenerational programmes, but only one-off activities. "We are mainly trying to motivate lonely seniors to be outdoors as much as possible, so they don't stay home alone. We find it important to connect seniors with the same interests, for example to cook together or go on a trip together," says respondent B from the Social Department of Copenhagen City Hall.

In all the interviews, it became clear that the emphasis in Denmark is on keeping seniors active and at home for as long as possible. The municipality and non-profit organisations have a wide range of services for them to help seniors lead an active life. "What happens is that we have a senior who has six different caregivers and volunteers coming to them in a day and they still don't qualify to go into a nursing home. In Denmark, a senior cannot decide for himself that he would like to apply for a place in a home. He can only do so after a team of his long-term carers has assessed that he is so ill that he really cannot be in a home environment any more. According to the law, we as a municipality have to provide him with a place in a home within two months of his application," says respondent A from Herning Municipality.

The same situation is described by respondent F, who works in the management of Solund senior home in Copenhagen, and explains why there are no intergenerational activities: 'The average length of time clients are in Danish senior homes is roughly the last two years of their lives. Our clients spend most of their time in their rooms, they are already very fragile and I can't really imagine how they would cope with programmes like the co-creation with children that you describe in the Czech Republic. Moreover, in Denmark it is not very common for generations to live together. The elderly help out with the grandchildren when they are young, but then usually this intergenerational help diminishes because they want to volunteer.' The same reason is given by the co-founder of Elderlearn, a social enterprise that connects seniors living alone with foreigners who want to improve their basic Danish. "I was inspired by Germany, where I did an internship. In the senior homes there, there are people who don't have so many health complications and therefore can do a lot of activities together with young people. They can live in the home for many years. In Denmark, this would not work at all, because the seniors in the homes are already very sick."

Czech Republic

The public image of the elderly in the Czech Republic is completely different from that in Denmark. The senior in the Czech Republic is presented as someone who needs help and advice. Whether it concerns health or social problems. Seniors are victims of so-called scumbags, or they do not know how to use a computer or do not recognise fake news. In the national media and in advertising, the stereotype of the senior as someone rather passive is only slowly changing. On the other hand, intergenerational relationships have long-standing support in the Czech Republic. The value of intergenerational solidarity and help has a strong tradition in Czech families. SHARE research in the Czech Republic shows that Czech seniors are among the most active grandparents in Europe. They are willing to spend several hours a day with their grandchildren. However, there is also a growing trend of individualisation of the approach to this period of life and, consequently, to the function of grandparents.

According to Tošnerová, (Tošnerová, 2009, p. 63) the leisure activities used to have a somewhat pejorative touch. It was as if all one's efforts were to be concentrated in the "main occupation" that sustained us... To answer the question of what you would like to be and give something other than your current occupation was suspicious. Times are changing. One has worked with people all one's life, but not, for example, in ecology. It was much later that he became interested in the subject and started to work on it. Conversely, a number of alibis work in banking with numbers but are interested in being useful to others as well. Such people are then involved in volunteering in homes for the elderly, in hospitals. Second wind – why not. Many of today's amateurs can slowly compete with the professionals. Most Czech women lack self-confidence compared to men. A fifth of women even feel guilty when they try to succeed and establish themselves in society. This often significantly hinders their behaviour, behaviour and performance, as well as their position at work. Moreover, women's self-esteem declines significantly as they get older. This is according to a survey commissioned by the Slovak-Czech Women's Fund in 2008.

In the Czech Republic, there is no single non-profit organization of hundreds of thousands of senior volunteers comparable to the Danish organization Aeldre Sagen, only the SenSen project, whose management is based in Prague and is part of the non-profit organization Charta 77 Foundation. SenSen is a loose, informal association of so-called SenSen clubs and individuals who share a common interest. Their aim is to support "seniors who are willing and able to pass on experiences, qualified opinions, memories that should not be forgotten." Therefore, it cannot be accurately deduced from the information about this project that it is a purely voluntary activity. Some SenSen clubs organise joint activities such as courses or workshops only for their members. Other clubs actively reach out to representatives of public institutions in the city and propose programmes involving, for example, children or adolescents from a local kindergarten or school. According to respondent G, who works on the board of the SenSen project, there are **30,000** members involved in the project across the country. In Denmark, on the other hand, the largest Danish organisation, Ældre Sagen, has a clearly defined objective, which is primarily to motivate the elderly to volunteer. The organisation has **940 000**

members and branches in every county. In the Czech Republic, which has 10 million people, there is a much smaller network of seniors who are actively involved. Unlike Ældre Sagen in Denmark, there is no single programme strategy or massive involvement of seniors as is common in Denmark.

Results

The results of the field research in Denmark clearly show that there are several reasons why seniors are active and why there are no regular intergenerational programmes:

- Danish seniors are associated in one large non-profit organisation that coordinates their volunteer activities.
- The seniors are very active, but their main focus is on volunteering within their own senior community or in public or state institutions; and therefore they do not have time for other activities.
- Representatives of Danish town halls and NGOs are not familiar with examples of good practice from abroad and cannot yet imagine that, for example, experience from the Czech Republic would be "transferable" to Denmark, where there is no tradition of such programmes.
- Seniors who are in senior homes are already too ill to participate in activities similar to the Czech programmes: joint creativity, trips, walks, etc.

The situation in the Czech environment is quite different:

- There is no one organization of hundreds of thousands of people that facilitates and motivates seniors to volunteer.
- In the Czech Republic, unlike Denmark, there are long-standing intergenerational programs that work thanks to non-profit organizations and public institutions
- Representatives of these organisations have a detailed methodology for educators and social workers.
- Throughout the Czech Republic there are several independent networks of intergenerational programme coordinators who have been supporting schools and the elderly for a long time

After a detailed examination of the activities in both countries, the question logically arises what would help to implement what has worked in Denmark in the Czech Republic and vice versa.

At the beginning of my research I was interested in how Danish society treats the elderly. What is it doing to activate them and how different is this approach from the situation in the Czech Republic. In the course of my research, I found that there is a lack of long-term regular intergenerational activities in Denmark. Representatives of Danish institutions and organisations agreed that they would be interested in such a programme, but could not imagine its implementation because seniors are too busy with their own activities and teachers do not have time for such programmes. Moreover, it is not clear where such

programmes would take place as seniors in senior homes no longer have the energy for such activities. In the Czech Republic, I have found that there are a number of long-term regular intergenerational programmes that have a detailed methodology and are led by coordinators who are an indispensable “link” between teachers – children – seniors. It has been confirmed that the intergenerational programmes operating in the Czech Republic have a very good response not only in Denmark but also in other European countries.

Discussion

Based on research on the situation in Denmark and the Czech Republic, the question has arisen whether the benefits of intergenerational activities can be comprehensively measured at all. Whether in the form of one-off meetings or long-term programmes where children and seniors meet once a month or more often, as is the case, for example, with the activities of the non-profit organisation Mezi námi. The difficulty of measuring benefits has already been identified by Rabušic in her article *Intergenerational learning in community settings: conceptualisation and mapping the research terrain*. At the beginning of her research, Rabušicová defined her research area in the Czech Republic and abroad, specifically in the following countries: the USA, Australia, Spain, partly Germany and the UK. Why she deliberately left out the Scandinavian countries is not justified by the author of the study. She then describes who the organisers of intergenerational activities are, namely cultural, social and educational institutions. The study was published in 2014, when the intergenerational activities coordinated by cities, non-profit organizations, which I describe in the previous chapters of my dissertation, were already in place. Why Rabušic omits them is not clear.

In my observations and consultations at the largest non-profit organization Among Us, I often find myself asking, what is the specific impact of bringing together kindergarteners and seniors? Or, how can one comprehensively measure that an intergenerational program is “helping” in the sense that it is impacting the physical and mental health of participants? To answer this question, we encounter specific limitations in the youngest generation. Children as young as three years old participate in the Between Us programme. Some have been in the programme for one school year, others for three years. The organizers do not have exact statistics. It is difficult to carry out detailed questionnaire surveys with preschool children, because they will not – due to their age – be able to independently describe either their state of health or their state of mind. And how to measure the benefits of the programme with the elderly? A questionnaire survey would of course be possible, but can improvements or deterioration in physical fitness or mental well-being be directly linked to intergenerational programmes? Springate notes that only this can be ascertained: how they have developed friendly relationships and understanding for other generations. MacCallum defines the benefits of intergenerational programmes in even greater detail, which he argues help to reduce social isolation, reduce feelings of loneliness, establish new contacts and friendships, and increase tolerance between generations. Rabušic believes that the outcomes of intergenerational programmes, because they are in “soft categories” such as strengthening dialogue, mutual support.

An interesting alternative to analyse intergenerational programmes was chosen by researchers in the study *I'll Never Say Old Grandma Again*, published in 2017. They focused not on the direct participants in intergenerational programmes (in this case, teenagers and seniors), but on the organisers of the programmes – the educators. This was a survey of 258 educators who coordinated an intergenerational program called *Stories of Our Neighbors*, where teenagers record interviews with seniors from their local community over a six-month period. The research was conducted by NMS Market Research. Respondents were asked to rate whether the students had learned to work better as a team or whether they had learned to listen, empathize and ask the right questions. Almost 70% of teachers said the project had given them "a pleasant surprise at what the children were capable of". This information, which would more comprehensively confirm or refute the benefits of the intergenerational programme, is missing from the analysis:

There has been a shift in opinion – e.g. at the beginning young people thought that seniors were not very active and thanks to the programme they found out that seniors live an active life:

Has the programme had an impact on the physical or mental health of the participants?

Helped young people to take more interest in the elderly and vice versa?

So, the question that remains unanswered in the Czech environment – how can we comprehensively measure the overall impact on the direct participants of an intergenerational programme? Methodologically, this would mean finding out the physical and psychological state before the start of the programme, asking also about attitudes towards the opposite generation. Then continuously check these factors (physical and mental health, opinion shifts) at regular intervals.

The situation in Denmark, where intergenerational programmes are at a completely different stage than in the Czech Republic, cannot yet be analysed, as they are either one-off activities or last for a few weeks. When analysing the available literature in Denmark, I found only studies that focus on volunteering by seniors who are involved in activities within their senior community or who volunteer to help adults, i.e. not children. For example, the following studies primarily address the question: why do Danish seniors volunteer? In what areas do they volunteer? How much time does volunteering take them?

The most recent research looking at the topic of senior volunteers in Denmark was published in 2020. The analysis, entitled *Volunteering by older people*, was produced by a team of experts, Ana Amilon, Torben Fridberg and Malene Rode Larsen. The research focuses on changes in volunteering between 1997 and 2017 and is based on data available to VIVE (Danish Centre for Social Science Research). The experts were interested in what areas seniors are involved in. They asked respondents questions about where they volunteer. Respondents had the following choices: I work in culture, I educate adults or I help other seniors. None of the answer options related to children or youth. It is not clear why the authors of the research completely omit volunteering activities that connect generations? In my

opinion, it is because the number of intergenerational activities in the analysed period was so insignificant that they did not include it in the research. Information on intergenerational activities is not even in the article published by Amilon (Amilon, 2022, p. 87-99) in 2022, which again focuses on senior volunteers.

The topic of intergenerational programmes as part of volunteering does not appear in other studies that focus on volunteering in Denmark in general. Inger Koch-Nielsen's analysis focuses on the typical features of volunteering in Denmark. She notes that most volunteering is coordinated by non-profit organisations. She finds that Danes spend an average of 17 hours per month volunteering, mainly in the field of sport, and also engage in volunteering within the social and health sectors. Koch-Nielsen says that most volunteer work consists of various forms of administrative or organisational work, such as serving on a school board or helping to raise sponsorship. is more of a function, for example – a volunteer is a board member or helps with fundraising. In the Koch-Nielsen text there is no detailed specification of the above mentioned fields i.e. it is not possible to determine whether, for example, intergenerational programmes are also carried out within sports or social activities. Without this specification, it is not possible to extract data from the Koch-Nielsen research and determine how many volunteers are involved in intergenerational activities and what specifically they are doing in these activities, whether it is reading storybooks or joint creative activities such as drawing, singing or dancing.

The topic of volunteering was also elaborated by Torben Fridberg, who compared the areas in which volunteers work and analyzed the trends in Danish volunteering in the years 2004–2012. He states that men are involved in sports much more often than women. As part of the research, he found that there was a significant decrease in volunteering in the field of culture, sport and leisure, but the number of volunteers in the social field increased. Fridberg believes that a possible reason for the increase in social volunteers is that at the end of the analyzed period there was an intense public discussion about social policy in Denmark and a parallel recruitment campaign to motivate more people to start working as social volunteers areas. Like the other Danish experts I mentioned, Fridberg does not focus on a specific area – intergenerational programs. As part of the research, they only say in general terms that the volunteers are engaged in social or health work, but it is not clear whether this work also includes connecting generations.

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