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Guest Blog: Andrzej Klimczuk, Independent Researcher - The Future of the Economy in an Ageing Society: The silver economy: one or many?

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There is much talk in recent months about the development of the silver economy. However, this concept is usually seen in a narrow sense as a market of goods and services for older adults and solutions for ageing workers ("silver market").

Thus, the silver industries or segments of the silver market are usually described as health care; smart living, housing adaptations and supported living services, increasingly on an IT-basis; education and culture; IT and media; service robotics; mobility; recreation, travel; fitness and wellness; clothing and fashion; care services; insurances; and financial services.

However, also a broader approach to the silver economy should be popularized. It may be seen as an economic system that is based on the adaptation of production and distribution of goods and services not only for older people but for "society of all ages." This will make it complementary to the United Nations' "Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing." Having said that, it should be also underlined that the silver economy is also related to new technologies and various social innovations for ageing societies.

Of course, changes in the marketing of goods and services are very important. Nevertheless, does adding the information that some product is for "people 50+" make any difference? Simply referring to older adults as some special "target group" may be interpreted as an ageist practice... Modern seniors often do not feel as old anymore. Thus, a wider approach to the silver economy also includes education, R&D, a cross-sector set of goods and services from already existing sectors, and career opportunities in the silver industries. This perspective includes the use of universal design and concepts of "age-friendly (everything)" and "ambient assisted living."

Moreover, if we analyze the silver economy at the national, regional, and local levels, we will see a huge diversity of forms. At the "International Seminar on Active Ageing Index" held on April 16-17, 2015 in Brussels, I argued that we may already discuss the characteristics of: "the liberal silver economy" (e.g., the United States), "the coordinated silver economy" (e.g., Germany and Japan), "the mixed/hybridized silver economy" (e.g., in Mediterranean states where is a large agrarian sector and the influence of non-market solutions of the social economy), and "the dependent silver economy" (e.g., states in transition where companies show low levels of technological innovation due to, e.g., bonds of dependence on intra-firm hierarchies within transnational enterprises and being seen as

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assembly platforms for a semi-standardized industrial goods).

In conclusion, we may add that since various societies and countries are characterized by various cultures we should accept that there will be no “one type of the silver economy that will fit for all.” The discussion about the future of the economy in an ageing society is, in fact, the discussion about the recognition, understanding, and the use of diversity.

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