

# SENIORS-RESOURCES IN THE COMMUNITY \*

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## Abstract

In this paperwork, have started from the premise that seniors can represent a resource in the community by manifesting prosocial behavior and volunteering. One of the questions of interest here is focused on knowing the motivation of seniors to exercise prosocial behavior. A concept used to explain the activities carried out by seniors is that of volunteering. Through this article, I have developed an analysis of the volunteering activities carried out in the two rural-urban environments, focusing on available resources. On the other hand, we also analyzed the benefits of volunteering on seniors. The study materials used include both national and international studies on civic involvement and active ageing, with emphasis on senior volunteering. Subsequent research will be able to analyze how older people can be stimulated to engage in volunteering and contribute to community welfare.

**Keywords:** prosocial behavior, seniors, resources, motivation, volunteering, community, social participation

## Résumé

Je pars par la prémisse que les seniors peuvent représenter une ressource dans la communauté en manifestant un comportement prosocial et le bénévolat. L'une des questions d'intérêt a porté sur la connaissance de la motivation à exercer un comportement prosocial par les seniors. Un concept utilisé pour expliquer les activités entreprises par les seniors est volontaire. À travers cet article, je me propose une analyse des activités volontaires menées dans les deux milieux ruraux-urbains, en mettant l'accent sur les ressources disponibles. Une analyse spéciale est faite sur les déterminants de ce comportement chez les seniors. D'autre part, j'ai analysé les avantages résultant de la pratique du bénévolat sur les seniors. Les matériaux d'étude utilisés comprennent des études au niveau national et international sur l'engagement civique et le vieillissement actif, en mettant l'accent sur le bénévolat des seniors. D'autres recherches seront en mesure d'analyser comment les personnes âgées peuvent être stimulées à s'engager dans des activités bénévoles et contribuer au bien-être de la communauté.

**Mots-clés:** comportement prosocial, seniors, ressources, motivation, bénévolat, communauté, la participation sociale

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### **Rezumat**

Pornesc de la premisa că seniorii pot reprezenta o resursă în comunitate prin manifestarea unui comportament prosocial și acțiuni de voluntariat. Una din întrebările de interes s-a axat pe cunoașterea motivației exercitării unui comportament prosocial de către seniori. Un concept utilizat în explicarea activităților desfășurate de către seniori este cel de voluntariat. Prin articolul de față mi-am propus o analiză a activităților de voluntariat desfășurate în cele două medii rural-urban, cu accent pe resursele disponibile. O analiză aparte este făcută pe factorii determinanți ai acestui comportament în rândul seniorilor. Pe de altă parte am analizat și beneficiile ce rezultă din practicarea voluntariatului asupra seniorilor. Materialele de studiu utilizate cuprind studii atât la nivel național cât și internațional cu privire la implicarea civică și îmbătrânirea activă, cu accent pe voluntariatul seniorilor. Ulterioare cercetări vor putea analiza modul în care pot fi stimulate persoanele în vârstă pentru a se implica în activități de voluntariat și a contribui la bunăstarea comunității.

**Cuvinte cheie:** comportament prosocial, seniori, resurse, motivație, voluntariat, comunitate, participare socială

We have assumed that the elderly can be a resource in the community, engaging in civic implication in various activities, because the elderly were often labeled in negative terms as if they were a burden on the rest of the population. This population, people over 50, is experiencing a steady disadvantage, due to the low birth rate and the increasing life expectancy. Only in Romania, the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics shows that life expectancy is rising, the situation being the same in most European countries. All countries seem to face this situation, requiring retirees to bear for a longer period than expected. UE countries will undergo great changes (Curaj 2010, 298). Apart from the family, medical, aging effects of the population, economic aspects are also considered. At European level, alarming aging has emerged. Every country is trying to find solutions. That is why the concept of active aging is being promoted. It relies more and more on the involvement of the elderly in society in various forms. The World Health Organization launched in 2012 the concept of "Active Aging", with the stated aim of changing the notion that elders are a burden. Active aging is a necessity for economic and social progress.

Several studies (Warburton, Paynter, Petriwskyj 2007; Ariza Momtes, Morales Gutierrez 2011; TNS Opinion&Social 2011; Tedre, Pehkonen 2014) showed that there is a fairly obvious variation among UE Member States regards volunteering among older people. In the Netherlands ranks, where 57% of respondents are volunteering, Denmark is ranked second with 43%, and countries such as Finland 39%, Austria 37%, Luxembourg 35%, Germany 34% ,where a one third of respondents answered positively. At the

opposite end, we have countries like Malta 16%, Spain 15%, Greece and Romania 14%, and Poland 9%. Romania is ranked 24th, with a low percentage of volunteers (TNS Opinion&Social 2011, 11). The themes that have been studied by researchers to the volunteer relationship among third-age people have also focused on areas where volunteers work often, types of organizations, associations, benefits from elderly volunteering, benefits to the volunteer, and the reasons behind the activity. Volunteering differs depending on the geographical situation, so different countries in the same continent may have different things to say about volunteering. For example, in Europe most researchers indicate that women are the majority in volunteer work compared to men, Canada's research on residents shows the opposite (Ariza Momtes, Morales Gutierrez 2011, 687).

In *Volunteering as Productive Aging study: Incentives and Barriers to Volunteering by Australian Seniors* (Warburton, Paynter, Petriwskyj 2007), the results suggested that governments and organizations need to consider a lot more problems, if they want that more elderly people be attracted to volunteering. Ensuring adequate incentives to encourage volunteering has been seen as particularly important, including the need for development, more flexible training and various choices and opportunities for intergenerational volunteering. As for motivation (Principi, Warburton, Schippers *et al.* 2013), it was found that older Dutch volunteers seem to be less led by altruistic beliefs, while older German volunteers are more willing to exercise their knowledge and skills, and the Italians are more driven by the desire to have social relationships, to protect themselves from negative feelings and to increase their self-esteem.

The majority of studies (Warburton, Paynter, Petriwskyj 2007; Ariza Momtes, Morales Gutierrez 2011; Principi, Warburton, Schippers *et al.* 2013) are similar and related to each other. Fewer studies have analyzed the differences in motivation for volunteering based on the volunteer's age. In 2013 "Individual Social Responsibility in Romania" was conducted, by the Center of Marketing and Social Prognosis at the request of the React Association, on a sample of 830 people through interviews. The study comprised volunteers aged 14 and up to 80+. The target group was not strictly represented by elderly people. We can conclude that the study shows the motivation for volunteering to be similar to any age group given the difference in years, but we can still believe that among them we can find some differences depending on the respondents' age, aspect which is not specified in this study.

The Aging People as Local Players study (Tedre, Pehkonen 2014) was conducted in eastern Finland, and analyzes older people as actors of a rural village. The article suggests that seniors not only participate in a variety of communal activities, but also act in their homes, which are culturally codified as a private territory. By “just being there,” people produce and reproduce rural communities in many ways. A survey of Volunteering and Solidarity between the Generations (TNS Opinion&Social 2011) was conducted in 27 UE countries on volunteering, where about 27,000 people over 15 years old were interviewed in Europe. Respondents regard solidarity and human help as the most important aspect. Volunteering for solidarity and humanitarian aid is mentioned by most respondents from countries like Cyprus 68%, Sweden 58%, France 57%. In terms of age, young people emphasize the importance of volunteering in the field of education compared to people over 55, who reveal the importance of volunteering for health care. The answers are somewhat suggestive when young people think about their future and are trying to build a career, and those who have reached the age of three are important to the medical field as the need for medical services increases. Seniors can contribute to community well-being through various areas and forms. Most are involved in cultural or artistic associations, charities, associations, community or neighborhood. From a different perspective, there are clear gender differences when considering the type of volunteer activity. In this way, volunteering among women is geared towards activities traditionally linked to the role of women such as caring for people and less to other activities of a more public or political nature. From this perspective, women are less inclined to take leadership positions in this area (Ariza Momtes, Morales Gutierrez 2011, 688). We can no longer speak of geographic positioning as a determining factor.

### **1. Seniors support network**

A key factor in defining the status of the third-age person is the balance between its contribution to society, satisfaction gained by engaging in various activities, but sometimes this contribution is also determined by the resources that the person has (Gîrleanu-Şoitu 2006, 187-188). However, the elderly seek to continue to be active through different ways such as volunteering, but especially to manage their own lives. In gerontological social assistance a very important role is played by the support network, which can be made up of institutions and people present in the community. We can talk about two types of support: formal and informal social support.

Formal social support generally includes social and health services in the community. We want to emphasize the informal support provided to elderly people, including: family, friends, neighbors, church (Stanciu 2008, 32; Muresan 2012, 45).

When we talk about middle-aged people, we think about the needs people have, but also about the fact that they have besides these specific needs, other ones. Middle and third-age people, when leaving the labor market, and experiencing the departure of children, feel the need for new roles to give them social recognition such as membership in various social groups, the role of coordinator in a group of popular dances in a day center (Gîrleanu-Șoitu 2006, 175; Curaj 2010, 283). Activity is correlated with satisfaction, and many elderly people want to find activities similar to those before retirement. For example, if they have worked in the social environment they will want to continue with social support activities or opt for something totally different, but most of all, want to pursue the same patterns. We can say that the eagerness of an elderly person to be active consists in the experiences she has had during her lifetime, in other activities that have fulfilled her personal needs and values (Mândrilă 2008, 56; Gîrleanu-Șoitu, Luca 2012, 12).

## **2. Prosocial behavior and volunteering**

Prosocial behavior is not a new manifestation, since this type of behavior has existed since antiquity, and it is known under other forms such as good deed.

Prosocial behavior has the following essential features: it explicitly seeks to help, support or protect people who are in difficulty or who seem to be in such a situation is a conscious, intentional act and in relation to which there is freedom of choice, that is carried outside any formal or professional obligations and without the expectation of external rewards (Cristea 2015, 887).

Various experiments have been carried out by the researchers, and there have been found several influences on the decision to give or not help. For example, people are more willing to help those who are of the same religion, age, race. At the same time, the reason that made the person come to that situation is very important. For example, if alcohol was one of the trigger factors and not poverty or accident, then the person would be more retiring. Physical appearance and clothing are other factors that can trigger or stop providing help, for example a clean caregiver is likely to receive help when needed, compared to a dirty one. Sex is also a factor, for example, men are

predisposed to helping women to a greater extent than women to each other (Cristea 2002, 397).

In terms of prosocial behavior, several theories have been created in areas such as sociology, psychology, biology. Sociological theories claim that people give each other mutual help without pursuing any external reward, they can feel bound even more as the person is a friend or relative. Parents, the wife, get help as the person perceives the addiction to that them (Neculau 2003, 182). Biological theories explain the prosocial behavior by genetic factors, and a central place for these theories is sociobiology that systematically studies the biological bases of behaviors in both man and animal.

We help those that are close to us from the cultural point of view, spatial or behavioral, because we understand that they are close to us genetically. There is no doubt that there is a biological availability that sends us to empathy, compassion towards other, when needed, regardless of whether there is any genetic mechanism to help others (Iluț 2004, 82).

Volunteering is globally recognized, including by the United Nations (ONU), as a social practice with many positive and benefic effects. Volunteering is often approached in relation to terms used in social sciences: prosocial behavior and altruism, charity behavior and philanthropy, social responsibility, democratic behavior and active citizenship, community development, social capital (Andronic 2012, 69).

According to the National Strategy for Promotion of Active Aging and the Protection of the Elderly 2015-2020 (Ministry of Labor and Social Justice 2015) in Romania elderly population is an insufficiently used resource. The employment rate among the population aged 25-54 is only 2 percentage points lower than the UE average, while the same rate for the population aged 55-64 is 9 percentage points lower there. Romania as a member country of the European Union, is constantly making efforts to grow and be at the level of other member countries. By developing the National Strategy for Promoting Active Aging and Protecting the Elderly in 2015-2020, Romania supports active aging and believes that a key element of the concept is to increase social and political participation of older people groups at the city life. 2011 was declared The European Year of Volunteering, and 2012 was dedicated to older people and intergenerational relations, as the European Year of Active Aging and Solidarity between Generations was celebrated. As the population is in a continuous process of aging, maintaining the vitality of the elderly and involving them in the community to increase independence, are objectives of present and future policies.

The beginning of social work is related to the movement in the United States. With the establishment of voluntary social welfare organizations, volunteer activities have been officially recognized and volunteers have been selected and enabled to work in certain areas by helping the needy. In 1877 the Charity Organization Society was established in New York to support the population and coordinate anti-poverty activities. The volunteers were called friendly visitors and were trained to provide services to the needy. People offered to be volunteers and live in poor neighborhoods to better understand problems and identify the needs of the poor (Buzducea 2009, 98-99).

Social participation implies all those activities where people engage in formal or informal networks. Even if Romania is in a continuous process of aging, we can observe the positive side of this phenomenon, the fact that we will have more elderly people who have free time and will be able to contribute to the development of society. According to the National Strategy for Active Aging and the Protection of the Elderly 2015-2020, social participation in volunteering contributes to the community's development but also to the volunteer's personal level, increases the level of satisfaction and happiness, self-esteem and that's why they need elderly people. However, according to statistical data, Romania is one of the last countries of the European Union in terms of volunteering development (Ministry of Labor and Social Justice 2015, 19).

Well-being at third age is very important, because health at this stage is more subdued, deaths often occur and elderly people's lives are always changing in various stressful ways, they lose their jobs and not only. It has been found, however, that happiness increases with age. As a contributing factor is a mature perspective on the life that elders can achieve compared to other ages (Șoitu, Rebeleanu 2016, 58-59). Depression among older adults is lower compared to young people. Coping is defined as thinking or behavior that aims to remove the stress caused by various harmful or problematic things. The elderly seem to be adapting better and have a remarkable ability to cope. One of the support systems they call is religion (Papalia 2010, 589).

Considering the magnitude of the aging phenomenon and the high number of active and healthy elderly, some concepts have changed to try to place the elderly in a positive position. It is supported in different ways by active, beautiful and healthy aging. The elderly who participate in various programs as volunteers forget about loneliness, feel useful, active, less

isolated and marginalized, they are offered the opportunity to contribute to the good of the community and to value their knowledge.

The purpose of this article is to identify the factors that support the manifestation of elderly people as resources in the community.

### **3. Research methodology**

As we can often see, the image of the elderly is not always favorable, often this age is associated with illness and loneliness. The research prospect I fall into, is the constructivist one because it assumes the existence of multiple realities that change as a result of construction and reconstruction. There is no fixed reality that can be objectively known, life means more and more movement, change. The task of the researcher is to build or deconstruct versions of social reality (Silverman 2004, 105-115; Baban 2010, 11). I chose this perspective because in my work I want to see how elders describe and explain actions and deeds of life to which they give a certain value and importance, because each person sees things in a certain way and describes it in a unique form (Şoitu, Rebeleanu 2016, 26).

The research described in this article is about the following research question: What are the factors that make seniors resources in the community? Thus the purpose of the research is to find out the factors that lead the seniors to work in the community in various forms.

To answer the general research question, we have used qualitative research. I chose qualitative research because it is best suited to achieving my research goal. I believe that this type of research helps me to study people in their natural environment and aims at knowing how they live, act, speak, learn the things they enjoy, and especially aim at knowing the meaning that people give to their own words and behaviors (Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell 2005, 18). I chose in this research, to use the interview as a method of collecting data because I sought to understand better a human being and its relations with the surrounding world, and also gave me the opportunity to observe the non-verbal behavior of the interview and the possibility to get answers from each individual. As techniques we used the semi-structured, individual, face-to-face interview and participatory-unstructured observation.

The target group aimed senior volunteers engaging in various community activities. Iasi interviews were conducted with 7 seniors of different ages, 6 of whom were men and one woman, and the ones in Iugani village were made up of 5 volunteer seniors, of which 3 women and 2 men, where I



followed their perceptions about volunteering and how they relate to it. Study participants had to meet the following criteria: be involved in a volunteer activity and have over 50 years. Both the first and the second selection of the participants were made with the snowball method called progressive recommendation, because I relied on well-informed people like the social assistant and during my research they helped me, by offering other participants in the study, because one research participant recommended me another. The participation of people in the research was voluntary by prior information, and at the same time they had the right to withdraw at any time and the freedom to answer questions or not. Most of the interviews lasted for 40 minutes, but interviews were also 60 minutes, recorded audio, based on the acceptance of each participant by signing an informed consent form in two copies.

The participants were informed of the nature of the research, the purpose, the objectives, all of which were included in the consent form that the participants analyzed and signed before starting the interview. Throughout the interview and the analysis, I have respected the privacy principle, according to which individuals had the right to privacy on personal data and privacy information.

The thematic units considered in the data collection process were: the forms through which the seniors are resources in the community, their motivation in the exercise of prosocial behavior, the personal history, the relations with the other members of the community, the satisfaction of the person involved in these activities, qualities required to be a good volunteer. The big issues discussed in the interviews started from the items included in the interview guide: what do they think about the fact that some consider them a resource in the community, what looks like a day of their lives, how they decided to volunteer, the elderly able in a community, how they describe relationships with others, how they feel within the group, what significance has the activity, what advice they would give to others who are not involved in activities, if they know other volunteers.

#### **4. Analysis and interpretation of data**

For the interpretation of the data we used the thematic analysis of the content that aimed to discover the common things among the answers of the participants in the interviews. The ordering of responses was achieved through thematic analysis of content. In analyzing and interpreting the data,

the participants noted the details in brackets, by quotes, by a coding, including: subject matter, age and residence (Maria, 74, urban).

#### **4.1. *The forms through which seniors are resources in the community***

Seniors are aware that what they do have contributions to the welfare of their community. According to the answers received, 11 out of 12 respondents consider that they are a resource for the community, *“yes, they are a human resource, they are volunteering in the church and on the choir”* (Elvira, 55, rural). As Cristea explains, the prosocial behavior has as an essential feature -it is a conscious, intentional act and implies the possibility and the freedom to choose (Cristea 2015, 887).

In the study titled “Individual Social Responsibility in Romania” (Center for Marketing and Social Prognosis, 2013) regarding the volunteer activities, social services represent the main area of interest for volunteers, services such as caring elderly people, shopping for the elderly, but also children, especially those in need. Out of the 12 interviewed people, all 7 in the urban environment act as volunteer coordinators in the 7 clubs for pensioners in Iasi. Of the 5 rural ones, 3 of them are active in the church choir in the village of Iugani and the other 2 act as parish councilors or church sons, specifically those who help the priest and contribute to the good development of parish life. Among the respondents we identified 3 people who get involved and visit other elderly people, *“I go to the ground because I have people calling me, I go every day and see 3-4 people”* (Maria, 74, urban). As we can find in literature (Mureșan 2012, 45), seniors can get involved in three types of activities: informal and here we have the activities they can do with their friends, family, neighbors, and formal ones include well-structured activities in groups, participation in various social, solitary events such as watching television, or those activities carried out individually.

In general, the results on the topic of identifying the forms in which seniors are resources in the community show that in the urban area, the predominant area where seniors can carry out volunteer activities is retirement clubs, but also in helping others, shopping for the eldest, within the church, within the various cultural associations. In rural areas, the possibilities of seniors to engage in activities are more limited, most of them being involved in church activities.

#### **4.2. Their motivation in exercising prosocial behavior**

The motivation to do a good thing for the community was found in several senior responses, *“I like it, and I make every effort to do something good for the community”* (Petrică, 71, rural), the seniors believe they do a good deed and most of them are happy, they like to help and do something for others, as the standard of responsibility also mentions, does not give help to receive a reward but because they feel satisfied (Neculau 2003, 182 ). Quality time is been counted amongst the motivations of some of the seniors, *“I use my time, I can not stay at home”* (Costache, 68, urban), who are involved in club activities to – and occupied much of their time after they left the workforce. The number of elderly unemployed persons is gradually increasing from 2011 as it is stated in the New Perspectives on the course of life, given that the participation of the elderly in the labor market is essential according to the forecasts that have been achieved (Șoitu, Rebeleanu 2016, 178-179).

Most seniors in the urban area used to go to clubs, participate in activities as beneficiaries, and know how bad it is when there are clubs left without coordinators and they want to do more, staying the stage of beneficiary, *“Before taking over the club I enjoyed it and liked to take care”* (Vasile C., 61, urban), one of the interviewees confessed to me that before being a coordinator here she was the coordinator at another club of the 7, thing mentioned in the theory of activity, people want to continue the same behavioral patterns, the same activities (Gîrleanu-Șoitu 2012, 10).

Trying to find out if there were times when seniors wanted to give up voluntary activity, 8 out of 12 volunteers said yes, they also had moments when they wanted to retire, invoking various reasons such as health, offenders received from other people, *“I had temptations, even people who had discouraged me”* (Petrică, 71, rural), says a church councilor, the seniors sometimes are being disturbed by the behavior of other people in the community, because they are making offenses against them. Asking those who have responded positively to what motivated them to continue, I found out that some were supported and motivated by different people, such as the priest, employees of the Community Assistance Directorate, and others found an inner motivation. To these being the words of a senior who confessed that working with people is very difficult, sometimes they bear hideous words from others and everything depends on them, the effort they make to overcome certain things that affect them, as the gentleman did in the above case. This effort in the literature is called coping and is defined as

thinking or behavior that aims to remove the stress caused by various issues (Papalia 2010, 589), in our case the discouragement of some members to the coordinator.

### **4.3. *Personal history of the active senior***

As we have seen from the interviews, there are male seniors, 7 out of 12, that men are more involved than women. In traditional societies, gender differences and their roles are heavily differentiated, men must be independent and strong, while women are passive and dependent (Mândrilă 2008, 55), we can also draw the conclusion that men are more involved in community life as we have seen in research, because of the image created by the society that women are more passive and devoted to domestic activities, and men are the ones who strengthen relationships with the community. The activity of the rural people revolves around the church, and the shorter involvement in the urban environment is explained by the different activities carried out by the seniors, and by the fact that in rural areas the possibilities for involvement in a retirement club do not exist. Retired senior citizens have much more free time, so we can explain the long time spent in volunteer activities, as Larsen says, many of the attributions will be taken over by seniors as they have the necessary time (Larsen 1995, *apud*. Mureșan 2012, 60).

Asking how they manage their time, the seniors have confirmed what I suspected, *“it’s simple, I do not have a program so loaded”* (Urmă, 71, *urban*), as I said above, seniors have more free time after retirement. Most are planning their program for the next day, organizing their other activities so they can participate in the activity of the club, the choir, the church. Compared to urban ones, rural seniors are more involved in farming or animal husbandry activities, and daytime activity is shared between house, field, animal, and church. Although their free time is shorter than that of urban seniors, they also find time for activities in which they are involved.

When I thought to do this research and started to document, I have found information about the perceptions of young people, adults about the elderly, and very little about their opinion of the elderly about the role of an elderly in a community, about what role is sustained, an active or disengaged role of the person. Since the beginning of the research, I have argued that the elderly person has an active role in the community, and this has been confirmed by interviews. The interviewed seniors consider that the role of the elderly in a community *“is to contribute to its development, to*

*participate with a small contribution, to socialize, to be active” (Urban, 71, urban), this answer resembling many of the seniors interviewed. However, this active role of the elderly in the community was conditioned by a number of factors listed by the seniors, the most well-known being the health “to be active if it is possible and not ill” (Vasile C. 61, urban) says an elderly, poor health prevents the person from being able to participate actively in the community.*

#### **4.4. Senior relationships with other community members**

By engaging in activities, seniors form and expand their social network, as Bodogai also states, the social network contributes to well-being, especially during the third age, because seniors have a much greater need for appreciation and resources to maintain autonomy and independence and not becoming vulnerable (Bodogai 2009, 67). Seniors have specified that they have linked new friends since they are members, expanded their knowledge, and thus have the opportunity to learn new things and share experiences, *“I have a lot to learn from them because they have gone through enough” (Maria, 74, urban),* a response received from a lady who was a social assistant, and now she capitalizes her skills and knowledge within the retirement club.

Differential relations we encounter in the two environments. In rural areas, even if the number of volunteer seniors is lower and the opportunities for interaction is less, the relations between the seniors are closer, the observable difference and the answers given for the description of relations are more emotional. Those in rural areas used words like family, brothers, while those in the urban environment summed up to very good, good, not very good, amiable.

From the seniors’ accounts we noticed that a benefit of an active life by engaging in various volunteer activities would be the acquisition of a sense of utility, *“it means a lot to me, I know that I mean something, that I have a contribution” (Maricica, 68, rural),* they are involved, they feel useful, as we find in the theory of activity, the more active a person is, the more satisfied it is, the activity is correlated with the satisfaction (Șoitu 2012, 10).

#### **4.5. The satisfaction of a person who is involved in volunteer activities**

The well-being they have is another benefit mentioned by the seniors as a result of the various activities, *“I feel better, I load with energy, I relax and forget all the hardships” (Dominica, 62, rural).* According to the National Strategy for Promoting Active Aging and the Protection of the Elderly

2015-2020, volunteering contributes to the welfare of people practicing it, and it has been noticed that there is a link between involvement in various forms and increasing the level of well-being, happiness, self-awareness, at the same time, physical health. As rewards from volunteer activities, I found the pride of the seniors, feeling appreciated, proud of what they can do and realize, for some that they have made new friends with whom they greet and help occasionally “*I am proud of what I am doing*” (Urmă, 71, urban), others have a soulful satisfaction, as it is also specified in the Social Psychology Treaty, the prosocial behavior once practiced, can have positive consequences for those concerned, practitioner but also for the social climate (Cristea 2015, 887).

#### **4.6. Qualities required for senior volunteer**

An essential quality declared by seniors is goodness, “*the first quality is the kindness that they share with everyone*” (Emilian, 72, urban). Other qualities that the seniors have mentioned are: patience, perseverance, fairness, earnestness, joy, honesty, diligence, responsibility. Over time, several specialists have tried to create a personality profile of the person who has prosocial behavior but could not reach an agreement. However, Bierhoff and others have proposed some characteristics: empathy, faith, social responsibility as well as low egocentrism (Iluț 2004, 91), some features found in interviews.

I was surprised to see the rich experience in volunteer activity the seniors have behind. In rural areas among parish councilors we have identified a gentleman who has been involved since 1985 and continues to be involved, adding up to now 32 years of community service. Another lady has been involved in the choir for 13 years, and another lady has been involved in maintaining church cleanliness for 19 years. In the urban area, the longest time elapsed from engaging in co-ordination activities is up to 7 years and less than one and a half years. We notice a major difference in the manifestation of prosocial behavior in the two environments. Even though the activities are different, rural seniors have a richer history than those in the urban environment.

Wanting to find out other people’s willingness to engage in other volunteer activities, 10 of the 12 seniors told me they did, they would get involved, and the other two said they were limited to health. A key factor in defining the social status of the third-age person is the balance between its contribution to society, satisfaction gained through involvement in various

activities, but sometimes this contribution is determined by the resources that the person has (Gîrleanu-Șoitu 2006, 187-188). In the urban environment, some elderly people do not have enough resources to give them the opportunity to fully participate in social life. Unlike the elderly in the urban environment, rural people retain their autonomy for a longer period of time and interact with other members of the community frequently through agricultural activities, attending the job and other village specific sessions, and the degree of knowledge and help among members, is much greater.

Given that the number of third-age volunteers involved in volunteering activities is small compared to the number of elderly people in our country, we have learned from the interviews that although they work hard enough in the activities they involve, some elderly volunteers are not stimulated and appreciated for their work, *“we sometimes work more than those who are paid and not even our work is recognized”* (Marius, 62, urban), this being one of the problems they face and affect them. The fact that clubs do not give activities to club members when certain cultural events involve several social actors, and other elderly people from other clubs are involved, is disturbing to some volunteers, arguing that non-recognition of work by others is because this activity is done on a voluntary basis.

The lack of volunteering in which they can get involved was another topic supported by interviewees, *“you do not really have a place here, we have not heard of volunteering”* (Elvira, 55, rural). Both urban and rural seniors have specified this and also the fact that there is a great chaos in Romania regarding volunteering for the elderly. This fact was also claimed by the village priest who specified that the church wants to involve seniors in activities but sometimes it is difficult.

## 5. Conclusions

Through this research, we have tried to identify the motivational factors used to contribute to the closer knowledge of certain relationships, behaviors, specific to the third age, and the conclusions can be useful for those who are around the elderly, their families, the different institutions and other community members with an important role in making decisions. Elderly people are able to do many beautiful things, both to improve their own lives and to beautify the lives of other community members. Given the increasing number of elderly people and the effects this phenomenon has, I believe that more attention should be paid by the various actors to support the autonomy and independence of the elderly. In addition to the needs

people have, elderly people are a category that presents themselves with specific needs, because things that for some of us seem tiny, to them means a lot.

Following the interviews in the two environments, we found that each elderly person is a resource, some are a resource because they carry out voluntary actions for the benefit of the community, and others are a resource simply by emotionally supporting other members of the family, community. We have noticed that the notion of free time in the two environments is different. In rural areas, seniors only have free time on holiday days, as they are very active in field work and animal husbandry, and free time is shared between socializing and volunteering within the church. For those in the urban area, they have free time every day, and therefore the volunteer activities involved are richer and extend over a longer period of time. This also explains why the rate of elderly people involved in voluntary activities is higher in urban areas. Most seniors involved in volunteer activities, be they within a club or within the church, make them have fun, feel useful and also visible, contribute to the community. As we know, volunteering also contributes to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy. I believe that in the modern society, which is in a continuous process of change, the maturity and wisdom of the elderly must be valued more at community level, because they continue to be valuable and can make their contribution to the community even if they have reached an age within their capabilities. I would like this research to contribute to the formation of a better vision and a change of outdated attitude and mentality towards the elderly, at the way in which we will be able to perceive the people around us.

My research shows that the elderly are involved in voluntary activities because volunteering facilitates the establishment of new social contacts and involvement in the community, contributes to the elderly's satisfaction, eliminates the elderly's isolation tendency, offers the opportunity to use its personal experience, the transition from certain stages is an opportunity to regain pride and satisfaction to be useful, contribute to maintaining the state of health and autonomy, and at the same time it promotes the inter-generational relationship.

As far as the volunteering of seniors is concerned, at the level of Iași country, we have found too few associations, organizations that include activities, programs, volunteer projects for seniors in which they will spend much of their time doing volunteering. We have found that both organizations and volunteers do not have a volunteer contract in both urban and rural



areas. In rural areas, things are different as the seniors carry out their activities next to the church, which means that we do not have an institution to deal with these contracts, whereas in urban areas, Iași municipality, volunteer coordinators are working within of the 8 retirement clubs belonging to the Local Social Work Direction.

The results of this study confirm the premise of the motivational factors in the manifestation of the seniors as a resource in the community, to which are added the support network.

We ask ourselves how to develop a pro-active culture among the population, encouraging volunteering, community involvement through the presentation of benefits in community-led information campaigns by various local actors on the TV, radio? At the same time, several programs of elderly involvement should be created in volunteer activities, at least at the level of Iasi County, these programs being very few, especially in rural areas. Incorporating incentive measures for older volunteers would be another measure that emerged from interviewing senior volunteers. To involve locally as many social actors as important at community level, such as the church, the local council, organizations, to create a partnership to help create the conditions for elderly people to get involved.

Subsequent research will be able to analyze how older people can be stimulated to engage in volunteering and contribute to community welfare.

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