

EMILIAN M. DOBRESCU, DUMITRU BATÂR (eds.): *Active Aging. Studies and Researches*, Oscar Print, Bucharest, 2014, 264 p

“Old age is a universal bio-socio-spiritual phenomenon, but its approach only in terms of psychological and biological age often leads to the misconception that it is only a period of decline” (p. 5). Studies and research volume *Active aging* comes to prove that old age has socio-cultural and human potential that can be exploited and that active aging is not just an abstract notion but an increasingly pertinent aspiration.

The concept of active aging

According to the author Emilian M. Dobrescu, “Active aging means to preserve our health and status of active, independent and involved in society members, as we age. Regardless of age, we can play an important role and enjoy a better quality of life. It is essential to exploit our own potential” (p. 60). Also the study author exemplifies the most common definition of active aging, the World Health Organization one: “Active Ageing as healthy as possible is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, social participation and security in order to improve quality of life for older people” (p. 61). Given the fact that until 1988, when WHO included senescence among the top 5 priority health problems of population, aging was considered a disease (p. 61), improvements that have been made so far are remarkable, at least in European countries.

“An important problem Europe is facing is that its population is in the process of aging and the demographic change is an inevitable consequence of the considerable progress of our society: a mortality rate substantially reduced and therefore higher life expectancy” (p. 63). At EU level, “the most delicate issue remains retirement: only one in three Europeans agrees with the idea that the official retirement age should be increased in all states by 2030. Already the subject is on the agenda of most European governments” and 2012 was promoted active aging in three areas: employment, participation in society and independent living.

Another important observation from this study on Active Ageing is the active role that the elderly can play in society. “Retirement should not mean inactivity. The contribution of the elderly to society, playing the role of caregivers for others – parents, spouses or grandchildren, or the volunteer is often overlooked” (p. 65).

An undeniable fact is that active aging begins at work place. “A third of Europeans say in a survey (Eurobarometer 2012) that would like to continue



working beyond retirement age, though not necessarily full time. But many Europeans do not have this possibility now” (p. 66). And so it comes to addressing another very real and pressing problem of contemporary society: the impact of aging. “The aging and the reduction of population in EU Member States will have a strong impact on the economies of the EU compared to the current financial and economic crisis, according to a report published by the European Parliament in late January 2010. Therefore, reforming pension systems is a strong necessity. By 2060, the average European dependency will double - thus public pension systems will no longer be able to sustain this rate of addiction. No pension system can survive such a doubling of the pensioners/employees’ ratio, the report says” (p. 67). And in Romania things will be even worse, because this report will triple, according to official statistics. Under these conditions, active aging of the population appears to be the only solution to the European labor market, the more that people are willing to remain active as they age.

REGIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS IN ROMANIA

Vasile Ghețău makes an analysis of the demographic crisis in Romania, compared to the high number of elderly among European Union countries. One of the conclusions of the article is the fact that the Romanians have an average degree of demographic aging as birth before 1990 still acts as brake on that process. But now, “birth developments after 1990 and those that lie ahead will accelerate the aging process and at regional level fastest dynamics would be in three regions in the south. Negative migration will accelerate the process and the share of elderly population will rise to a third (33%) in 2050 to 17–18% today, and the average age of the population will increase by 7–8 years” (p. 79).

Turning to the situation in Romania, the author believes that the general deterioration of regional demographic construction will come from natural population decrease by birth recoil and rise of general mortality. Vasile Ghețău asserts that “will only be the continuance and accentuation of the developments occurring in the last two decades to the Romanian population. It should not be forgotten that both birth rate and general mortality rate are derived indicators, resulting in a design population. If birth is the result of joint damage of low fertility and dwindling female population of babies that will come in the coming decades by reaching younger generations less fertile after 1990” (p. 78). Things are no different in the mortality indices, as the author notes: “The increase in overall mortality is only the result of the general rise of the degree of demographic aging. Share deaths ages 70 and over was one third of all deaths in the mid-1950s and rose to two-thirds in 2011, and the progress will continue”(p. 78). However, regional population decline rate is not identical. “Elimination of the population of people going to work abroad for at least 12 months has by far the largest contribution to

reduce the number of people normally resident in the country in six of the eight regions, the exceptions being South region, where decline natural and net migration exceeds region 8 Bucharest-Ilfov, with positive net migration, even if modest. In fact, this migration is found in Ilfov County and not in the Capital” (p. 79). As expected, the poorest in the country are those with the highest negative migration, as the author affirms: “Around the net negative migration, 71% is from Moldova and three regions in the south. Same regions are assigned a negative internal migration, the regions benefiting from the influx of population is West and Bucharest-Ilfov” (p. 79). What is noteworthy is that the general deterioration of regional demographic structures will have the main cause natural loss of population and no migration.

PROLONGED SOCIAL ACTIVITY *VERSUS* EARLY RETIREMENT

Florentina Nina Mocanasu makes an analysis of our society, in terms of how a group of individuals, here elders, tend to be affected by social exclusion, because old age has come to be associated by others with the disease, impotence, lack of judgment and dependence on others. “Often society associated ageing with loss of sensory capabilities, mobility and retirement changes; however, some researchers have shown that for most of the elderly, these changes are not so burdensome or as obvious as one might imagine” (p. 91).

The paradigm of retirement is a recognized social and legal problem, but supports comprehensive debate on age which must be carried out and these people exclusion from the labor market. In addition, we can speak even about retirement pathology because retirement is a stress which can accelerate preexisting illness and generate more of them and can damage the mental state of the individual and thus can be delimited retirement pathology, a disease retirement, a very real morbid entity. Author of the article claims that there are currently two trends, one for and one against, the first seeks the remained biological and social potential of the elder and the second aims to limit the retirement age for issuing the necessary jobs to younger generations. Florentina Nina Mocanasu asserts that people who have had extraprofessional activities maintain a better social balance and stress retirement in men is higher than in women, many of them making true neuroses. Equally important is the environment from which future pensioners are originate, because in rural areas it is not a serious shock because cessation is not complete and sudden. On the other hand, very active people in urban areas, if they do not find other interests and activities, support retirement very difficult. This is why the “Retirement pathology’s prevention should be made from time through special courses, integration in work communities where the individual to retire integrates more easily. Psychological preparation is essential because it is indispensable to combat feelings of worthlessness” (p. 93). In Romania, 40.3% of respondents in

surveys on aging agree to retire later because it scares them worse that they become inactive social and their income decreases than those going to work at a later age than before. The situation is the same in all other EU countries, where the population agrees that retirement time to be as high as possible.

THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN RECOVERY ELDERLY

Doru Vlad Popovici, the author of this article, makes an analysis of how the elderly can have a better quality of life with the help of occupational therapy, the more necessary as generally without activities such as employment, human personality is regressing, so far visible in old age. The author starts from the definition of occupation, which is the main issue of the extensive analysis in this article: "The occupation is the dominant activity of the human being, including serious and productive behaviors, and leisure behaviors, creative and festive. It is the result of evolutionary processes culminating in social and biological need for leisure and productive activity" (p. 169). Medical professionals, but also social work and psychology professionals consider the main forms of human occupations as work, leisure activities and daily life activities.

Thus, the work activities must include all forms of productive activities, whether compensated or not. It is important to note that labor activities, by their specific, contribute to structuring person status and role, acknowledged in social terms. Doru Vlad Popovici summarizes the current situation and adapting to the social activities of the elderly: "Experts say that, in the current period, we are seeing new types of occupations that lead to the development of complex personalities, with level higher than ever of skills development, skills and abilities involved in social adaptation. All these aspects are, however, new barriers arising in the process of social integration in the elderly, who often have difficulty using new information technologies, which requires the development of specific skills and abilities" (p. 170).

In terms of occupational therapy, occupation can be analyzed in terms of three characteristics: biological, psychological and social, because the occupation has a basic role in maintaining and developing biological support of any human body, the influence of occupations at psychological level is a very complex process, because there is no activity that does not determine psychical changes, and the social dimension of occupation relates primarily to the impact of the occupation on the structure, skills and social behavior of the individual.

This is why the main features of occupation (biological, psychological and social) must be included in the design of a therapeutic intervention plan as a whole. The development of a therapeutic plan refers to description of therapeutic methods and procedures to be used in activities for achieving the targets. It includes also the synthesis of activities designed to achieve a performance level of

functioning skills and capabilities of the elderly. In addition, the plan should be set according to specific short-term goals to be changed easily, if an interim evaluation can demonstrate his lack of viability. Therefore, “the main features of a treatment plan must be flexibility and mobility, adapted to the progress made by those it is addressed” (p. 177). The author states that: “Modern occupational therapy research has shown that currently, the yield of this discipline is greater as designing more and more recovery plans, applying within the institutions of various types (daycare centers, hospitals and home). Currently, it is expected that the frequently used plans can be applied to the elderly person’s home or in the community where he takes its existence. Therefore, the use of adaptable plans according to different contexts is particularly important for both the elderly person and therapist” (p. 177). The conclusion of the article is highlighted by Doru Vlad Popovici: “The people of the third age are recommended that, in the recovery process to combine intervention through occupational therapy specific activities with other methods of intervention in the fields of psychotherapy, physical therapy and drug therapy in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary recuperative-therapeutic intervention” (p. 182). This volume also contains, in addition to articles and studies which we mentioned in detail, a number of materials with highly informational and human quality, as “Old age on all sides. Neo-sociology of old age attempt” (p. 5), the renowned sociologist Ilie Badescu’s “Old age breviary” (p. 72) a collection of texts that include concepts such as equity release and emotional intelligence of the seniors made by Emilian M. Dobrescu, but also a broad approach to longevity made by Gabriel Ungureanu entitled “longevity – concept experienced in religion, science and literature”.

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