

# ONGEVITY: RISK OR OPPORTUNITY? RELATIVITY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE PHENOMENON. A RESEARCH STUDY

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**Abstract** - Almost all countries are ageing. Differences between regions and countries highlight the economic, political and cultural background of each community. Increasing longevity, a positive phenomenon for the individual, has become a difficult problem for governments. "The elderly live too much and it is a risk for the global economy, something must be done now. The risk of people living longer than expected" (Lagarde, Cr.<http://alertas.eu>, 2018). Longevity: risk or opportunity? Each answer requires reason, emotional intelligence and most of all empathy. Good governance seemed sufficient to make decisions about society. Nowadays, governments and communities are more emotional than rational. Major societal problems, including ageing, are required to be approached from a dual perspective: behavioral-cultural and rational. Governance could be a process of conscious attention and empathy inclusive toward the elderly. This process involves competencies, consistency and respect for the individual. Governance is strikingly like a fish, that is, it is snapping or being healthy from the head. When government does not offer fair models, why would community members behave like honest individuals? (Nordstrom, Ridderstråle, 2009, pp. 228-229). The paper presents the results of a study on the phenomenon of aging. The research has been conducted over the last 7 years, analyzing the cultural and political outlook of answers to the primary question: aging represents a risk or opportunity? It is imperative that governments and public opinion reconsider their positions towards aging. Future strategies could start from this gain of humanity (increasing life expectancy), correcting budget imbalances and inequalities.

**Key words** - Ageing People, Culture, Politics, Relativity, Complexity

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research has reminded me of two happenings, the first one taking place in Vienna, and the second in Romania. On a bench in Sigmund-Freud Park in Vienna a 19-year-old and a 79-year-old lady talk about perfumes and holiday projects. They feel good together, smile and are optimistic. The lonely age lady tells the young woman how interesting her life is. She walks daily, make many trips, goes to the cinema and loves shopping, especially cosmetics. An old man and an elder in Romania. The young man apostrophes the other: what are you looking for? Do not you die once?

Different countries, own cultures; A decent life in a country that respects its citizens. Humiliation in the country where the individual does not matter. "But now it's a lot worse. Today's youth hate old people. Today, in Romania, my feeling is that elders are ugly" (Paler in [costintanasescu.com](http://costintanasescu.com)). How is the increase in population longevity perceived? Risk or opportunity? The changes to the population structure engenders major consequences for any economy, in terms of retirement, healthcare, social protection systems. The main demographic change will be the transition towards a much older population structure, especially the increase in the age group over 65 up to 2030 ([www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)). The science and politics concerning this change are far away clarity and coherence. Undoubtedly, aging is a complex phenomenon borne by the risks and opportunities. The longevity risk affects financial stability in public and private balance sheets. On a macroeconomic

level, the effects of a longevity propagate through the size and structure of the labor market, public finances, corporate balance sheets, private saving, investment, and potential growth. Living longer also holds opportunities for individuals, communities, the economy and society. The official concerns (WPA 2017, IMF), and studies of researchers (Ageing Research Reviews, The Journal of the Economics of Ageing, Journal of Aging Studies, Journal of Behavior, Health & Social Issues) are consistent and particularly important. "No one will be left behind" is an optimistic pledge of the United Nations Agenda 2030 (UN, 2017, WPA, p.1). The research was conducted from an institutional and cultural perspective. During the period 2010-2017 there were recorded information on the societal and cultural aspects of the aging population. The work is based on an international conceptual and methodological support, even if the experiment was carried out in Romania. Descriptions and comparisons supported by limited data aim to highlight institutional and cultural components in addressing aging as a quasi-general phenomenon. How important is the institutional and cultural context in appreciating longevity increased as risk or opportunity? The form of government, the type of democracy, the functionality of public institutions, the economic and cultural context form the starting point in the analysis of aging as a risk or opportunity. The interdisciplinary research has several objectives: (1) to highlight the importance of political-economic and psychological-cultural elements in the aging of the population. (2) to demonstrate that The Paradox of Longevity (Forbes,

2015), can become that state that makes the elders assess their existence in the positive manner. (3) to share ideas and experience with colleagues from other countries to improve scientific knowledge towards a phenomenon that interests everyone. As part of this research, I interviewed the scientists, politicians, students, ageing men and women, who are setting the tone for longevity perception, and help illuminate what human enhancement means for our lives. Seven years and work has not been completed, we have done several analyzes and comparisons that have focused on the political, cultural and economic triangle surrounding the aging of the population.

The analysis of the political-institutional context is indispensable to the scientific researches on the aging phenomenon. There are many studies published at the international level with regard to the demographic causes and consequences of an aging population (Lee, 2016; Bloom et al., 2015, Kāčerova et al., 2014), as are studies that are concerned with aspects of the institutionalization of the elderly (Runcan, 2011; Luppá et al., 2010). Regarding the aging of Romania's population, there are significant contributions, with a general character (Muntele, 2010, Bărbulescu, 2010), and also concerns focused on the consequences and the regional particularities of the demographic aging (Istrate et al. 2015; Panait, 2011). Useful and interesting information is also included in the official documents which addresses the problems of Romania's elderly (CNPV, 2015, 2016, 2017). The analysis of culture is particularly important when attempting to better understand the ageing. Some important studies (Schein, Maanen, 2013; Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) continue to be an important source of data for cross-cultural researchers. In this paper we chose to use both Hofstede and GLOBE models, but also others results.

## II. DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL

The research is a statistical and experimental study regarding ageing. The study used a contextual analysis, which required framing the research from a social, and temporal point of view. In order to validate the data and information we have obtained, we used the methodological triangulation method. This required various techniques for drawing conclusions such as observation, interviews, documentary analysis, statistical and psychological tools. For a rigorous research a questionnaire has been elaborated. It has 59 questions regarding four cultural features founded of elderly. The questionnaire is characterized by the following features:

- it ensures the anonymity of the participation and the confidentiality of the answers;
- it accepts the voluntary nature to the survey participation and the answer to all questions;
- it contains methodological information for guiding respondents regarding the content of the

questionnaire, the manner of filling it in and other orientation information.

This study holds the opinions expressed by 2459 respondents from Iasi County, North East Region in Romania. The total number of respondents in this study is considered to be sufficiently relevant for the objectives of the research.

## III. RESEARCH

Ageing population in Romania: risk or opportunity?

Hypothesis no.1– Health of elderly Romanians are crucial aspects of life quality. It is a risk for any corrupt political system.

Hypothesis no.2 – Aging is more risk than opportunity in Romania.

Hypothesis no.3 -The demographic ageing process is a social and public health problem.

The state of health of Romanian elderly was measured by the subjects' own descriptions of their state of health. This research was conducted on an experimental lot of 2,459 persons over the age of 65.

- Distribution by gender: 1,499 women and 960 men;
- Distribution by urban/rural residence: 1,410 urban and 1,049 rural;
- Distribution by education: 990 with higher education and 1,469 with secondary or elementary education;
- Distribution by marital status: 979 married, 520 divorced, 580 widowed, 480 in cohabitation.

All the subjects participated on a strictly voluntary basis and none of them has been financially rewarded subsequently. The respondents were interviewed between 1.10.2011 and 1.10.2017 by the general practitioners that have accepted to participate in this experiment. 190 people died during this period, so the final sample comprised 2269 respondents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis no.1 – Health of elderly Romanians are crucial aspects of life quality.

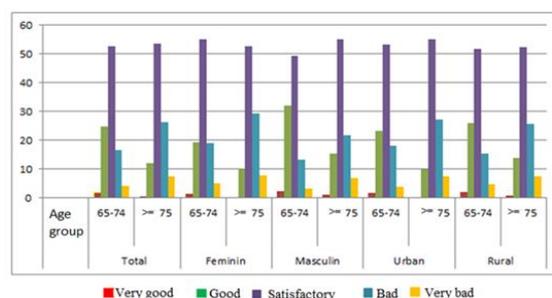


Figure 1. Respondents' Opinions On Health Status

The above figure 1 shows the results regarding the perceived opinion on the individual health status in Romania. Elderly women were noticed to be more

pessimistic than elderly men, assessing their health as being bad or very bad at a higher rate. As far as differences by living environment were concerned, older people from rural environments consider their state of health either good or satisfactory at a higher rate than those in urban environments. The older the ages, the worse the health assessments. 60.00% of the people over the age of 65 declare that their state of health is bad and very bad, 26.00% deem it satisfactory, while 14.00% deem it good and very good. This goes to prove that bad health in these age categories can be the result of accumulating certain problems along the life cycle and not only that of age itself. Preventive behaviors are more marked in the 65 year old population. This determined a marked demographic ageing in the rural environment and a disparity between the two environments. The elderly population in Romania is a major risk to the political system. "Elders in Romania have an instinct of incredible survival: they manage very little money" (Iosub in <https://www.viitorulromaniei.ro/2017>). Romania has one of the lowest scores on the quality of life index: 63 out of 79 countries (Carballo, 2014, WVS).

Hypothesis no. 1 was validated: Health of elderly Romanians are crucial aspects of life quality. Ageing people is a risk for any corrupted political system.

Hypothesis no.2 – Aging is more risk than opportunity in Romania.

Unlike the demographic risk, which is more latent, economic risks manifest their acute character, becoming particularly severe in the last few years. The costs of ageing processes do not have a proper coverage with funds and at least on the short and medium term, these problems will be very difficult to solve. The experimental research showed that the main economic risks of the ageing process in Romania focus on: economic dependence; consumption and adequate satisfaction of consumption needs for the elderly population; ensuring budget expenditure regarding pensions, welfare benefits and other forms of support. 97% of the respondents are financially dependent on their families, cannot ensure a decent living based on their pensions (an average of 200 \$/month) and are not satisfied with the healthcare and/or social assistance system. The issue of social risks entailed by the ageing of population groups is a field of research due to the multiple situations that population category is faced with and presents with various particular features. Risks accumulate economic, psychological and cultural issues:

The shock of retirement is more intense among people with higher education and generally skilled people compared to those with a lower level of education or unskilled people. The physiological decline quickly becomes the main preoccupation and the feelings of isolation and marginalization become more acute. Pensioners find themselves overcome by

events, and within their families they feel that they have lost their authority and even their independence. Loneliness has a significant share among women, who are more numerous in Romania as a result of higher mortality rates among men. The feelings of loneliness become more severe with age and trigger special problems for the society and family. An important role in solving the problem of loneliness is played by community services, other specialized structures for household assistance and providing qualified supply, care and monitoring services (in case of extreme situations, such as immobile people with physical and mental disabilities and/or chronic disorders). The loss of social relationships accentuates the feeling of loneliness, favoring isolation and the onset of depressive states. About 1.5 million elders, almost half, are affected by loneliness. I feel that the world around us no longer needs them, that the rest of society sees them as a burden (<https://www.viitorulromaniei.ro/2017>). Loneliness is an issue as important as poverty and corruption.

Culture greatly influences the negative perception of the elders in Romania. The cultural features, often issues minimized in ageing process researches, are much more difficult to quantify through statistical indicators and can be analyzed more accurately with neuroscience, psychology and behavioral economics. The objective culture (buildings, constructions, machines, installations, technologies) and the subjective culture (concepts and values, beliefs, customs, stereotypes, prejudices) outline the environment in which people live. The culture of the place imprints individual and collective behavior. Individual culture depends on origins, education, living standards and civilization. The Romanian cultural environment is vitiated with perplexing stereotypes regarding ageing population: The elderly are useless, they need pensions and health care. On the one hand, many young people live with their parents and grandparents because they do not have enough means to afford their own apartment. The tension between generations is amplified by material shortages. Elderly people are a material and psychological burden. Many have health problems, do not have the money to care, they are difficult, irritable, selfish. The TV replaces any other form of socialization. Cultural education, individualism and fear of the group's judgment turn them into socially autistic. They hide their shortcomings, they are ashamed to be poor, sick and old. The young people they live with are come from two main categories: the educated ones, who focus on their career, raise money to move on their own or emigrate; the less educated ones, who expect and live off social benefits. The society is divided, the gap between the poor and the rich is growing, the elderly are marginalized: the state by survivors' pensions, the ineffective and corrupt health system, the children they are confused with, the informational technology that they do not understand and not assimilate. On the other hand,

young people who do not live with their parents have their own problems and the elderly become a supplementary responsibility that is culturally managed differently: they want and can be convinced that it is their duty to support the elderly or do it because the collective culture of the place requires this. From the perspective of societal culture and behavioral psychology (Marinescu, 2017; David, 2015), research pursued the following cultural-psychological dimensions relevant to the analysis: selfishness, power distance, avoidance of uncertainty, individualism-collectivism. The essential tendencies of the variability of the answers given to the questions from the questionnaire were highlighted with the average score. The evaluation scale: the value judgments comprise the entire spectrum of opinions: from highly positive to highly negative, with intermediary degrees: total consent, partial consent, indecision, partial dissent, total dissent (Likert scale 5 –total consent and 1 –total dissent). One may notice that the respondents express a high consent regarding the features analyzed. Suggestively, the economic indicators present in table 1 are highly concluding in this direction.

No. crit.	Cultural-psychological dimension	Econometric indicators/markers Average score ( $\bar{X}$ )
1.	Selfishness	4.87
2.	Power Distance	4.97
3.	Uncertainty Avoidance	4.66
4.	Individualism - Collectivism	4.16
5.	Total	4.59

Table 1. Synthesis Indicators Of Some Cultural-Psychological Features

The image of the average score for each of the four questions that characterize cultural features of respondents – is reproduced by the graphic representation in fig. 2.

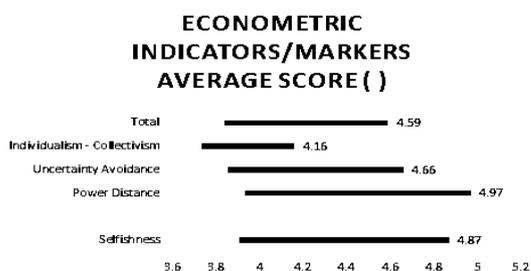


Figure 2. Graphical Representation Of The Average Score For Cultural-Psychological Features

Respondents have selfish tendencies. Religious and defensive, respondents are only interested in their family. Conformism is elevated to religion, although other studies show that Romanians do not follow the rules, although they are obedient to power (David,

2015, Marinescu, 2017). Respondents want life stability and they don't like to be surprised by unknown situations. Respondents are individualists, but mimic the interest for the common good. Having lived with inferiority complexes, they try to diminish through selfishness towards children. They wanted an economic, political and social environment that could potentiate their own virtues. They have instead learned the obedience to the authorities. Fear, suspicion, and lack of trust in institutions is quasi-general inside, but behaviors are conformable outside. Lack of solidarity and obedience caused respondents to complain about the system, complying with the rules they do not believe. This picture is strictly necessary to explain the cultural risks of the elderly, the paradoxes and the dilemmas that define the groups, not individuals isolated from the group. The consequences of aging cannot be studied rigorously in terms of black and white, because although scientific conclusions are essential they do not coincide with reality, covering the infinity of the manifestations. The tension between what you think (the invisible part of the culture) and what you say (visible part) becomes dangerous by repetition and leads to skeptical, cynical behavior. Dominant culture allows for external adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 2010). It is a common learning process. Each personality structure permits both positive and negative expressions, depending on who dominates socio-cultural modelling. The socio-cultural environment in Romania does not allow expressing and capitalizing on the positive potential of the elderly (David, 2015). Hypothesis no.3 - The demographic ageing process is a social and public health problem. The public healthcare system is not adequate for the purpose of ensuring universal access to healthcare, a high level of quality and for maintaining the financial viability of the system. The healthcare system and its deficiencies multiply the problems that elderly people already can barely handle in the current socio-economic context. The social services provided and rendered do not manage to offset these gaps, but they further worsen the state of dependence and degradation of the living standards for the elderly. Romania does have severe problems with the management of its entire public sector. Also, Romania is suffering from an antiquated healthcare structure, with a high and costly ratio of in-patient care over out-patient care (EHCI-2017-report). Romania ranks 34th in the ranking of 35 European countries, regarding the quality of the health system. Social protection is inefficient and ineffective. Romania has 3.43 million citizens aged over 65, and over 20% of them need home care. In fact, only 0.23% benefit from such services, according to the data published two years ago at the National Conference of Home Care Providers. More than one third of the elderly face the risk of poverty and social exclusion, twice as many as the European Union average (<http://www.viitorulromaniei.ro/2017>).The

message of this paper is that each society could try to learn to prove its respect and empathy for the old age people. Education, politics and new social media are able to develop a positive conception of the ageing people. Sharing experience and ideas fosters the desire of the different generations to learn together and to learn from each other. The opportunities for aging are minimized in the political, economic and cultural context of Romania. The elders of tomorrow may be autonomous/independent, capable of generous social solidarity. The seemingly collective culture, born out of the desire for safety and the fear of unsure citizens, will disappear through education and tolerance. All of this will then be able to support a good mental and physical health, with a positive impact on the increase in life expectancy and well-being. If government does not care, does civil society not become proactive? Political incongruence and corruption give general tendency of individuals to demand increased political rights and civil liberties when culturally defined political expectations are out of line with political realities. This trend does not manifest in elderly people in Romania. They are humiliated and obedient to power. The calculation of pensions in Romania is incorrect and totally out of control, with special laws for certain favored categories and incongruent rules for simple citizen. The principle of social contribution and solidarity, which is said to govern the pension system in Romania, is knowingly stifled. Gaps in confidence in political system tend to be bigger in a country with such most unequal incomes. Over a million Romanians live with a minimum pension of 110 euro starting in February 2017. They are former farmers, invalids or people who have failed from their honest work to accumulate a score that will allow them to live without being assisted. The state does not subsidize the pension of 20-40 euro, but between 500 and 2500 euro. The budget is borrowed to be able to pay special pensions for politicians, military, police, and justice. They take between 3 and 10 average public pensions. The pension's picture in Romania looks shocking (Ivan, 2017, Jurnalul.ro). With an incongruent regime, actual political system dissatisfy a population's legitimacy beliefs.

Romania is facing a marked ageing of the population, a lack of adequate resources for this phenomenon, an increase of inequalities and a dramatic decrease in the quality of life. A special attention should be paid to the role of individual factors such more responsibilities and macro factors such as equity of retirement system and changing social norms and stereotypes. By understanding its specific population trends, Romanian government can assess present and anticipate future needs to its older population. The government has the power but not the will to do something sustainable in this regard. The paper points out that ignoring these problems affect the very existence of the Romanian people. The study is to be

completed with other analyses, providing a theoretical and practical background to understand the influence and importance of these phenomena in an interconnected and multicultural world. There are several aspects in which this study is limited. However, this suggest a direction for future research with people of other cultures in order to gain a broader perspective of ageing and migration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Communities are highly technologically, informationally advanced, but there are emotional slipping's that do not tolerate differences. The certainty has died, the chaos has lived. This puzzle requires tolerant, multi-cultural people. More freedom for the individual requires more education and responsibility "(Ridderstråle, Nordström, 2003).The paper suggests that, by way of this type of conference open for the reciprocity, one of the major problems for understanding cross-cultural phenomenon on aging could be mitigated.

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