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Volunteering in “Old” Europe

Patterns, Potentials, Limitations

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This article aims at providing an overview of patterns, potentials, and limitations of formal volunteering among older Europeans. Based on data from the 2004 Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), we first describe cross-national variations in formal voluntary engagement and report on recent research investigating societal determinants of volunteering. We then discuss general issues related to policies and programs promoting older people’s voluntary engagement. This is complemented by some critical remarks on the current “productive aging” debate in Europe. Pointing out limitations of volunteering in the older population, we conclude by suggesting a broad concept of aging, which encompasses both productive and consumptive elements, as an appropriate model for our aging societies.

Keywords: volunteering; productive aging; cross-national research; Europe

Two decades after the pioneering work by Butler and Gleason (1985) and building on the huge literature published thereafter in the United States (cf. Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, & Sherraden, 2001; O’Reilly & Caro, 1994, for example), productive aging has finally been established as an

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important issue in “old” Europe as well (e.g., Avramov & Maskova, 2003; Erlinghagen & Hank, 2008). European policy makers have begun to acknowledge the potential of older citizens to participate more actively in society and have recognized that (more) efforts should be made to promote greater participation of older people in voluntary activities (e.g., Commission of the European Communities, 1997; Hank, Erlinghagen, & Stuck, 2008). However, while the U.S. government initiated specific programs for older people as volunteers as early as in the 1960s (as part of the Older Americans Act), a similar European policy is yet missing (cf. Baldock, 1999).

The number of projects receiving public support through national or European funds is growing, though. Recent examples include the German Federal Model Program “Experience for Initiatives” (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2006) and its successor, the European LACE project (http://www.lace-project.net), as well as the U.K. Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative (Rochester & Hutchison, 2002). It is also worth noting that the European Network of Older-Volunteer Organizations (http://www.enovo.eu) was formally constituted as a section of Volunteurope, the European network for volunteering and active citizenship, in 2005.

Against the background of these developments, this article aims at providing a broad audience of scholars and practitioners—particularly from the United States—with an overview of patterns, potentials, and limitations of formal volunteering among older Europeans. (Note that the term formal volunteering as it is used throughout this article refers to voluntary activities usually performed within the context of a formal organization, whereas informal volunteering and caring refer to unpaid productive activities within the context of informal [kin or nonkin] social networks.) Building on previous work exploiting data from the 2004 Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE; see appendix and Börsch-Supan, Hank, & Jürges, 2005, for details), we first describe cross-national variations in formal voluntary engagement and reports on recent research investigating societal determinants of volunteering. We then give a general discussion of issues related to policies and programs promoting older persons’ voluntary engagement. This is complemented by adding a critical perspective to the current “productive aging” debate, which points to the limitations of volunteering.

Cross-National Variations in Volunteering

Patterns of Older Adults’ Voluntary Engagement by Country and Selected Individual Characteristics

Across all 11 Continental European countries represented in the SHARE baseline study, an average of 10% of the population aged 50 or older engaged
in formal voluntary work in the month preceding the interview (Figure 1). Between countries, however, substantial variation in the proportion of active older people was found. Denmark, Sweden (17%-18%), and, particularly, the Netherlands (21%) were characterized by the highest shares of older adults reporting to have volunteered. Belgium, France, and Switzerland (14%-15%) are followed by Germany and Austria (8%-10%), constituting a group of countries with medium participation. The proportions of volunteers in Italy (7%) as well as in Greece and Spain (2%-3%) were clearly below the average. Among those who reported to have volunteered in the last month, almost one fifth (18%) had done so almost daily, nearly half of the volunteers had been engaged almost every week (45%), and slightly more than one third had worked less often (37%). Cross-country variations in frequency of engagement are notable but apparently unrelated to the overall level of volunteering.

Source: SHARE 2004 (Release 2.0.1), authors’ representation.
in a country. The frequency of volunteers’ engagement does not follow a systematic geographic pattern, such as a north–south gradient (details not shown here; see Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006).

Many studies showed that to engage in unpaid productive activities, individuals need to be equipped with specific resources (e.g., Musick & Wilson, 2008, Part III; Tang, 2006), reflected in various sociodemographic, socioeconomic, and health characteristics. Turning to differences in volunteering according to such individual characteristics, we first detect a clear age gradient (Figure 2a), showing remarkable cross-country differences, though, if the two “younger” age groups are compared. Whereas the share of Swiss, Austrian, and Italian volunteers aged 65 to 74 is 3 to 5 percentage points lower than the respective portion in the age group 50 to 64, the reverse is true in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and France; that is, in these countries, volunteering even increases (by about 3 percentage points) among those aged 65 to 74. However, when respondents aged 75 or older are considered, activity rates drop by at least one third everywhere (in the Netherlands, starting from a very high level, even by two thirds), to an average of 5%. Still, in the Nordic countries, one eighth of the population aged 75+ continue to be engaged in voluntary work—which is a higher proportion than the SHARE average across all age groups and 3 to 4 times more than in the youngest age groups of older Greeks and Spaniards.

The share of volunteers also varies substantially across educational levels (Figure 2b). Participation rates generally increase by 5 percentage points when respondents with low formal education (5%) are compared to those with a medium level of formal education (11%). The proportion of volunteers increases to an average of 19%, that is, by another 8 percentage points, when the highest educational group is considered; this increase is less pronounced in Switzerland and Austria (plus 3.5 percentage points). It is worth noting that volunteering is more common among the poorly educated in Sweden (14%), Denmark (13%), and the Netherlands (18%) than among the highly educated in Spain (9%) and Greece (7%). Generally speaking, the share of volunteers differs only moderately by individuals’ employment status, that is, between working (11%), retired (10%), and other nonworking (8%) respondents (see Figure 2c). In Austria and Switzerland, though, the proportion of volunteers is substantially lower among retirees (7% and 11%, respectively) than among those who are employed (13% and 17%, respectively).

While there are only minor differences in the shares of volunteers according to their general physical health status (details not shown; see Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006), the share of older volunteers suffering from
Figure 2
Older Adults’ Formal Voluntary Engagement in Continental Europe, by Age Group, Level of Education, Employment Status, and Symptoms of Depression

Source: SHARE 2004 (Release 2.0.1), authors’ representation.
symptoms of *depression* is clearly lower than among those without mental problems (7% vs. 11% on average). Still, the observed differences between these subpopulations are, again, not as substantial as those observed between countries (Figure 2d). In the Netherlands, 17% of older adults exhibit symptoms of depression volunteered, closely followed by Danes (14%) and Swedes (13%). Once more, these shares are higher than the respective proportions in the less disadvantaged older populations in many other—particularly southern European—countries covered by SHARE.

Using multivariate logistic regression, Erlinghagen and Hank (2006) confirmed the relevance of sociodemographic characteristics in predicting the individual’s propensity to engage in volunteer work. Particularly if the respondent is more than 75 years old, if he or she is working, or perceives his or her health as relatively poor, the probability of volunteering decreases significantly. Factors that are positively related to voluntary work are a higher education, a steady partnership, and one’s engagement in other social activities (see Hank & Stuck, 2008, for further details).

Preliminary analyses of data from SHARE’s Wave 2 (cf. Hank & Erlinghagen, 2008), collected in 2006-2007 and covering three more countries than the baseline wave, suggests that the share of older Israelis performing formal voluntary work corresponds to the Continental European average, whereas the respective numbers in Poland and the Czech Republic are very close to those observed in Greece and Spain. The latter two countries as well as Austria exhibit the greatest instability of formal voluntary engagement across time. Only about two fifths of those who volunteered in Wave 1 also did so in Wave 2. This is very different in the two Scandinavian countries as well as in Belgium and the Netherlands, where the proportion of continuously active volunteers ranges from roughly two thirds to three quarters. These countries are not only characterized by the greatest stability of engagement but also exhibit the greatest proportions of the population aged 50+ taking-up voluntary work between waves.

**Societal Determinants of Voluntary Engagement**

Although the association between individual characteristics and formal volunteering is very similar across a large variety of countries, the overall probability of being engaged varies greatly across national contexts (cf. Musick & Wilson, 2008, chapter 16). This should not come as a surprise, as Anheier and Salamon (1999, p. 43), for example, noted that “volunteering is part of the way societies are organized, how they allocate social
responsibilities and how much engagement and participation they expect from citizens."

While there is a number of recent cross-national studies investigating various aspects of the context dependence of voluntary engagement in general (e.g., Curtis, Bear, & Grabb, 2001; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2003; Smith & Shen, 2002), to our knowledge the study by Hank (2008)—which is based on the 2004 SHARE—is the only one taking a comprehensive look at the societal determinants of older persons’ participation in formal volunteering in particular (considering informal volunteering and caring as well). Hank argues that a society’s civic culture should constitute a highly relevant frame of reference for the individual’s decision to volunteer and that a country’s “welfare state regime” (Esping-Andersen, 1990) is likely to play an important role in shaping the opportunity structure for active voluntary engagement. Although his results indicate that a substantial share of the observed cross-national variation in the propensity to perform nonmarket productive activities at older ages is due to differences in population composition (e.g., the age distribution or the distribution of educational degrees), the author also found a country’s degree of civil liberties as well as government social spending to be positively associated with older citizens’ propensity to engage in formal and informal volunteering in particular. These macro-level factors are shown to explain a significant proportion of the difference in rates of volunteering among the population aged 50 or older in northern and southern Europe.

In line with these findings, Hank and Erlinghagen (2008) found not only that societal context has a significant impact on the prevalence of older people’s volunteering at a given point in time but also that the dynamics of volunteering vary by country. Comparing, for example, Scandinavian and Mediterranean countries suggests that social environments characterized by higher proportions of older volunteers cross-sectionally also fare well in establishing opportunity structures which stabilize voluntary activity and foster taking-up new engagement.

Consistent with results of related European studies dealing with the role of service systems and intergenerational family solidarity (e.g., Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Römer, & von Kondratowitz, 2005) or with welfare regime influences on rates of social exclusion in old age (e.g., Ogg, 2005), a general conclusion to be derived from the findings described here is that civic engagement needs to be supported by welfare state interventions (see Chambré, 1989, for a discussion from a U.S. perspective).
Promoting Volunteering Among Older People

Many welfare state policies have an indirect effect on older adults’ unpaid productive engagement as they may influence the “division of labor” between a society’s market and nonmarket sectors. Whether care, for example, is provided through for-profit or nonprofit (voluntary) organizations, by older family members, or by nonkin social networks is likely to depend on a country’s institutional setting (cf. Motel-Klingebiel et al., 2005). Direct measures to promote voluntary engagement need “to acknowledge the aging process, such that inclusive opportunities extend beyond matters of economics to social and physical accommodations as well” (McBride, 2006-2007, p. 67). Such policy measures may be initiated at the national, state, or community level and may be targeted at individuals or at voluntary organizations.

Initiatives targeted at individuals first need to make sure that older persons are sufficiently informed (e.g., through media campaigns) about the opportunities to become engaged as well as about the individual and community benefits resulting from voluntary action. A crucial issue when creating new opportunities for older people to contribute to the public good is accessibility, which may be constrained by physical impairments, for example. Mobility or, more specifically, the availability of (public) transportation, also matters here. The lack of resources (e.g., time or skills) necessary to carry out specific voluntary assignments is another important issue that could be addressed by offering flexible work opportunities and training programs. Accounting for the heterogeneity in the pool of potential volunteers—their diversity of abilities, interests, and needs—is important when thinking about incentives that might help motivating initial and sustained engagement. Incentives may be connected to internal motivations related to, for example, the need for self-agency and self-esteem (cf. Siegrist, von dem Knesebeck, & Pollack, 2004), or to external motivations, taking the form of educational opportunities, modest stipends, or tax credits (e.g., Kiesel, 2002; Silverstein, Sullivan, Murtha, & Jawad, 2005; see Caro, Caspi, Burr, & Mutchler, 2005, and Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyj, 2007, for recent studies investigating incentives and barriers to productive ageing).

Measures targeted at improving voluntary organizations’ capacities to engage (more) older volunteers should aim at building a (more) professional volunteer administration and management, which enhances organizations’ ability to match individuals’ preferences, interests, and skills with adequate opportunities to be active (e.g., Atkinson, 2006, p. 7; Hong, Morrow-Howell, Tang, & Hinterlong, 2009). This also requires infrastructures for
recruiting, training, and connecting older adults to an organization. Institutional age-discrimination, that is, binding opportunities to be active to certain age limits, must be avoided. Parallel to measures directed at professionalizing the performance of individual organizations, building networks among different organizations should be an important step toward creating a strong civic infrastructure that provides information about best practices and opportunities for older volunteers and allows individuals to “move in and out of diverse roles, with varying levels of intensity and different areas of focus” (Henkin & Zapf, 2006-2007, p. 75).

National- or state-level policies designed to promote social participation need to make sure that they are administered locally in efficient ways. In the United States, for example, the national policy for older people as volunteers—established as part of the Older Americans Act—is administered by the Federal Administration on Aging through a tight network of local Area Agencies on Aging, which are responsible for contractual arrangements with voluntary organizations receiving federal funds (Baldock, 1999, p. 585). The involvement of communities is critical for the success of initiatives promoting social participation and civic engagement among older people (e.g., Henkin & Zapf, 2006-2007; see Erlinghagen & Hank, 2008, Part III, for a discussion and related evidence from Germany). Not only is the focus of many organizations on services for people in local communities but also did the studies show that the likelihood of volunteering increased with individuals’ sense of community (e.g., Okun & Michel, 2006).

Although it seems clear that private voluntary action needs to be supported by public infrastructures (cf. Chambré, 1989; Hank, 2008), it is yet unclear which policies are best-suited to serve this purpose: “We have accumulated solid evidence that volunteering is good for older adults [. . .], but we lack research to determine what programs and policy initiatives will maximize the engagement of older adults in volunteer roles” (O’Neill, 2006-2007, p. 98). This statement is true for Europe in particular, where sizeable initiatives and programs to promote older persons’ voluntary engagement have evolved rather recently only (see Hank et al., 2008). In addition to promoting even greater participation of seniors in volunteering, the most important issue here seems to be the question of sustainability: that is, what will happen to the older volunteers and the organizational infrastructures built to initiate voluntary engagement once the original programs terminated? It seems clear that Europe needs long-standing policies for older people as volunteers, securing the funding of “promising” initiatives over a longer period of time. This would also imply a rigorous evaluation of such initiatives. Moreover, short-term funding of specific programs
needs to be complemented by long-term welfare-state investments in people’s education and health, which ample research showed to be the major determinants of (paid and unpaid) productive activity at the individual level (e.g., Tang, 2008; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).

Critical Perspectives on Older People’s Voluntary Engagement

Parallel to the growing number of studies providing evidence for a multitude of individual and societal benefits related to older people’s voluntary engagement (e.g., Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005)—and resulting implicit or explicit calls for initiatives to promote this dimension of productive aging in particular—various authors raised concerns about an uncritical and overly optimistic discourse about older people’s civic engagement (e.g., Erlinghagen, 2008; Martinson & Minkler, 2006). The most important issues of this debate shall be highlighted in the remainder of this section.

Preconditions for Positive Health Effects of Productive Aging

The “quality” of socially productive activities has been shown to play an important role in explaining the relationship between social engagement and health. Siegrist et al. (2004), for example, consider social productivity as a form of interpersonal exchange, which is founded on the notion of reciprocity. That is, older volunteers’ efforts, for example, are expended in return for rewards, such as social recognition. Should efforts not be matched by rewards, the resulting imbalance might have the capability to damage the individual’s health and well-being. Empirical research by Wahrendorf, Siegrist, and von dem Knesebeck (2006), using the 2004 SHARE, showed that unpaid productive activity tends to be associated with greater well-being, although this relationship varies with the experienced quality of exchange. For volunteering and informal helping (but not for caring), experienced reciprocity between efforts spent and rewards received was associated with positive well-being, whereas high efforts that were not paralleled by adequate rewards were associated with negative well-being in all activities. Complementary findings from a recent study by Litwin and Shiovitz-Ezra (2006), who used data from a nationally representative sample of Israeli retirees, provide empirical backing for the assertion that the quality
of social ties matters more than activity participation per se as predictors of well-being at older ages. Moreover, it seems important to defend the opportunities of role enhancement through productive activities against the dangers of role strain, if volunteers, for example, were overburdened with expectations regarding their engagement (cf. Baker, Cahalin, Gerst, & Burr, 2005).

Social Participation, Integration, and Polarization

Social participation and social integration of older persons are closely—and positively—linked (e.g., Hyde & Janevic, 2003; Ogg, 2005). However, promoting voluntary participation also bears in it the potential of increasing polarization among older persons, if the selection of people into social activities is biased by the individual’s endowment with health or socioeconomic resources. Wilson (2000, p. 232), for example, notes that “[v]olunteering improves health, but it is also most likely that healthier people are more likely to volunteer. Good health is preserved by volunteering; it keeps healthy volunteers healthy.” Thus, rather than attracting inactive people suffering from health limitations (i.e., those who would need to enjoy the health benefits of volunteering the most), undirected initiatives promoting social participation are likely to be particularly successful among those who are in better health already and whose health will subsequently improve even further. A similar line of argumentation holds when thinking about the relationship between volunteering, socioeconomic status, and well-being (e.g., Tang, 2008).

Volunteering Is not Always Charitable

The unambiguously positive image of volunteering in the public perception suggests that all volunteering is charitable. However, this perspective ignores that voluntary engagement might well serve purposes that are not directed toward social integration, for example, but toward the exclusion of certain individuals or minority groups from a community. McBride (2006-2007, p. 66) notes that “civic action includes those behaviors in the realm of civil society that express the voluntary, collective spirit of the people and, thus, may include actions that many consider abhorrent.” Put differently, all characteristics of volunteering also apply to, for example, vigilante groups, unpaid activists of a (legal) fascist party, or to members of a citizens’ action committee trying to prevent the establishment of a refugees’ hostel in their neighborhood.
Negative Consequences for the Labor Market

Although some authors welcome older volunteers as an important supplement to Europe’s aging and shrinking workforce (e.g., Atkinson, 2006), expanding the role of older volunteers in providing services to our communities might also have negative labor market consequences, if volunteer work crowds out paid employment (especially in the low-wage sector). Baldock (1999), for example, notes that “there are many volunteer tasks carried out by seniors in the USA which are difficult to differentiate from paid work. Work as tax consultant (as in VITA), business consultant (as in SCORE), or home help (as in Senior Companions), are typical examples of volunteer activities which duplicate paid employment” (p. 588). Moreover, some “semivoluntary” and time-intensive (near full-time) forms of productive aging—especially in the social service or care sector—may not only reduce work opportunities for professionals but also constrain the labor force participation of the “young old” (see Wang & Marcotte, 2007, for a related discussion of the labor market effects of caring for grandchildren).

Realistic Expectations of Unused Volunteer Potentials

The SHARE study provides evidence for significant cross-national variation in the share of volunteers in Europe’s older population, ranging from about 20% in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands to roughly 5% in the Mediterranean countries. This gap between northern and southern Europe indicates that there might be a significant, yet underutilized volunteer potential in a number of European countries. The Dutch proportion of older volunteers could serve as a modest benchmark to identify the extent of such unused potentials, suggesting that in Germany, for example, the proportion of volunteers aged 50 or older could possibly be doubled (assuming similar endowments with health and human capital in the two populations). However, even if it would be possible (and desirable) to maximize older adults’ participation in voluntary work, it seems unrealistic to expect the proportion of older volunteers to exceed 35% to 40% of the respective age groups in the population (applying the current and projected U.S. situation as an internationally acknowledged “best practice” example; cf. Einolf, 2009; Rozario, 2006-2007). Thus, even if activation policies would be very effective, a clear majority of about two thirds of the older population would remain inactive—for whatever reasons. Policy makers should thus keep in mind that initiatives to promote older persons’ social participation will eventually reach a minority of the older population only. Whereas this minority might still be a significant one among the “young
old” around retirement age, it will be a very small one among the “oldest-old,” which is the fastest growing age group in Europe.

Avoiding the Primacy of “Usefulness” in the “Productive Aging” Debate

If we support the notion that “social productivity” (e.g., Siegrist et al., 2004)—independent of its specific form—does good for the aging individual and for aging societies, we might easily conclude that unproductive behaviors are bad. Such beliefs, however, would be both dangerous and incorrect.

Perceiving “unproductive” aging as harmful for society is dangerous for social cohesion, because it is likely to stigmatize those who—for whatever personal reason—may take the liberty to refrain from volunteering, for example, or who might simply not have sufficient personal resources (including health) to engage in productive activities (cf. Martinson & Minkler, 2006, p. 322; Moody, 2001). Although initiatives to promote social participation in later life may seek to expand opportunities to be involved and productive without any intention to create new obligations, they might alter public expectations of socially desirable behaviors of older people in undesirable ways.

Perceiving “unproductive” aging as harmful is incorrect (or at least one-sided), because older adults contribute to society’s economic prosperity not only through paid or unpaid work but also—and in similarly important ways—by consuming goods and services (cf. Lührmann, 2005). Also, from an economic perspective, the loss of resources and abilities in the course of the aging process might not only bring about costs but also be beneficial for growth because the particular needs of the older population should result in increasing demand for specific new goods and services (e.g., in the medical and health care sector).

Conclusions

Recent findings from the SHARE study suggest a clear geographic pattern of participation in voluntary activities among Europe’s older population, with higher participation rates in northern Europe and substantially lower ones in the Mediterranean and former socialist countries. Beyond all cross-national differences, though, a significant share of Europeans aged 50 or older engages in voluntary work—as well as in other unpaid productive activities—on a fairly regular basis. The productive potential of this fast growing subpopulation...
may still not be activated to its full possible extent, though (see, for example, Warburton et al., 2007). This might be particularly the case in Europe, where—different from the United States—policy makers have just recently recognized the necessity to promote volunteering in the older population. Although recent years have witnessed a large number of very diverse, mainly community-based volunteer initiatives, coordinated national or even European-level activation strategies do not seem to exist yet (see Hank et al., 2008). It should be noted that the latter may not even be desirable, though, because the efficiency of a specific program may vary significantly across different national contexts, depending on the institutional and cultural roots of a country’s civil society (cf. Smith & Shen, 2002).

Independent of the regional level (community, state, national) or stakeholders (individual, organization) at which specific activation programs are targeted, the empirical evidence about the role of welfare state policies in promoting voluntary involvement—as limited as it may be if it comes to the specific mechanisms at work—suggests that private initiative requires public support (e.g., Chambré, 1989; Hank, 2008). That is, welfare states cannot and must not leave the responsibility for civic engagement in the older population to their citizens alone. Policy makers must be aware of the necessity to invest into basic prerequisites for productive aging, including, for example, the support of local charitable organizations or neighborhood initiatives (cf. Henkin & Zapf, 2006-2007), as well as sustained efforts to promote people’s education and health.

Even so, policies aiming to increase older people’s civic engagement should acknowledge the limits of volunteering among older people. This implies that a number of issues need to be accounted for when designing and implementing such policies. First, while it seems particularly important to create opportunities for disadvantaged older adults to get engaged in social activities, one needs to make sure that specific instruments, such as providing stipends to older low-income volunteers, are not misused to exploit needy volunteers, paying them financial compensations below minimum wage. Moreover, the promotion of unpaid productive engagement must not come at the cost of a reduced labor supply of those in their 50s and 60s, whose importance as paid workers will increase rapidly on Europe’s aging labor markets. Therefore, policy makers should carefully evaluate their strategies designed to promote volunteering in the older population to avoid unintended side effects in adjacent policy areas.

Second, while most voluntary activities contribute to the public good, voluntary engagement in principle also bears in it the potential for societal conflict (for detailed discussions, see Erlinghagen, 2001; Portes & Landolt,
Moreover, careful attention should be paid to avoiding conflicts for the older individual, resulting from possible tensions between social expectations concerning retirees’ voluntary engagement and their own concept of an “ideal retirement lifestyle” (Smith, 2004). Trying to “reobligate” (Gallagher, 1994, p. 577) older potential volunteers may cause resistance among them, which definitively needs to be avoided. This can be achieved by “[c]reating systems and opportunities in which motivations, efforts and rewards are marked by reciprocity seems to be of vital importance [. . .] in increasing meaningful participation, not least in view of their powerful implications for well-being and health” (Siegrist et al., 2004, p. 13).

In sum, the appropriate model for our aging societies should thus be guided by a broader concept of aging, which encompasses both productive and consumptive elements. Or, to put it in Holstein’s words (cited in Martinson & Minkler, 2006), “By assuming the desirability of productivity and reducing the vision of an aging society to it, advocates bypass a critical task—to understand aging in all its manifestations and to respect older people not only when they are contributing in any way elucidated to date, but also when they become more dependent” (p. 322).

**Appendix**

The Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) is closely modeled after the U.S. Health and Retirement Study. It is the first data set to provide extensive standardized information on the socioeconomic status, health, and family relationships of older people in multiple European countries. The analytic sample on which the analysis presented in this article is based contains data from 27,305 personal interviews with people aged 50 or more in 11 countries: Sweden, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Greece.

The information on the respondents’ engagement in formal volunteering was derived from a question asking whether respondents had engaged in voluntary or charity work during the month preceding the interview; that is, different from the many studies focusing on membership in voluntary associations (e.g., Curtis et al., 2001), we consider active engagement in voluntary or charity work within a relatively short time frame only. Although voluntary organization membership is highly correlated with activity, the former measure might lead to an overestimation of actual engagement. Moreover, since volunteer work is often performed occasionally rather than regularly and other studies’ retrospective questions on participation cover a longer period of time (e.g., the last year), our figures are likely to give a very conservative estimate of the prevalence of volunteering in Continental Europe (cf. Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006; Hank & Stuck, 2008).
References


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