

Editorial

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Although an aging population is a clear sign of civilizational advance, it nonetheless represents one of the greatest challenges for public policies in contemporary societies.

Besides its most evident impact on the long-term financial sustainability of social protection systems — particularly with regard to the regular payment of pensions — the combination of greater human longevity that increasingly benefits retired people, on the one hand, and a lower birth rate, with long-term effects on the number of professionally active people, on the other, have numerous multisectoral implications, some of which are the focus of this special issue.

There are several challenges going forward that require actors from both the public sector and civil society to quickly adapt and in a well-coordinated and timely manner. If, on the one hand, more flexible working conditions and arrangements are already required to accommodate emerging needs — which the context of COVID-19 has only exacerbated — on the other hand, conditions will also have to be created so that those who are still professionally active can be as productive as possible. In the health field, care services will have to be greatly adapted, living ecosystems reconfigured and mobility strongly promoted. In the civic domain, the conditions for the full exercise of citizenship will have to be guaranteed, in all phases of life.

Faced with a progressive maturation of modern societies and an increasingly heterogeneous elderly population, with increasingly differentiated life paths and expectations, are communities responding in an adequate form? Are current public policies appropriate, or, at the very least, sufficient to face the multiplicity of challenges? These were the two main questions underlying the theme presented in this edition, which aims to make a small contribution to the ongoing debate on public policy requirements in a context of demographic aging. This is a debate that must be plural, involving — for now - both academy researchers and policy makers, and the valued technicians who advise them, addressing how to best meet the challenges pointed out. This special issue is dedicated to all of them.

As a reflection of the multidisciplinary nature of the ‘aging population’ theme, the editorial team of this issue has received numerous proposals for articles on multiple fronts. After a rigorous peer review process, the articles that were eventually selected to compose this issue address not only a variety of challenges, but also a diversity of territorial contexts: focusing on Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, and Brazil. The editors thus considered the current worldwide state of demographic aging. Only a strategy of this nature, with an international approach, identifying and reflecting on different practices and concerns, can inform public policies.

This special issue of the magazine opens with an article by António Fonseca, entitled ‘*Aging in Place in Portugal*’. Focused on Portugal, it collects and systematizes local initiatives on how to operationalize the ‘Aging in Place’ concept. The richness of both the methodology used and the results achieved allow us to identify several good practices, duly framed within the territorial specificities. This research addresses the initial questions of this issue, informing readers on how local communities in Portugal are responding to the challenge of *aging in place*, as is desired by most people (Daré, 2010). In the area of demographic aging, those who decide on public policies currently have at their disposal growing scientific evidence. In addition, over the last few decades, this theme has gained increasing po-

litical importance. One of the paradigms that seeks to mitigate the harmful effects that the process of demographic aging brings, finding innovative and appropriate responses to the needs and demands of people who age, is ‘Aging in Place’. It values the home and the community, which are considered the privileged places to age, with security, independence, and autonomy (WHO, 2015). In addition to housing, the concept extends to the community, which is made up of family, friends, neighbors, associations, and service providers (Iecovich, 2014).

The next article in this issue was written by Philippe Pitaud and is entitled ‘*Personnes âgées, technologies numériques et rupture du lien social: risques de l’exclusion ou leurs de l’inclusion?*’. The complexity of the questions inherent to the aging process extends to its effects on social participation. Using the inclusion-social exclusion dichotomy, we can analyze these same effects. The personal and community resources that people have at their disposal, which are favorable to the articulation of the individual with the characteristics of the society in which he or she ages, are taken into consideration. In this sense, measures to combat social exclusion and to promote citizenship at older ages are urgently needed (Walker, 2002). This concern is heightened by the technological progress of modern societies, which occurs at a speed that is difficult to keep up with by older people, more disadvantaged, less educated or less familiar with ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), because, as Gil (2019: 1) affirms, “the fact that the elderly constitute the largest group of info-excluded citizens, this reality will make them socially excluded”.

Philippe Pitaud’s article focuses on contemporary French society, where signs of this growing disorder in the context of isolation and loneliness have been observed. It is an action research aimed at alleviating the adverse effects of the digital transition on the social life of older people, reflecting on the field of action of public policies on the digital exclusion of older citizens. This is an article that interests not only the French, but all of us, due to the recommendations regarding social balance and the principles of social justice.

How to ensure the regular and socially fair payment of public pensions over the coming decades is the central issue for the financial sustainability of OECD countries. In all these countries, which are aging — albeit at different rates — this challenge arises because a permanent and very significant increase in the number of retired people relative to professionally active people in an economy is expected. This makes it increasingly difficult to secure the financing necessary to maintain social benefits.

In the article entitled ‘*German Pension and Labor Market Reforms and the Potential Increase in Social Inequality Among Older Workers and Pensioners*’, authors Moritz Hess, Jürgen Bauknecht, Gerhard Naegele and Philipp Stiemke focus on

Germany and public policies for raising the effective retirement age. They conclude that there has been a very significant increase in the number of older workers, something they attribute to several factors: i) the good performance of the labor market in the period under study — to the extent that the discussion has shifted from how to combat unemployment to how to make up for the lack of skilled labor, ii) the strong participation of women, and iii) the fact that there are more healthy and more qualified workers than there were before. The less positive side is that less qualified and lower income workers, for financial reasons, are virtually forced to raise the retirement age, which has worsened social inequality.

On the same theme, but with a focus on retirement age in Portugal, with an article entitled *‘Retirement Age: One Size Does Not Fit All’*, author Margarida Castro Rêgo uses data from the Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) to analyze the heterogeneity in preferences regarding the age at which workers leave the labor market. Interestingly, she concludes that while deferred retirement is more associated to higher income workers, early retirement (i.e., before the legal retirement age) is more common among unemployed workers or workers with health problems. These are key insights for policy makers to design more appropriate public policies aimed at enhancing the social sustainability of the public system.

In her article *‘Caring for non-self-sufficient older people in Italy: from a familistic system to the immigrant live-in careworker model’*, author Carla Facchini focuses on care for older non-self-sufficient people. The health sector brings together some of the challenges that most concern public policies, due to its multi-sectoral character and the fact that the increase in healthy life years is not directly proportional to gains in terms of longevity.

Moreover, a greater number of very old people implies a greater number of people with chronic diseases, more vulnerable and more susceptible to situations of disability and dependence. In addition to prevention strategies that prevent or postpone age-related chronic diseases, long-term care responses are based on: i) formal care, related to medical care and personal care in support of ADL as well as social assistance and help in the realization of IADL; ii) informal care, with responses based on the informal and solidarity network, carried out mainly by elements of the family sphere (OECD, 2018).

In her research on the case of Italy, Carla Facchini analyzes the limitations imposed by family structure and configurations in the care of older elements, which led to the transition from a model based on the family system to a model based on the co-habitation of immigrant workers caring for the elderly (the so-called *‘badanti’*). In her article, the author characterizes the provision of care provided by

'badanti' and the constraints related to home care provision, namely the limited supply of general services and subsidies.

European societies are aging fast and the concerns with the policies directed at aging are reflected in the multiplicity of analysis of social and political problems. But the extent of demographic aging is increasingly being felt in other geographical parts of the world. Closing this thematic issue, Beltrina Côrte and Vera Brandão present the article entitled '*Territórios de Fragilidades: Envelhecimento e Políticas Públicas – um projeto de educação continuada*' which is focused on the Brazilian reality and reflects the importance of the territorial dimension in the analysis of the problem and in the process of policy formulation. Emerging from the concern with peri-urban spaces characterized by multiple deprivation — such as basic sanitation, housing, accessibility, education and health — that negatively interfere in the longevity of populations, the article analyses a continuing education project in the city of São Paulo. The objective of this project is to improve performance in the network of social assistance services, which include basic social protection, directed at the most disadvantaged people. As a result of a partnership between UNESCO and the São Paulo Foundation, the nature of the object of analysis is relevant within governance and collaborative actions, in response to population aging as a complex social problem, of a social disorganization nature, since it results from deficiencies in a given social system, translated into lack of resources to meet social needs (Carmo, 2011). The methodology applied in this article allows for a collection of narratives that allow us to reflect on: i) skills and abilities, challenges and opportunities of the spaces; ii) commitments, recognition, difficulties and achievements; and, further, iii) the actions of all those involved in overcoming the challenges of life-work and articulation of knowledge.

In conclusion, this special issue aims to make a small contribution to the formulation of better public policies that are effective responses to the multiple societal challenges posed by demographic aging, which — it is worth emphasizing — is a sign of civilizational advance. If in a pre-COVID-19 context this was already a difficult problem, now with the pandemic it has become even clearer that contemporary societies have vulnerabilities that need to be urgently addressed well before they manifest themselves in full. Let this special number be a further stimulus to political agents at various levels to — in fact — prepare, with time (which is already starting to run out) a future with greater comfort and dignity for the elderly, without neglecting the productivity of those that are professionally active and who will have to continue to create value.

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