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EDITORIAL

Lucinda Carvalho – Age.Comm (Interdisciplinary Research Unit – Functional Aging Communities/ Research Building Functional Aging Communities), Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco, Castelo Branco, Portugal

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0549-4666>

Corresponding Author/Autor Correspondente:

Lucinda Carvalho – Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco, Portugal. lucindasofia@ipcb.pt

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The aging of the population has introduced in contemporary Portuguese society the need to look at the aging process(es) with a perspective in which economic, social, cultural, biological, environmental aspects are interconnected, knowing the socio-environmental contexts in that occurs, in order to seek differentiating and targeted responses to a population, with different personal and social characteristics. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the way communities deal with aging processes, to define strategies that promote not only the well-being and autonomy of the elderly people, but also the maintenance in their surroundings (aging in place) and their integration, participation and involvement in local life and in the development of territories. Intervention that must pass through acting throughout people's life and life cycle to prevent dependence, improve living conditions at any age and age in the best way.

The Age.Comm – *Interdisciplinary Research Unit – Functional Aged Communities*, from the Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco, bringing together a group of researchers from different scientific areas, from the social sciences and behavior, education, Information and communication technologies (ICT) and various health sciences specialties, seeks precisely to understand the phenomenon of population aging, its object of study, from a systemic and ecological perspective. It is necessary to reconfigure the investigative framework that analyzes the repercussions of this phenomenon, which requires new planning and adaptive/functional capacity on the part of the communities. Its territory of study is mainly, but not exclusively, the interior, which concentrates the municipalities with the highest levels of aging in the country. It is intended, therefore, to combine academic research with a social, political, biomedical and economic need, responding directly to communities and their decision makers with the implementation of measures that ensure the individual functionality of the elderly population, as well as the sustainable longevity of social supports.

Thus, Age.Comm's mission is to understand the phenomenon of population aging, particularly the analysis of the way in which the communities of the most aged territories in the Portuguese countryside deal with the aging processes, contributing to the development of functional communities, through production and dissemination of knowledge that supports the definition of strategies that enable the well-being and autonomy of elderly people, their integration and participation in local life and in the development of territories.

We have advanced in time, we have progressed in each phase of history, with successive evolutions and where the general improvement of living conditions, both in the social and economic dimensions and in access to health care, had a positive impact in increasing the average life expectancy together with the decrease in the fertility rate. We live longer

and are born less and less. But if the analysis of aging has occurred around conceptions that show this phenomenon as a conquest of modern societies, there is also a concern to understand its impact on housing, health, dependence, social cohesion, intergenerational solidarity, promotion of active aging. The challenges are clearly identified, but the truth is that we are not fully prepared, neither institutionally nor socially to deal with all the consequences and impacts that result from the aging of the population.

The fundamental foundations of society are sustainability, economy and education; it is up to us to find a reason to maintain this equilateral triangle. Let us start with sustainability; we are in one of the oldest regions in Europe, in the interior of the country, with a clear difficulty in ensuring the populations and, mainly, the older equitable opportunities. In the economy, the region has average monthly income levels below that found in the rest of the country, as far as education is concerned, there have been significant improvements.

In fact, the development model that has been adopted in Portugal has led to the redistribution of the population, the effect of which was a greater concentration of activities and equipment in the most densely populated areas of the coast. The reverse is the low-density territories, which correspond to municipalities in the interior of the country, which combine depopulation, the aging of its population and the weakness of its economic fabric, reflecting the socio-economic asymmetries that occur in the country.

On the other hand, a significant part of the elderly population does not currently have autonomy and the ability to choose because the existing conditions do not allow it, social support structures have to be adapted in order to give the elderly people a real ability to choose. If we provide each decision maker with a set of facts based on evidence, concrete information on solutions and measures to be implemented, we allow politicians, businessmen and individuals to take a new path without necessarily seeing the demography as just the vision of an alarming destination.

In this context, there are multiple questions, multiple problems that need to be investigated and deepened through a multidisciplinary dialogue. This conviction was at the beginning of the organization, by Age.Comm, of the *1st International Congress on Aged Communities Challenges for Development*, which took place in Castelo Branco, between November 14th and 16th 2019, in interconnection with the axes of performance of this research unit: development of applied research, innovation and knowledge transfer, contributing to training in the area of aging in the fields of quality of life, social inclusion, functionality (of individuals and institutions) and human development. This congress aimed to reflect and discuss the problems of aging societies, always in an integrated and multidisciplinary

plinary approach, from the perspective of the individual and of the life cycles, but also of the communities. It brought together researchers and professionals from different fields and backgrounds who positively think about the development of aging communities, creating opportunities for a vision of societies that enhance active aging, through the interconnection of different factors. The congress was organized around four main thematic lines, whose approach was in charge of specialists, and intended to contribute to the construction of strategic lines that respond to the societal challenges associated with the complexity and dynamics of aging: *Human Development, Active Aging, Communities, Functional and Participation* and *Innovation*.

The articles included in this issue of RIASE result from communications presented at this *1st International Congress on Aged Communities Challenges for Development* and reflect different contexts and approaches to the aging process.