

OPPORTUNITIES OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS PARTICIPATION IN RURAL COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

The success of rural community vitality and development is based on communication, participation and collaboration among different generations. Theoretical and empirical findings disclose that there is a lack of systematic approach characterising different generations (in this article young and elderly social groups) participation in local activities, not much attention is given to activities which join young and elderly groups whether to maintain young people in rural area or actively include elderly to common activities. Accordingly this article aims to explore participation forms and methods of different generations (youth and elderly) participation in rural community activities. The methodological background of this research is based on theoretical research methods, statistical data analysis and analysis of case of different generations' participation in Šiauliai district municipality rural community activities. The research results disclose that different generations participation in rural community activities are various, but depends on rural areas and rural community's specific features. The suggested scheme based on evaluation of different generations' participation in rural community activities can be adopted to any rural area and rural community, but being aware about the current situation of youth and elderly, also activities which are possible to be implemented in particular rural community.

Keywords: different generations, youth, elderly, participation, rural community activities

INTRODUCTION

It has been acknowledged in various European reports (Council of Europe, 2000; The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 2011; FutureLab Europe, 2014; FutureLab Europe, 2015; Masson and Zecca, 2015) that every country should be responsible for the solidarity of its different generations in various life spheres. Analysis of the scientific literature has suggested that there is an increasing number of literature on society ageing across Europe as well as on decreasing number of youth in rural areas. These observations suggest an assumption that

successful survival and development of community in any society are based on close interaction and collaboration between different generations as well as in various social groups.

Changes of different generations, the issue of their participation in the society, and rural areas in particular, have not been studied extensively, and even sometimes become omitted. This issue is also relevant for the Lithuanian rural areas and their residents. According to the Law on the territorial administrative units of the Republic of Lithuania and their boundaries (1994) residential areas in Lithuania are divided to urban and rural. For

the rural areas are attributed small towns and villages. Small towns and villages are the areas which do not have characteristic features of towns. Small towns are compactly built up residential areas, where population is from 500 up to 3000, more than a half of the working population of which is employed in industry, business and production and social infrastructures. Villages and other residential areas have no features of a town and a small town. In general, the issue of generations is the closest to family institute; however, where the situation of an area is concerned, the concept could be extended and applied to a certain territory. Works in social sciences (psychology, management, sociology, etc.) (Cordington, 2008; Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė, 2011; Popović, 2012) often show that different generations are referred to as X, Y, Z generations, reflecting a certain moment or period of time when the generation was born and lives/lived. However, a simpler concept of different generations that is more acceptable for the society emerges from discussions on the generations in the context of age groups (e.g., in psychology, recording of statistical data, etc.): children, youth, adults, pre-retired, retired, etc. The Public Participation Manual (Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania, 2008) suggests that identifying the participating interest groups (groups of different generations) is an important component of the participation process. The following questions are addressed in order to identify the effect of participation of different generations on functioning of the respective generations in rural areas: What are the main groups of different generations? What relations between the groups are or could be there? Are those groups in conflict with each other? How each generation does perceives itself in the context of other generations? According to G. Cordington (2008), V. Stanišauskienė (2015), who analysed the theory of generations, the period in history when that a particular individual was born in influences their world-view, the values that govern different generations, their behaviour and communication. In view of this, contacts between the youth and the elderly, their relation could be explained by necessity of participation in various activities.

Scientific literature (Vidaus Reikalų Ministerija, 2010; NHI, 2011; Kuliešis and Pareigienė, 2014; Bifulco and Facchini, 2017; Grasso, 2016) has revealed that there is lack of systematic approach to the possibilities of participation of different generations in activities of rural communities. The novelty of this scientific research is based on the assumption that participation of different generations, their interaction in rural community activities determine particular level of area vitality. It has been noticed in various scientific and practical studies that participation of different generations is related also to promotion of political participation. Moreover, the issue of encouraging the youth to stay in and return to rural areas has not been dealt with sufficiently, while emphasis has been put on promotion of active participation

of the elderly. With the view towards a society comprised of all age groups and emphasizing different generations' characteristics, an important issue to be addressed in rural areas is description of the forms of their participation in rural community activities supporting and retaining vitality of rural communities.

In view of the above, the following research question is discussed in this article: what are the potential forms of participation of different generations (the youth and the elderly) in rural community activities. The research aim: to explore participation forms and methods of different generations (youth and elderly) participation in rural community activities. In view of the research aim, the following research objectives have been formulated:

1. to define the importance of participation to different generations;
2. to define the characteristics of the changes and features of different generations (the youth and the elderly) in Šiauliai district municipality rural areas;
3. to identify the criteria which determine the opportunities for participation of different generations in rural community activities.

The scientific and practical benefit of this research builds on the following statements:

- it can serve various rural community organisations as a guidance for involving different generations representatives into activities of the respective organisations;
- representatives of different generations can become familiar with the kinds of activities that are the most suitable for rural communities of those areas;
- results of the research could become good practice examples for residents of other rural areas and other local actors;
- results of this research could expand the existing research database;
- representatives of different generations, being aware of participation possibilities in various activities, could reduce potential future conflicts with another generations.

The article is detailed in several sections related to the research tasks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological background of this research is based on theoretical research methods, statistical data analysis and case study of different generations' participation in Šiauliai district municipality rural community activities. The literature review has been conducted in order to assess the past and current research related to opportunities for participation of different generations (the youth and the elderly) in rural community activities. Scientific literature analysis and synthesis, abstraction, comparison and generalization methods have been employed for implementation of the first objective. The second

objective has been implemented by applying descriptive statistics, which has enabled the authors to generate general characteristics of changes of the youth and elderly and their features in the analysed district. The third and fourth objectives were implemented by employing the document and Šiauliai district municipality rural communities' case, generalization, abstraction, and insights methods. The scientific literature is based on the resources exploring sociological, managerial, educational, policy related approaches as well as information from practical guides concerning the research problem and research aim.

In identification of the characteristics of participation of different generations' in common rural community activities case, the attention was focused on the rural communities of one municipal district – Šiauliai district municipality. This district was chosen as the pilot territory where rural communities focused on the problem of functioning of different generations, ageing society, and possible forms of collaboration between the youth and the elderly. The general characteristics of the district are (Statistics Lithuanian, 2017; Šiauliai District Municipality, 2017):

- Šiauliai district municipality is one of the Šiauliai county's municipalities', which is close to Šiauliai town (it is the 4th biggest town in Lithuania according to residents population);
- this municipality is the biggest in Šiauliai county according to the average annual resident population (excluding Šiauliai town municipality);
- internal migration of the resident rural population in Šiauliai district municipality was positive in 2016 years, net internal migration indicator was 515;
- this municipality has the only town Kuršėnai, 7 small towns and 579 villages;
- there are 65 rural communities.

There are 65 rural communities in Šiauliai district municipality and there were analysed their internet pages (due to ethics they are not given here, but known for the authors), but not all of them have such page. The main attention was put not on the number of rural communities, but on the common forms, activities, variety of environment of participation of the local youth and elderly.

For description of different generations analysed in this article, their official definitions used in official documents should be provided. Pursuant to The Law on Youth Policy Framework (Republic of Lithuania, 2003), young person is a person aged from 14 to 29. According to the Department of Statistics of the Republic of Lithuania (Statistics Lithuania), the elderly in Lithuania are the people aged 65 and older. Nonetheless, although part of older people have not reached this age yet, they still the age group of the retired. Since 1 January 2012, the retirement (old-age pension) age is increased annually by two months for men and by four

months for women until they reach the statutory retirement age, i.e. 65 years for both men and women (in 2026) (Statistics Lithuania, 2014, p. 96). Hence, the existing statistics reshapes the actual situation of the elderly, because the total number of the elderly increases, as the threshold of 65 years has not been reached by a part of them. Limited availability of the local – rural statistics based on the mentioned groups restricts possibilities to provide the full image of different generations. Therefore, the area-based statistics is analysed on Šiauliai district municipality level detailing the data about rural areas in general in the period of past 5 years.

RESULTS

Importance of participation to different generations

Concept, principals, forms, models of participation have been analysed by both foreign and Lithuanian scientists. According to some authors (Tijūnaitienė and Damkuvienė, 2010; NHI, 2011; Belarusian Red Cross Society, 2014; Bifulco and Facchini, 2017), participation is a multiple category including practical ways of enhancing different generations, processes of social economic problem solving, individual and collective effects. The key feature of participation is that activity is provided with people and by people, but not for people. It is an action with the aim to secure that every individual believes in himself that he can do, be, create and act. In other words, participation enables to influence the solutions, also creates conditions for wider participation and reduces conflicts in communities (Petukienė *et al.*, 2007).

Research works, political reports, practical guides have been increasingly referring to various social groups and promotion of their inclusion, participation in social life. Despite the increasing actualisation of active participation, consistent reasoning behind actual implementation of active participation has not been provided yet. In order to understand what participation of different generations actually is, or why reciprocal participation is important for different generations (for the youth and the elderly), the concepts that are employed further in this article should be defined. Concept different generations (e.g., in sociology, the concept means intergenerational groups) reflects a certain moment or period of time when the respective generation was born and lives/lived or interaction between representatives of several generations provided that the influence is mutual. Hence, in the most general sense, participation of different generations could be defined here as follows: addressing issues related to the youth and the elderly (in this case, their participation in rural community activities) with the both groups or their representatives participating in this process. Following the authors mentioned above, participation of different generations manifests itself in the following forms:

- informal presence and action together;
- mutual interaction in order to satisfy, implement various needs of the youth and the elderly;
- learning together;
- sharing experience in different real-life situations;
- mutual goal to solve the emerging problems, etc.

Although this is not an exhaustive list of forms of participation of different generations, it reflects the most common forms of participation that are accessible and comprehensible to the both groups. It has been observed that greater focus has recently been put on sociality, social trust, interaction and collaboration in communities; however, due to the lack of the respective scientific background, there is no answer to the society regarding what should be done to strengthen it between different generations.

Conception of participation in general and specified for different generations include various sources of literature (Tab. I).

The issue of participation is actually important for any social group, in particular those that encounter different participation challenges (in a local community, society in general). It should be noted that both foreign and Lithuanian research works demonstrate the approaches towards importance of participation for different generations in various contexts and studies:

- concepts of intergenerational relations, expression of generations and their solidarity (Stankūnienė and Maslauskaitė, 2009; Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė, 2011; Kraniauskienė and Kordušienė, 2012);
- promotion of and support to political participation (Cicognani *et al.*, 2011; Grasso, 2016; Bifulco and Facchini, 2017);
- adaptation of different generations to social changes (World Youth, 2003; Grasso, 2016);

- promotion of education of different generations (Wilson and Gerber, 2008; Schmidt-Hertha, Krašovec and Formosa, 2014);
- elderly people's attitude towards young people and vice versa (Popović, 2012; Kraniauskienė and Kordušienė, 2012);
- discrimination of different generations in various life areas (Masson and Zecca, 2015);
- collaboration possibilities, interaction and conflicts among different generations (Petrulis, 2015);
- issues of employment, participation in labour market and promotion of entrepreneurship of different generations (Boockmann, 2012; Stanišauskienė, 2015);
- barriers, issues of communication between different generations (Popovic, 2012);
- participation of different generations in rural development processes (Ribašauskienė and Šalengaitė, 2010);
- social participation on the local level (Bifulco and Facchini, 2016).

The literature analysis has highlighted that participation of different generations and its enhancement in rural community activities have little been studied. This brings about the need for conducting deeper studies in this area and exploring new opportunities for joint action of rural residents. Although importance of participation in rural community activities for different generations could be perceived differently, this also emphasizes both the rights of individuals and the choices that they make in order to participate. This depends on the characteristics of the groups analysed (the youth and the elderly), factors and criteria defining participation that

I: Identification of the information sources about different generations' participation (made by authors)

Type of information sources	The purpose of information source	Examples of information sources
Scientific articles	To reveal and explain participation importance, forms or participation, opportunities and limitations in scientific discourse	Wilson and Gerber (2008) Cicognani <i>et al.</i> (2011) Popović (2012)
Handbooks/books	They give background knowledge, information about various aspects related to participation	Burns and Taylor (2000) Stankūnienė and Maslauskaitė (2009) NHI (2011) Belarusian Red Cross Society (2014) Grasso (2016)
Practical reports/studies	Their purpose to explore and share good practice examples about participation, findings from real cases	Vidaus Reikalų Ministerija (2010) Masson and Zecca (2015)
Policy related documents	These kind of sources give cognitive information, policy orientated data (indicators) and implements about participation, concerned various actors, participation forms, level, etc.	Council of Europe (2000) The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2011) FutureLab Europe (2014)

are dealt with further in this article. The most important is the final result: the extent to which mutual interaction between different generations helps the youth and the elderly to live, act, improve successfully in rural areas.

Changes and features of different generations (the youth and the elderly) in Šiauliai district municipality rural areas

The importance of maintaining vital and mutually beneficial relations between all generations is based on the inhabitants and characteristics of the area. Where rural communities have the capacity to develop and sustain different generations-based approach, much depends on the inhabitants and characteristics of the rural area. Identification of sociodemographic characteristics of different generations (the youth and the elderly) allows to focus on the forms suitable for their participation. Hence, changing tendencies of the youth and the elderly starting with the national level and going down to the local level – rural areas, including the case in Šiauliai district municipality – are provided here.

Societies of not only most of the European countries, but also Lithuania, especially in rural areas, have been subject to structural changes, which have taken a destructive turn in the last decade: the level of births decrease, controversial development have been observed in changes of the elderly, migration increases etc. Statistical data (Statistical yearbook of Lithuania, 2016) have confirmed that 33 % of the Lithuanian population lived in rural areas in 2016, i.e. decreased by 5.3 % compared to 2012. Moreover, it has been noticed during registration of the changes of rural areas that the number of rural settlements (Demographic Yearbook, 2016) in 2016 decreased by 1.5 % compared to 2005. It should be noted that one in five city residents and one in four rural residents in Lithuania are over 60 years old. The fact is that the numbers of the elderly have been growing, as considerable part of the youth move abroad for

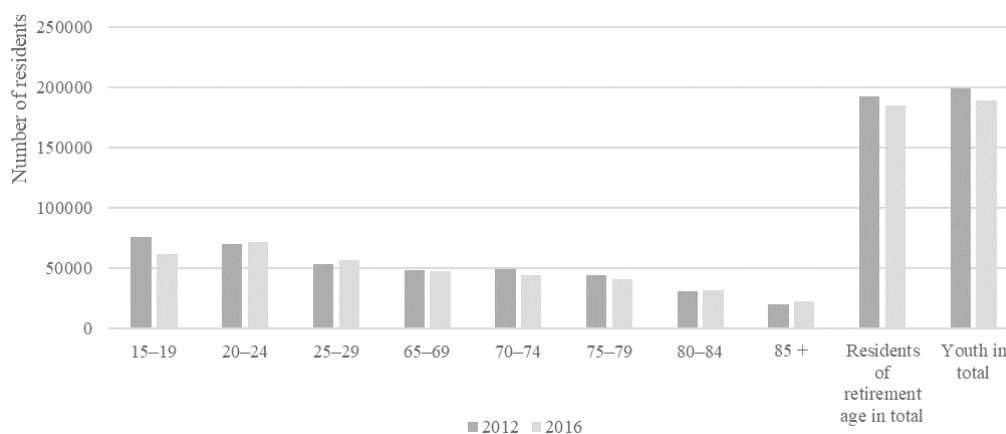
work or studies, downward trend in birth rates have been noticed in the country, average life expectancy has been increasing.

Analysis of changes of the youth in the country and rural areas has shown that, according to the data of 2017, the youth made 19.5 % of the entire population, and the number of the youth in cities was almost double that in the rural areas, and in the five-year period (in the period of 2012–2017), the number of young people reduced by almost 88 thousand (Jaunimo Reikalų Departamentas Prie Socialinės Apsaugos ir Darbo Ministerijos, 2017). Changes of the youth and the elderly in rural areas in Lithuania by age groups are provided in more details in Fig. 1. Compared to 2012, youth reduced by almost 5 % in total in 2016, while the number residents of retirement age reduced by 4 %. In terms of changes by age groups (every 5 years), the number of young people could be observed to be more stable – without any sudden drops, while the population of the elderly has been showing a downward trend.

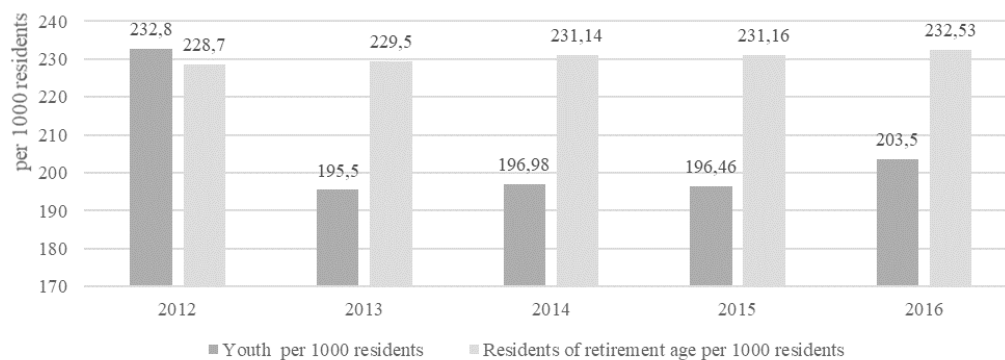
Whereas the article deals with rural populations, it would be interesting to note that reduction has been the greatest in the youth age group of 15–19 (19 %) and among the residents of retirement age in the age group of 70–74 (10 %). However, the fact of ageing rural population is confirmed by the increase in the number of residents belong to the oldest group 85+ by as many as 13 %.

Accordingly, it could be assumed that the ageing rural community brings various challenges not only to the local authorities, but also on the national scale, as sustaining functioning of the group in different aspects has been included in the agenda.

Šiauliai distr. municipality is a circular municipality and it has 579 rural areas (according to the data by Šiauliai district municipality). Online platforms developed specifically for monitoring of social indicators (e.g., www.socialinisizemelapis.lt – Social map of Lithuania) enable using the data on the municipal level. The situation of Šiauliai distr. municipality rural areas reveals that, at



1: Population of rural residents by age at the beginning of 2012 and 2016 (made by authors following Statistics Lithuania, 2018)



2: Changes of the youth and the elderly in Šiauliai district municipality in 2012–2016 (per 1000 residents)
(made by authors following Social map of Lithuania, 2016)*

*Social map of Lithuania: <http://www.socialinisizemelapis.lt/index.php?1978818987>

the beginning of 2017, the population of rural areas was almost 3 times greater than in the city, and amounted to 73 % of the entire population of Šiauliai distr. municipality. Fig. 2 shows that the changes in the numbers of the youth and the elderly in Šiauliai district municipality were significant. The dynamics of these changes reveals that after rapid reduction in the number of the youth in 2013, the number started increasing consistently until 2016. The number of the elderly, nonetheless, was growing consistently.

The analysed case has revealed that greater focus should be placed on gathering specific statistics on the very grassroots level in order to generate full profile of the youth and the elderly in rural areas. Practice shows that not all rural areas provide detailed characteristics of local residents on an annual basis. Results presented in this section demonstrate that the mentioned changes are related to survival and functioning possibilities of rural areas and their residents in Šiauliai district municipality. As the numbers of these groups increase, it could be assumed that growth of the population comprising these groups should be sustained and their mutual interaction through various local activities should be supported.

Forms of participation of different generations (the youth and the elderly) in Šiauliai district municipality rural community activities

This part analyses documents and case study on the opportunities for different generations (the youth and the elderly) to participate in rural community activities. In general terms, participation of different generations in local activities includes various forms of participation in formal and non-formal activities, such as participation in various organisations and associations, activities of community and educational institutions, etc. The analysis of Šiauliai district municipality documents (Republic of Lithuania, 2012; Viešosios Politikos Ir Vadybos Institutas, 2012; Šiauliai District Municipality, 2012; Šiauliai District

Municipality, 2013; Šiauliai District Municipality, 2017), which establish the approaches and priorities for the opportunities for different generations to participate in rural community activities enhancing their mutual relations and inclusion, predominantly emphasize the following traditional activities: cultivation of ethnic culture, promotion of amateur and professional art; presentations of books by the authors, literature exhibitions, artwork by folk artists, events dedicated to promotion of reading; computer classes; popularisation of educational activity at the museums; sports and health strengthening activities according to persons capabilities etc. This district offers various spaces for implementing various activities. These include not only public institutions (e.g., schools, cultural centres, libraries), but also manors, ethnical centre, sacramental, historical and literature objects. Although the latter are not always known to the residents, they should be popularised as well. Enhancement of active participation as one of the key elements emphasized in the documents is enhancement of mutual relations within a community and inter-community collaboration activities through volunteering in various life areas.

Examples from different Šiauliai district municipality rural communities have shown the forms of traditional and non-traditional activities, which feature mutual participation of the youth and the elderly. To provide more detailed overview of the activities, these could be classified into several groups:

- education and cognition activities (familiarisation with local prominent figures, destinations, computer literacy classes, learning to use social networks and informing about the internet dangers, learning to use various technical equipment, etc.);
- arts (popularisation of folk crafts, clay work, exhibitions of paintings, knitting, carving activities, making photos, etc.);
- sports (various competitions-darts, chess, checkers, meeting famous sportsmen, etc.);

- festivals and entertaining activities (traditional and non-traditional music, local theatre festivals, concerts using non-traditional musical instruments, quizzes, etc.);
- strengthening of health (seminars on health, sports in public places, hike, etc.).
- environmental activities (upholding of local natural, cultural, historical heritage, protection of the nature through actions, cleaning the nature, etc.).

The analysis of both the documents and the rural communities activities has revealed that the approach towards the importance of proper consideration of inclusion and participation of different generations' in common rural community activities is still under formation in the rural communities of the district. The ignorance and resulting poor interest in activities of organisations of the youth and the elderly have been found to also restrict the possibilities for participation and the potential resulting benefit. It has become evident that greater emphasis is placed on making sure that the youth stays in rural areas rather than on functioning of the elderly (there are no specific documents on enhancing participation of the elderly in the analysed district), meaning that the forms of interaction between the youth and the elderly might not be perceived in certain cases, or there is lack of mutual interest in assisting each other.

Determination of criteria revealing the opportunities for participation of different generations (the youth and the elderly) in rural community activities

The statistical analysis of different generations and characteristics of their participation forms in

Šiauliai district municipality rural areas provided above has enabled determination of the criteria revealing the opportunities for participation of different generations in rural community activities. The Tab. II below may be applied universally to diverse types of rural areas, because the criteria given in this Tab. II can be registered, monitored and evaluated by various rural actors concerned with supporting vital rural areas. The main elements in supporting the activities of different generations in rural community are the potential of local spaces (organisations, institutions, green spaces, etc.) and activity forms.

The role of local leaders and institutions (library, school, church or parish, cultural centre, local palace, multifunctional centre etc.) is important whether to foster this participation. Finally, following analysis of the case, there are some lessons to be learned in relation to seeking active participation of different generations (the youth and the elderly):

- mutual voluntary agreement between the both groups – we need this interaction;
- come and try yourself – if not interested – leave;
- play passive (observing the situation) or active role, but be with others;
- initiative groups go for action with weaker participants (they can be both the youth and the elderly);
- go for action: learning by doing;
- transmission of good things only (showing the power of positive thinking);
- find the best activities, forms of participation that attract you;
- broadening awareness about good practice examples on raising participation of others in your rural community.

II: Criteria characterising the opportunities for participation of different generations (the youth and the elderly) in rural community activities (made by the authors)

Criteria to be known/evaluated	To whom it may concern	Giving feedback/sharing information
Young people (age groups, gender aspects, social economic status)	Rural community organisations	Young people
Elderly (age groups, gender aspects, physical functioning and health, social economic status)	Leader of community	Parents/relatives of young people
Their attitude to other generation	NGO	Formal/nonformal education institutions
Needs	Youth and elderly organisations	Elderly and their relatives
Skills	Local governance institutions	Local community
Interests		
Their problems		
Their future aims		
Formal/nonformal activities in which interested		
The local rural area's resources/potential		
Financing (if needed)		
Success stories		

DISCUSSION

Above given analysis enables to reveal some specific and towards different generations participation in rural community activities orientated insights. Firstly, the consistency between the results of this research and previous research works (Schmidt-Hertha *et al.*, 2014; Masson and Zecca, 2015; Bifulco and Facchini, 2017) signal the actual issue that solving the conflicts between different generations is another challenge: the youth feel not being appreciated, while the elderly – underappreciated. This relates to the fact that both active young and elderly people participate in diverse activities, while passive people or people with various functioning restrictions are simply left alone with their problems (Popović, 2012; Belarusian Red Cross Society, 2014). Secondly, though rural communities developing, but skills and experience in promoting participation of different generations is not the same. It should be pointed out that positive attitude of local governors

towards rural people has been observed, which provides preconditions for further activities of different generations (Burns and Taylor, 2000; Vidaus Reikalų Ministerija, 2010). Understanding that supporting different generations depends not only on the youth and the elderly makes rural communities more prospective, local people can feel stronger identity with living place, which also shapes more positive approach towards rural areas in general. Following previous observations, such limitations of the research were identified: there are no sufficient data (statistical or empirical researches especially at local level) based on the analysed topic for rural areas; it is not easy to find out the best way/method how to encourage integration and participation of different generations, especially for passive rural residents; choosing different research methods and doing research at grassroots level can be seen the “real life” situation which can disclose the situation of different generations participation and possible outcomes for all rural community.

CONCLUSIONS

By the research it was disclosed that participation importance to different generations (youth and elderly) has multiple effects to their relations. Firstly, it has positive impact on personality strengthening by being and doing with other generation, helps to satisfy particular needs, promotes self-confidence etc. Secondly, this mutual youth and elderly participation process enables to understand others generation problems and aims, strengthens the feeling of identity to the place, promotes different generations solidarity in various rural community activities.

It was determined that sociodemographic changes of youth and elderly in the analysed district's rural areas are important to the capacity and functioning of rural community and whole rural area vitality. Each generation can bring positive things in maintaining these relations through various activities in rural community. Thus the adjustment of individual's and society's aims, collaboration and trust are very important enhancing participation of different generations in rural community activities.

Both document and good practice examples analysis highlighted that existing participation forms of different generations mostly focused on nonformal activities. Moreover much more attention is given to the sustaining of youth in rural area than to strengthening the elderly functioning and participation opportunities. According to that emphasizing different generations characteristics become important in rural areas seeking to describe their participation directions in rural community activities there is necessary systematic approach stimulation while joining different generations for their common participation while seeking determined aims.

With the results of this research it can be confirmed that different generations' participation should be described and can be evaluated according to specific generation and rural area based criteria. These criteria enable to know the potential of different generations and their features as well their possible contribution to the successful development of all rural community.

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