

# Active Ageing: Intergenerational Relationships and Social Generativity

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**Abstract.** This contribution is a reflection on the concept of active ageing from the perspective of relational sociology. At the same time, it offers practical implications and outlines possible future courses of action, in the face of demographic and relational scenarios rapidly changing, and the challenges that each day people of all generations are called to cope with. Active ageing is quite a recent concept and indicates an attitude towards ageing that enhances the quality of life as people become older. The goal of active ageing is to enable people to realise their potential for physical, social and mental well-being and to participate in social life also in the last stage of the life cycle. In this phase, the presence of a network of support, security and care adequate to the possible onset of problems and criticalities is crucial. Relational sociology frames the phenomenon of an ageing population in a dense network of social relations, primarily at the level of family and community. For this reason, as supported by the most recent sociological literature and evidence from studies conducted in Italy and abroad (cf. SHARE), it is extremely important to investigate the link between active ageing, intergenerational orientation (solidarity and exchanges) and practices of pro-sociality (i.e. engagement in third-sector activities and volunteering in later life).

**Keywords.** Active ageing, Ageing, Relationships, Agency, Family, Third Sector

## 1. Defining Active Ageing: a Sociological Approach

Active ageing is "the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age"<sup>2</sup>. The goal of active ageing is to enable people to realise their potential for physical, social and mental well-being and to participate in social life also in the last stage of the life cycle. In this phase, the presence of a network of support, security and care adequate to the possible onset of problems and criticalities is crucial.

The dimension of *activity* is today indicated as the means to prevent mental and physical decline, to the benefit of both the individual (who will thereby succeed in maintaining a significant level of quality of life) and the entire social context [1-3]. In the concept of *activity* applied to the condition of the elderly there lie both an individual and a social dimension. As regards the former, choosing to play an active

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<sup>2</sup> See Decision No. 940/2011/UE of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2011 on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012) [www.eur-lex.europa.eu](http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu).

role also in old age presents itself, first of all, as a subjective option which calls into play the full range of the physical, psychological, relational, ethical and value-related resources available to the individual. Dilution of professional constraints can indeed allow one to approach dimensions of personal commitment and engagement not accomplishable during one's working life, in a framework of physiological "rejuvenation" produced by the biological revolution that pushes forward what can be defined as "the oldest age." The origin of the propensity for *activity* is therefore to be sought in the individual motivations and resources of the elderly person resulting from the experiences of a lifetime.

This personal option assumes, however, specific social significance because, through *activity*, it is possible for the individual to experience that intersubjective and associative dimension that has so large a part in the perception of being playing a satisfactory social role [4]. In this perspective, the past, the expertise and the experience of the elderly provide consistency to the social dimension of *activity*, becoming actual resources for everyone.

The capacity for action of the individual (*agency*, see [5]) is viewed as a combination of both the cultural and structural emerging properties of the relational networks.

### 1.1. The Perspective of Relational Sociology: Active Ageing and Family Relations

In our studies we embrace the perspective of relational sociology [6], which observes the individuals as included in networks of significant relationships<sup>3</sup>. From this point of view, the family is seen as the basic social relation, the spring of society, capable of establishing alliances between genders and generations. Furthermore, the family – insofar as it fully expresses its social subjectivity – creates forms of sociality and promotes forms of prosocial belonging for its members.

According to this approach, one can analyse the different ways of living this stage of life on the part of the active elderly by combining the (referential) components of meaning with the resources available to them and the rules (structure) that underlie intergenerational exchanges.

From this perspective, one can observe the presence / absence of a generative dimension understood as the capacity / possibility of individuals to contribute to the common good and to experience a good quality of life.

The family – insofar as it embodies a relation of full reciprocity between genders and generations [7] – has always been the privileged place of encounter / clash or, in other words, of comparison between generations.

In effect, if at the physical, biological and psychological levels, differences regard the psycho-physical conditions of individuals, at the relational level it is indeed the inclusive abilities [8], the primary forms of belonging that involve one's family, as well as friendship and informal networks that exert an influence.

As known, the demographic changes taking place over the past few decades have altered the living conditions of the elderly [9].

In particular, the self-sufficient elderly represent today an increasingly larger share of the over-65 population. They mainly live in families of rather limited size from the

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<sup>3</sup> The expression "social relationship" is defined by three fundamental semantics (modes of conceptualization): referential, structural and generative semantics.

point of view of the number of members<sup>4</sup>, characterised by the simultaneous presence of several generations (multigenerational families, involving three or more generations) although not cohabiting.

According to some scholars, increase in longevity and delayed childbearing have contrasting effects on the generational structure of European families [10]. If, on the one hand, an increase in life expectancy results in the co-presence of more living generations than in the past – up to five generations in some cases –, on the other hand, a low birth rate leads to a relatively large generational gap thus reducing the probability of the co-presence of multiple living generations.

Multiple generations families – the so-called "*beanpole families*" [11] – display relatively few horizontal (intragenerational) ties and numerous vertical (intergenerational) relationships [12]. The data collected through the SHARE research (*Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe*)<sup>5</sup>, and specifically in the third wave, revealed a rather varied distribution of those families including three or four generations in the eleven European countries involved in the survey. In a context in which, as inferable from the demographic picture outlined above, individuals and generations share a greater number of years of life, multigenerational families constitute support networks [13], both manifest and latent, which are frequently activated in critical moments. In this sense, the intergenerational ties that intertwine in these new realities have assumed increasing significance and importance in the advanced industrial societies. In a context marked by increased marital instability, it is for instance worth reflecting on the role of grandparents and on the relationship between these and their grandchildren in the event of parents' separation and divorce. In particular, studies have evidenced the crucial role played by the figure of grandparents in coping with the needs of the family, as they embody the matrix of strength and resilience of solidarity between generations over time. As highlighted by the American sociologist Bengtson [14], intergenerational relationships in multigenerational families, marked by solidarity and increasingly important in the life of the individual and the family, display different characteristics and functions, and entail obligations that nowadays seem more relevant to the well-being and support of individuals and families than the obligations underlying the reality of the nuclear family. In particular, Bengtson relates the importance of intergenerational relationships in contemporary North American society to three fundamental motives, namely demographic change (the change in the age structure of society and of the family, resulting in a greater number of "shared" years, which has increased opportunities for interaction and exchange between generations); the greater strength and variety of ties over time; and increased marital instability in recent decades, which has weakened the ability of the nuclear family to cope with the socialising task of children and with the support of its members.

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<sup>4</sup> In Italy, the average family size is below three units (2.4 components per family).

<sup>5</sup> The survey was conducted in different "waves" (respectively in 2004, in 2006-07, in 2008-09 and in 2010-11) in a number of European countries that increased over the years. The survey is designed to investigate the health and economic conditions, the family realities and the support networks of over 45,000 individuals aged 50 or above. The third survey (SHARELIFE, 2008-09) focused on the life histories of 30,000 men and women, interviewed in thirteen European countries; as a result of this phase, it was possible to cross-examine micro-data drawn from individual life histories and macro-data relative to the institutional context and the welfare state.

### 1.2. Active Ageing and Prosocial Relationships

A further viewpoint on active ageing, according to the relational perspective, is represented by the prosocial and solidarity relationships that the elderly can experience in organisations of different types (such as those pertaining, for example, to the third sector, see [15]), and by the elderly's social generativity.

By participating to third-sector organisations, the elderly respond to a strong push for solidarity that gives rise to networks of mutual help. At the same time, associative relationships, *i.e.* relationships that can be experienced and performed in associative realities, allow the elderly involved to draw from them a certain level of personal well-being.

Socialising assumes a positive meaning for the elderly because it stimulates the activation of the behavioural, material, relational and communication resources available to them. In the group, the elderly feel they are members of a community and of a collectivity in which they play a particular role, and through the mediation of associations they can assume or reinforce a specific social identity. In the group / association, the elderly rediscover the value of dialogue, and find satisfaction to their needs of expression, sociality and, in some cases, solidarity.

In brief, with reference to prosocial orientation and participation of the active elderly in third sector associations, three characterising social elements can be detected:

- A first element relates to the reinforcement of basic principles, such as participation and self-realisation of the elderly. Through social action provided by associationism, the skills, *know-how* and specific interests of the elderly do indeed find social expression.
- A second element, which is closely related to the former, concerns the process of consolidation of the social identity of the active elderly, which, through associative activity and life, occurs both at the individual and the intersubjective level. In effect, the elderly, through the experience of associative belonging, discover a social position for themselves, which is not imposed but rather chosen on the basis of their own personal values of reference (subjective level). Moreover, the presence of a new social actor, represented by associationism promoted by the active elderly, introduces a *quid* of relational, organisational, structural, cultural and value-related resources that flow through the different levels of social life – from the local, which is closer to associations, to the national and international levels, which have less chances to be experienced in everyday life but are present as the horizon within which one can position one's social action, or as a paradigmatic framework for comparison and for the construction of one's identity (intersubjective level).
- The third element that emerges as a distinctive trait of the forms of associationism promoted by the elderly refers to the multiple process of social identity construction, which occurs associatively. In other words, the associations promoted by the elderly constitute a multipurpose entity, that is, capable of serving and interacting at multiple levels – from that of the experience of the elderly person, to the local, national, European and international levels – using different tools and resources and introducing a specific product in each of these areas.

In a phase of life that for the over-65 sees an increase of personal time not prescriptively saturated with professional commitments, self and mutual help as well as associative engagement represent significant options of life.

### *1.3. Active Ageing and Intergenerational Orientation: the Exchange Dynamics*

The importance of a broad perspective of observation of the condition of the elderly, which allows delving into its different specifications, is also highlighted by the choice made by the European Union to declare 2012 the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

This denomination includes a significant interpretive key, namely intergenerationality that allows the interpretation of the relationships between members of different generations as a fundamental step to proceed towards a society in which all ages rightly belong.

At this point, it is important to observe closely the functioning of the give-receive-return dynamics between generations and in the different stages of the family life cycle. This means identifying the generations directly involved in the exchanges, the polarity from which and to which proceed the exchanges themselves, as well as the opportunities and moments in which these are accomplished, and their content. Under this last point of view, we shall bear in mind that between generations there can be material, psychological, emotional and relational support and help. In particular, relational support can be exemplified by the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren in the event of parents' separation. In this situation, grandparents become indeed key figures also for the construction of the networks of relationships of their grandchildren, especially if the latter are very young.

In the exchanges enabled by intergenerational relationships, the dimension of gratitude is especially important, which, from the psychological point of view, is understood as the feeling of surplus and positive recognition of limits.

Those who are grateful feel that their life was benefited by someone, that their being and well-being do not merely depend on their own abilities and potential but are also the result of the benevolent action of others in their favour. In particular, for the active elderly a link can be hypothesised between gratitude, personal well-being and prosocial behaviours.

## **2. The State of the Art**

Existing studies and research on active ageing of the population have been mainly conducted, both nationally and internationally, within specific disciplines, such as economics, demography and epidemiology, with a particular focus on the prolonged and nowadays problematic permanence of the elderly in the labour market, on health conditions, on the onset of specific diseases.

In the debate, sociology has introduced conceptual categories and dimensions relative to the use of free time, to consumption styles, to modes of media and new media usage.

A specific dimension introduced by relational sociology is, as illustrated above, the focus, in the transition towards old age, on the family dimension and - more specifically - on the generational dimension, in terms of care and solidarity.

Furthermore, the perspective of "active ageing", investigated not only through the evaluation of structural (presence/absence of disease conditions) and economic (lengthening of production and consumption age) parameters but also through cultural (symbolic and value-related level) and social (civic and prosocial engagement)

parameters offers reflections and factual information for sustainable and innovative *welfare* management.

### 2.1. A Relational Approach to Well-Being in Later Life

The belief that well-being manifests a relational dimension, and the view that such well-being can be pursued through participation in associative forms and relationships do often intertwine. In this perspective, the intersubjective relational processes that occur in specific organisational contexts become fundamental interpretive keys of emerging social phenomena like associationism by the elders as aimed to the involvement of their peers.

As several studies have indeed documented, the well-being of the elderly is multidimensional, in the sense that well-being brings into play a number of factors: psycho-physical, socio-economic, relational, and participative ones [16,17]. In other words, the well-being of individuals in general - and of the elderly in particular - tends to present itself as a set of needs, elements and relationships that can be increasingly more integrated socially, and increasingly less integrated systemically [18]. In effect, those well-being factors that can be systemically controllable, accumulated and distributed do lose importance, whereas in wellbeing-generating processes it is the different and articulated forms of sociality, both informal and associative, that gain importance. Nowadays, well-being in complex societies, in those cases in which it can regenerate itself and assume forms that are neither narcissistic nor privatistic, is, and is increasingly becoming, a social relationship. The idea that well-being more and more often manifests a relational dimension, and the notion that this well-being is to be produced by new associative relationships and forms go hand in hand.

There is a close link between *agency*, *activity* and both personal and intersubjective well-being: therein play a crucial role the attributions of meaning that occur in and through relationships, as Donati explains pointing to "l'esigenza di rendere riflessive le relazioni sociali, oltre gli individui in se stessi, perché sono le relazioni a fare la qualità sociale del *welfare*"<sup>6</sup> [8, p. 276].

The propensity for *activity* of the elderly tends to fall within a double interpretive scenario: it can be both a time for oneself and a time for the benefit of others.

The first approach is explicated by a conception marked by expressiveness and the pursuit of one's personal autonomy.

The second approach, relative to the prosocial propensity of the elderly, refers to both primary and informal networks and to unrelated third parties, and highlights the crucial role played by these both as care-givers (*providers of care*) and helpers (*recipients of care*) in different situations [15]. In particular, the contribution of the elderly in primary networks becomes increasingly essential with the spreading of dual-career (*dual breadwinner*) family models, as some surveys have documented [11,19]. Specifically, the care of grandchildren by grandparents is a crucial intergenerational relationship within which occurs an important transmission of material and symbolic exchanges. From the point of view of the *modus vivendi*<sup>7</sup> of the people, in the context

<sup>6</sup> "the need to make reflective the social relationships, as well as the individuals themselves, because it is the relationships that shape the social quality of welfare".

<sup>7</sup> According to the English sociologist Margaret Archer, the lifestyle of people is to be understood in terms of a constellation of interests shaped on the basis of the ranking that individuals attribute to their priorities. The author argues that we are what we take care for, that is to say, our personal characteristics are the mirror and the consequence of what we attribute the highest value to.

of family relationships and of the hierarchy of priorities, different trends become visible: a closeness between generations, as evidenced by a dense network of exchanges and support and by interesting differences at the European level [20], which is however not immune to a certain degree of ambivalence.

## *2.2. Different Profiles of Active Elders: Evidence from the SHARE Data*

In a specific discussion conducted on a multivariate analysis of the SHARE data [21], three different profiles emerge as related to *active ageing* and intergenerational exchanges:

- "Individualistic withdrawal": the individuals in this category, representing most young elderly, display a situation that is definitely "at risk". Reluctance towards active ageing is indeed closely correlated with low quality of life.
- "Competitive ambivalence": for the individuals in this category, active ageing means selective commitment to either family or society. What is of concern is that when the ambivalence resolves towards the support between generations, there emerge stress indicators as well as, consequently, negative implications on life quality. With respect to this group, appropriate policies to support exchanges between generations would allow the elderly to recover a better quality of life, as also to avoid living competitively the double opportunity of engaging in social work, putting to use the experience of a lifetime, and of answering the needs of support of sons/daughters and grandchildren, especially in the current economic crisis.
- "Socio-generativity": the individuals in this category are able to combine positive commitment to family and society (full active ageing). They show indeed a high quality of life perception, which suggests that they could be more likely to keep it high in the future.

The focus on the relationships between generations that recent research [22] has again brought to the fore enables a more adequate understanding of the ways in which people live, keep alive their fundamental ties and articulate their lifestyles [5].

The observation of the ties existing between generations is sociologically relevant as it allows the identification of what results from them in terms of generativity, that is, the constructive results of relational surplus [23] that prompt those belonging to different generations to assume active social behaviours, and that can give life to interventions that are innovative in form and, at times, in substance.

In intergenerational relationships occur material and symbolic exchanges: in other words, generational transmission takes place.

The intergenerational relational perspective [8] wishes to emphasise the quality of the relationships between members of different generations as a crucial step for people to realise their potential for physical, social and mental well-being and their participation in social life in all its aspects. Living longer in effect corresponds to a longer period of (real or "distance") cohabitation of at least three generations (grandparents, children, grandchildren), and this enables relational exchanges, whose presence or absence and corresponding subjective positive or problematic perception have to do with the quality of life of the elderly as also of all the other generations [24-27].

However, focussing on intergenerational relationships inevitably entails identifying their ambivalence.

### 2.3. *The Challenges of Ageing: Intergenerational Relationships and Ambivalence*

Ambivalence is a complex quality of relationships: this category, applied to intergenerational relationships [28], allows one to identify the aspect of risk inherent in them. Ambivalence is generated by the remarkable plurality and fragmentation of the elements involved in intergenerational relationships, which combine according to opposing strategies [29].

This aspect of risk – sometimes inherent in intergenerational relationships – seems to find no room in most part of post-modern reflection, which tends to flatten out on a unique and deterministic conception of intergenerational relationships which prescind from focussing on their ambivalence.

Construing the relationships in this way not only prevents one from observing the existence of possible generativity between generations, but also contributes to thwart it at the social level [30].

In brief, a pattern of active ageing emerges that provides a representation of the final stage of existence as a "second life", in which one can benefit from good physical and mental efficiency in order to realise personal and social interests that one was not previously allowed to cultivate.

### 2.4. *Our Current Research Activities on Active Ageing*

Starting from these theoretical considerations and the analytical review of the state of the art, we realised a new research (cf. chapter written by F. Colombo and colleagues for preliminary results) pivoted on the relational dimension. Here relationships are intended as intergenerational support and significant elements to build sense of belonging and loyalty between the generations. They are also conceived as forms of engagement, and civic and voluntary participation. All these aspects are crucial to understand the concept of *activity* in later life. The first data available allow to attribute to the later stage of life a non-marginal role within our society.

In particular, voluntary activities are seemingly declined according to a personalized and non-conventional way, including civic orientation: 21.3% of the sample take part in block reunions, 61.4% give money for charity, and 83.9% voted at the last political elections. Participation to community initiatives (such as church or parish activities) is also practiced but not always according to the conventional ways and innovative and differentiated activities are often carried out.

A further analysis was conducted on the relation between intergenerational exchange and the active position of the elderly, starting from the hypothesis that the first is a significant causal determinant of the latter. The hypothesis is that the intergenerational context, where the active position can express itself, is more likely to be contingent (that is linked to the chance of engagement/socialization offered by the social context) or somehow "almost compulsory" (as the case of the intra-family care.) Vice versa, there might be an association between the generative quality of the intergenerational exchange and the active position assumed by the elderly, especially when the active engagement assumes a clear and relevant prosocial characteristic (voluntarism).

The theoretical and conceptual basis is that (personal and family) generativity transcends almost naturally in forms of social generativity. In the case of the elderly then it cannot be limited to a generic activism, or an activism mainly oriented to



maintain a vital and significant sense of self, nor it can be confined in a compensative aspect of the loss on social and relational centrality.

These premises are grounded also in the most recent psycho-sociological literature [31,32].

### 3. Operational Impacts

Observing how the population ages becomes thus crucial in order to understand the state of health of a society, test the tightness of its ties and put in place, also with a preventive view, strategies and measures of social inclusion and cohesion.

Our research group is therefore committed to theoretical reflection and empirical research so as to explore the dimensions of active ageing according to the equation that relates propensity for *activity* to *agency* of the individuals, and therefore to quality of life.

From these studies we expect to achieve a more extensive, and at the same time more in-depth, understanding of how the generations closer to passing on their 'generational leader' baton, namely the young elderly aged between 65 and 74, prepare to face the last phase of the life cycle. It is crucial to outline their profile at a national level, taking into account the essential steps of one's biographical background (marriages, separations or divorces, any reconstituted ties, presence of children and grandchildren, work and study paths and so on). For this reason, and always from a relational and family perspective, we expect to reconstruct the family types in which these generations live, yet without flattening out on a purely structural dimension, that is, aiming instead to also detect the circuit of any exchanges and gifts in which they participate. Care between generations is expressed not only within the narrow or wide family circle, but originates and is also reflected in relationality present in associative contexts and in active participation in the life of one's own community. For this reason, the survey currently conducted devotes much attention to the exploration of the activity of the young elderly in the social context through organised forms of prosociality. Intergenerational solidarity, the care of the younger and of the older generations are powerful indicators of a propensity of the young elderly to express their *activity* and their *agency* in the context of reference, with positive effects on themselves and the others. The survey we are conducting is thus expected to verify this hypothesis through an exploration of prosocial engagement of the elderly both with young people (forms of *mentoring* at the workplace, intergenerational programmes and activities at school, etc.), and with the 'oldest age' elderly, who are often not self-sufficient (supported through forms of associationism).

At the same time, through the investigation currently conducted, we expect to better delineate the profile of the generation of people aged between 65 and 74 in relation to their cultural consumption, *leisure* and entertainment opportunities, and - most importantly - access to the new technologies.

Once these key elements are outlined, a better knowledge can be achieved of the factors that facilitate or hinder active ageing, and of how it is related to a higher quality of life, which will ultimately allow one to devise, plan and implement interventions, measures and policies in favour of an inclusive and cohesive society in which any age can find room to express its social subjectivity.

Operationally, speculative investigation and empirical research that we are conducting can be employed as a platform to dialogue with other experts in the field, but also, and

above all, with other *stakeholders* actively engaged in family care and care of and with the elderly. In other words, speculative investigation and empirical research could be used as a *baseline* to interact with *policy makers* and public decision makers, with the third sector, with service providers and the families themselves, in order to concert strategies of enhancement, promotion and support that be increasingly participated, inclusive and effective.

We therefore expect to acquire key knowledge about ageing in Italy today and about the conditions that make people's lives better, from a relational perspective. The idea is thus to capitalise expertise and disseminate expected results, so as to promote a culture of good ageing that may entail the relational design of good practices aimed to reach conditions of material, psychological and relational well-being for all generations.

### 3.1. Expected Impact

In brief, the impact that we expect to produce through ongoing study and research can be articulated in the following points:

1. Providing a solid contribution about active ageing and intergenerational solidarity not merely in terms of academic debate but also with respect to practical implementation and policy advice.
2. Facilitating knowledge dissemination and networking among different stakeholders.
3. Fostering participation and knowledge sharing/organisation through a web portal ([www.anzianiinrete.wordpress.com](http://www.anzianiinrete.wordpress.com)) which aims to enhance information and collective intelligence about active ageing, volunteering in later life and generating solidarity between generations.
4. Sensitising and raising awareness on the issue of active ageing.
5. Proposing, organising and activating training activities on active ageing, as well as best practices in intergenerational initiatives.

### 3.2. Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of our studies and research are:

1. Deepening the understanding of the role played by volunteering in later life and participation in prosocial activities in achieving better life and ageing conditions.
2. Organising evolving knowledge about active ageing and intergenerational initiatives, and making it more accessible to agents of change for public policy and effective programme devising.
3. Facilitating access to cutting-edge analysis, innovative methodologies, and multidisciplinary knowledge.
4. Making knowledge about active ageing and intergenerational solidarity operational as well as replicable.
5. Increasing the visibility of existing activities that promote active ageing.
6. Increasing the opportunities for networking and collaboration.
7. Fostering dialogue between different stakeholders.
8. Sensitising and raising awareness on issues concerning active ageing and intergenerational solidarity.
9. Capitalising experience and activating new experiences, reflections, and practices able to maximise benefits in view of shrinking resources.

### 3.3. Potential Applications and Future Actions

Potential applications of this project are: activating initiatives to promote active ageing and the quality of the relationships between the elderly and the young (intergenerational perspective).

In particular, we hypothesise to put in place the following lines of action:

1. Implementation, within our web platform, of an area dedicated to the involvement of the active elderly, with a view to promoting exchanges between generations in terms of care and *mentoring* on career paths, and to incentivising voluntary action within third sector associations.
2. Activation of training programs for the young elderly and for adult children with a view to intergenerational *enrichment*.
3. Design of good practices at the local level aimed at the creation of Intergenerational Laboratories, through the method of mutual help groups and direct activation of networks.
4. Support actions aimed at using the new media both for socialisation and health promotion.

At the methodological level, four steps will accompany the actions described above:

*First step:* involvement, through a sort of *call for action*, of the formal (public bodies, third sector organisations, trade unions and market entities, e.g. productive enterprises) and informal (spontaneous groups of grandparents and parents, groups of volunteers, parishes, etc.) actors in the various territories, so as to prompt their self-candidature through which also actions in partnership may be carried out. In this phase, particular relevance will be granted to the dissemination of the results of research conducted, with the aim of spreading and problematising its findings, proposing useful comparisons between different territorial contexts, in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the context in which intervention is suggested.

*Second step:* drafting of joint projects through participated planning methodologies with the *stakeholders* present in the different contexts.

*Third step:* implementation of training and action projects at the local level.

*Fourth step:* evaluation of the results in order to arrive at the formulation of guidelines for action in favour of the elderly.

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