

Article

Towards Sustainability: The Involvement of the Elderly in the Educational Activities of NGOs in Lithuania

Edita Štuopytė

Faculty of Social Science, Arts, and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, 44249 Kaunas, Lithuania; edita.stuopyte@ktu.lt

Abstract: In an aging society, the promotion of lifelong learning is important for sustainability and the social inclusion of elderly people. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are actively involved in this process, accepting a significant challenge to promote the activity of elderly people through educational activities. Such activities with elderly people are special, as they include the integration and empowerment of the individual to re-adopt societal norms, to discover new opportunities for self-realization, and to respond flexibly to economic and social change. This study aims to reveal the involvement of the elderly in the educational activities of NGOs. To achieve this goal, a qualitative research method was chosen—the discussion of a focus group. In the case of the study, the group assessment and categorization methodologies were used. The analysis of the experiences of elderly people participating in NGO educational activities revealed that the motives for engaging in NGO activities are related to the needs for self-expression, communication, as well as social mobility, integration, and social adaptation to constant changes in society. To promote the involvement of elderly people, NGOs must focus on disseminating information on educational activities, promoting active aging, removing barriers to individual activity, and improving the competencies of elderly people, helping them to acquire new knowledge and skills, as well as focusing on the organization itself.

Keywords: elderly people; involvement in activities; NGO educational activities



Citation: Štuopytė, E. Towards Sustainability: The Involvement of the Elderly in the Educational Activities of NGOs in Lithuania. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 2095. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14042095>

Academic Editors:
Laura Daniuseviciute-Brazaite and
Michail Kalogiannakis

Received: 18 December 2021

Accepted: 9 February 2022

Published: 12 February 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is the path of development of the modern state and society. It is based on three main elements: (1) environmental protection, and (2) economic and (2) social well-being [1]. By following this path, the state can ensure a safe life for its citizens, sustainable, environmentally friendly production, and natural resources for future generations. In this process, broad public participation is important, not only in accepting the specific challenges set out in the European Union's strategy, but also in making decisions at various levels that are important for sustainable development [1]. Furthermore, one of the priorities of the renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy is social inclusion.

During the strategic analysis of Lithuania's sustainable development [1], three main areas of sustainable development have been identified: (1) environmental quality and natural resources, (2) economic development, and (3) social development. In the field of social development, it has become clear that the social situation in Lithuania is strongly affected by significant long-term demographic changes—a declining population and the related aging of the population. According to Statistics Lithuania [2], Lithuania's population at the start of 2021 was 2,795,680 inhabitants, and the number of people over the age of 65 accounted for 19.8 percent of the country's total population [2].

As the number of elderly people is increasing, an important issue is to increase their social activity and social inclusion, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have an important role to play in these processes. Fisher and Grettenberger [3] identified the importance of community potential in the processes of shared learning, empowerment,

and motivation of individuals. Pin and Spini [4] state that to meet the needs of elderly people, it is appropriate to promote social integration in communities, focusing on the provision of formal and informal assistance to this group, especially with the involvement of NGOs. According to the recommendation of the World Health Organization (WHO), elderly people are included in the age group of 60 to 74 years. In this study, the involvement of this age group in the educational activities of NGOs is analyzed.

Promoting lifelong learning is important for sustaining and increasing the social inclusion of all sections of society (especially the elderly). Lifelong learning proposes to enrich every person's life and is the path to building learning and sustainable societies. Adult education is an indispensable part of lifelong learning systems, and according to Griswold [5], adult education has a significant role to play in creating a just and sustainable world. According to Casey and Asamoah [6], lifelong learning is also a principal factor in the organization of all forms of education. This includes formal, non-formal, and informal learning, and ways to access education and learning opportunities flexibly and continuously, especially throughout adult life. Casey and Asamoah [6], p. 600, analyzed "The Cocoa Communities Project" conducted by the International Labour Organisation in partnership with government and NGO agencies in Ghana. The Cocoa Communities Project sought to promote thriving cocoa-growing communities in which all children are at school and out of child labor. A key strategy for achieving this objective was community-based adult education intervention. The Ghana experience demonstrates the transformative power of adult education to bring improved quality of life, greater justice, and sustainability to communities [6], p. 600. In this context, it can be argued that the education of the elderly can become one of the most important services provided by the community.

Researchers have discussed community-based services and their accessibility to elderly people [7]. After analyzing research on this topic, researchers suggest that the community should focus on adult daycare centers (learning, social activism, care, etc.) and other institutions that provide social and educational services to the elderly [7]. An important challenge is to encourage the active participation of elderly people through educational activities. The process of education is closely related to the promotion of the social activity of the elderly in the community. Educational activities with the elderly are special in that they include the integration and empowerment of the individual to re-accept the norms of society, to discover new opportunities for self-realization, and to respond flexibly to economic and social changes. To purposefully organize educational activities, it is also necessary for the participants of the activities—the elderly—to be involved in the organizational processes of NGOs.

Various scholars have studied the activities of NGOs working with the elderly [8,9]. Research shows that NGOs work with elderly people to enable them to live independently in the community for as long as possible, and that many modern gerontology researchers view older people as honest community members rather than only customers or beneficiaries [5,6]. "Elderly people are now understood not as people who should disengage from earlier life and be institutionalized but as individuals who can age healthily and (more recently) remain active in communities" [9], p. 344. Gorman [10] argues that it is important to involve the elderly in problem-solving research and development activities, implying the encouragement of partnerships with organizations to further the involvement of older people in community-level action [10].

Researchers who have analyzed the involvement of elderly people in volunteering have subsequently investigated the experiences of eight countries [11]. Principi et al.'s [11] study results show that special attention should be paid to the activities of NGOs and the development of the management skills of the employees of these organizations, involving the elderly in the activities. Analyzing the involvement of elderly people in the participation of educational activities, it was found that this process is related to people's personal development—the ability to maintain social roles and to remain as independent and valuable members of the community [12]. Studies comparing the involvement of elderly people in volunteering in Lithuania and Greece [13] have shown that lifelong learning is

more important for Greeks than for Lithuanians [13]. They understand this as helping each other, and the possibility to learn at different ages, and to achieve this they participate in voluntary activities. When analyzing the works of researchers [13,14], it is clear that elderly individuals' life satisfaction is related to the ability to maintain social roles, engage in volunteering and cultural activities, and learn new things.

Lithuanian NGOs are relatively young and small; therefore, they do not always manage to implement large-scale, nationwide projects, and they usually operate in local communities [1]. Importantly, the processes of the activation and involvement of the elderly in the community are not yet sufficiently studied. In the context of the research discussed, it became clear that the involvement of elderly people in the educational activities of NGOs has not been sufficiently researched; therefore, the following problematic scientific question arises: What would encourage elderly people to get involved in NGO activities? This study aims to reveal the involvement of the elderly in the educational activities of NGOs.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data Collection

In 2018, a qualitative study analyzing the social and educational activities of NGOs for the elderly in one of Lithuania's regions was conducted [15]. During the study, 142 NGOs were registered in the region, of which only 12 worked with the elderly. Individuals from 8 NGOs involved in educational activities were invited to participate in the focus group discussion.

The present study is an integral part of the aforementioned study. Moreover, to achieve the goal of this research, a qualitative research method—focus group discussion—was chosen [15]. According to Nyumba et al. [16], p. 21, “focus group discussion is a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction” [16], p. 21. Focus group discussion is frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population [16]. Focus groups allow for collecting rich information in a limited time period. Focus groups provide verbal and non-verbal information thus enhancing the richness of data collected. According to Gaizauskaite [17], there are also some disadvantages and difficulties with focus groups. It can be difficult to practically arrange focus group activity—the researcher has to handle a group of people, getting them to attend the discussion at a certain time; a special room and environment are needed to host a group of people for discussion; data recording equipment is required to ensure the completeness of the data collected [17]. This method was chosen as, compared to individual interviews, the active interaction of the research participants adds value to the focus group method [17]. This method aimed to reveal the relationship of the elderly (opinion, attitude, evaluations, emotions, etc.) with the object of the research. This allowed for the collection and analysis of a diversity of opinions, experiences, and competencies of the participants. In the case of this study, elements of group assessment and categorization were used [18].

This method is used in a group setting where the facilitator raises open-ended problematic questions, and the members of the group—the elderly—express opinions about their participation in educational activities. During the research, the participants categorize the various opinions expressed according to their semantic similarity and then give a name to the categories formed. In this way, according to Ruskus and Stuopyte [19], theoretical constructs are created, which become the main axes of the topic, known as semantic units, enabling us to assess the structure of the problem (elderly people's involvement in educational activities of NGOs), to perform qualitative analysis, and focus on opinions about educational activities for the elderly.

The stages of the focus group discussion are listed below [15].

Stage one—planning and organizing the discussion of the focus group:

- the research problem was defined;
- the research questions were formulated;
- sampling decisions (the target population was selected, the number of members of the focus group was decided, the selection criteria for the participants of the focus group discussion were set);
- guidelines for discussion of the focus group were prepared;
- the search, selection, and invitation of the research participants were performed.

Stage two—holding a focus group discussion [15]:

- acquaintance, discussion of goals, presentation of the ethical principles and course of the meeting;
- raising problematic issues regarding the organization of educational activities in NGOs;
- expressing specific practical experiences, problems and achievements, or in other words, the empirical exploration of the reality of elderly people's participation in the educational activities of NGOs, presenting them for group discussion, and recording.

2.2. Focus Group Discussion Analysis

The data were analyzed according to the following steps:

- individual ranking of the empirical speakers regarding the participation of the elderly in the educational activities, expression of practical experiences and problems (focus group participants);
- categorization of extracted and expressed practical experiences and problems, grouping of them according to semantic relations, naming the excluded categories, giving the category a name corresponding to its essence (the researcher).

In this way, a new theoretical construct was developed that revealed the real problematic areas of the participation of elderly people in NGO educational activities.

The investigators (using this method, both the study leader/facilitator and the research assistant participated) guaranteed the personal anonymity of the study participants' opinions, and their thoughts were not personalized. It is also important that:

- the research participants were accepted as equal opinion-makers and creators of new theoretical constructs;
- focus group participants were selected as experts. The concepts of experts was used, which indicates the recognized status of the research participants [15,19].

During the discussion, the focus group participants made 39 remarks (lexical–semantic units) about the peculiarities of their participation in educational activities, attitudes towards the organizational processes of these activities, participation motives, active participation, and changes in their lives after they joined educational activities. In other words, one or another statement or remark made by the participants was treated as an indication of educational reality. All the expressed sentences and features were evaluated and ranked by the group members (on a scale from 0 (completely irrelevant) to 5 (especially important)) according to their own subjectively perceived importance. Thus, empirical statements were ranked, at the top of which the most important (and at the bottom, the least important) aspects of the group members' attitudes towards the participation in educational activities and the organization of these activities stood out [15].

2.3. The Sample of Focus Group Participants

The sample of expert participants in the focus group discussion consisted of eight elderly people participating in educational activities carried out by NGOs. Data on the experts who participated in the discussion of the focus group are as follows: 6 women and 2 men, average age 67.5 years (presented in more detail in Appendix A). The composition of the group depended on the main aim of the research. People of both genders were invited to participate in the focus group. According to Nyumba et al. [16], mixed-gender groups tend to improve the quality of discussions and their outcomes. The results obtained are

not disaggregated by gender. Purposive sampling is widely recommended, since focus group discussion relies on the ability and capacity of participants to provide relevant information [16]. Nyumba et al. [16] argued that the number of respondents to be invited to focus group discussion is important. It is generally accepted that between 6 and 8 participants are sufficient. The focus group discussion lasted two hours. The main methods of data collection during the focus group discussion were audio recording, note-taking, and participant observation. The focus group facilitator has been using this research method since 2004 and has the necessary experience and skills to apply the focus group method.

2.4. Research Ethics

There are various discussions in the scientific literature [16,17,20,21] about the representativeness and reliability of scientific data, including the analysis of data obtained by quantitative and qualitative methods. Validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as quantitative research, nor is it a companion of reliability (examining stability) or generalizability. Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing specific procedures. In this context, as Petousi and Sifaki [20] argue, public trust in science must be grounded on scientists' moral obligation to society. All this obliges the researcher to adhere to the ethics of research strictly. "First and foremost, the researcher must respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informants" [21], p. 183. To ensure the quality of research, the author used two strategies [21]: member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they give an accurate and detailed description of the study [21].

The following ethical principles of the study were followed [22]:

- **Autonomy**—The study participants had the right to decide for themselves whether to participate in the study. Each selected expert (the research participant) decided on their participation in the study and consented to participate in the focus group discussion;
- **Goodwill**—The study participants were informed about the purpose and goal of the study and the format of data submission. The data provided did not affect the status and work situations of the study participants;
- **Justice**—All data provided by the study participants were analyzed. By participating in the study, the elderly people were able to express their opinions and be heard;
- **Confidentiality**—The study participants were not asked to provide their last name or status information, and all study participants were informed of the use of the recording equipment. The researchers will not identify individuals in the report. The author explained that this is purely a matter of trying to avoid distorting their information, and assured them that the records would be anonymous and confidential for research purposes only.

Research challenges and limitations. Not all invited participants agreed to participate in the study. Of the 12 persons invited, 4 men refused to participate in the survey, resulting in only 8 participants in the study. All participants in the focus group discussion were invited to the same place simultaneously. This process required the researcher's time and organizational competencies. The author tried to get each participant to express their opinion on the issues under discussion, which became a challenge as the time available for focus group discussion was limited. The author helped manage this challenge by thinking about things in advance: the focus group discussion process, the wording of the questions, the right place, and the environment.

The author chose the focus group discussion to gain a thorough understanding of the involvement of older people in NGO educational activities. The interaction of the study participants generated additional information during the debate. The moderator of the study encouraged the participants to express their opinions freely. Notably, the study question was discussed in a group and was therefore not considered individually by

each study participant, but instead in interaction with others. The focus group discussion provided an opportunity to reveal the diversity of views of the study participants.

Finally, it is essential to note that the characteristics of the research sample described above and the specifics of the applied research method do not allow us to consider the obtained research results as representative of the entire Lithuanian NGO community. In other words, the analysis results below reflect only the actual opinion of the survey participants, but not the opinions of all Lithuanian NGO participants. The results and conclusions of the study are essential to the members of the NGOs participating in the study working with this socially sensitive group.

3. Results

After analyzing the obtained data, six qualitative categories related to the participation of elderly people in educational activities organized by NGOs were singled out: motives for participation, information on activities dissemination, activity, barriers to active participation in activities, purposeful activities, and qualitative changes in life. Each of these categories will be discussed in more detail.

Table 1 presents the statements singled out and arranged by the experts, highlighting the motives for the participation of elderly people in the activities of NGOs.

Table 1. Motives for the participation of elderly people in educational activities organized by NGOs.

Statements	M *
Participation is relevant to avoid feelings of loneliness.	4.9
Need for knowledge, new competencies.	4.7
Participation—an incentive for self-expression.	4.46
Greater opportunities to maintain or re-establish social connections, find friends.	4.31
The need to engage in activities as an opportunity for self-expression.	4.29
Free access to activities (excursions, events, lectures, etc.).	4.11
Group meetings as a motivator for active participation in society.	2.9
Overall average: 4.23	

* M—average (scale from 0, not important at all to 5, especially important).

When analyzing the involvement of older people in educational activities, it became clear that the motives for participation are related to internal/personal factors, i.e., to avoid a feeling of loneliness, to strengthen self-expression, to restore and/or maintain important social connections with family and relatives, as well as to make new friends. It should be noted that financial factors are also relevant (“Access to free activities (excursions, events, lectures, etc.)”), which become an important motivator for increasing the involvement of older people, active participation in activities, or their organizational processes. The fact that group meetings are not the main motivator for active participation in society can be understood in two ways: Firstly, it can be an indication to professionals that older people join social groups when they receive personal attention and/or undertake individual activities. On the other hand, the reluctance to undertake activities is sometimes based on certain personal qualities (lack of self-confidence, low communication skills, etc.) or external reasons (groups are formed without regard for their wishes, preferences, individual abilities, etc.).

Other discussion questions—What is the dissemination of information about activities for the elderly? How is access to information related to your participation in activities?—were formulated to understand how information about NGO activities reaches this focus group, and how access to the information about these activities is related to older people’s participation in educational activities. Expert participants identified these empirical statements reflecting their views (see Table 2) and categorized them according to the importance or dominance of their position.

Table 2. Dissemination of information about NGO activities.

Statements	M
The most commonly found information about opportunities to engage in activities is random.	4.08
Information can be found when searching sequentially.	3.91
Information is not available to the most vulnerable.	3.83
There are many publicly available activities, but most of them are paid.	3.80
Lack of access to information separates women from greater opportunities to promote activity.	3.12
Dissemination of information too small.	3.05
Overall average: 3.63	

By reviewing the empirical statements made by the participants in the focus group discussion and grouping them according to their importance, it can be concluded that the involvement of older people as participants in educational activities is stimulated by random information, which they do not consider to be widely available; thus, this information does not reach the most vulnerable groups in society. In this case, the participants of the discussion stated that the lack of access to information forms is the beginning of social exclusion—exclusion from active social activities—which prevents the pursuit of life quality, and limits opportunities to act and participate in activities. It can be stated that when improving the organization of activities, specialists must create information and communication relations not only within the organization (between organizing specialists, volunteers, partners), but also focus on the dissemination of information regarding the activities of their organization. The information must reach as many elderly people as possible.

Another aspect of the organization and participation in the activities discussed by the participants—experts of the focus group discussion—is the activity of the elderly in the activities of the educational field. The empirical statements of the experts in this respect are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The activity of elderly people in NGO educational activities.

Statements	M
The desire to act and organize is individual.	4.98
It would be more effective if someone constantly encouraged us to get involved in the organizational–development processes of activities.	4.8
Higher activity in artistic than educational activities.	4.73
Activity is a personal trait that is very difficult to influence externally.	4.69
Overall average: 4.8	

The activity of the elderly in educational activities is closely related to the individual desire of each person to act and organize. Analysis of the research data revealed that the elderly would be more active and involved in this activity if it was constantly encouraged. It is possible to assume that the support and encouragement of the leaders of the organization, the organizers of the activities, as well as their relatives and family members, are important for the elderly who want to become involved in or participate in the activities. Thus, the need for an organizer, who often acts as an enabler, becomes apparent. The obtained research results also confirm the results of previous research [23,24]. However, according to the experts, the activity of individuals depends on the activities carried out by organizations (“More activity in artistic than educational activities”); in their opinion, “activity is a personal trait that is very difficult to influence externally”. Considering that researchers [25] treat the social activity of the elderly differently, it becomes clear that the research participants are characterized by active participation in individual and group educational activities. In this context, it is useful to uncover what prevents elderly people from being active.

This research aimed to identify the main obstacles to activity and involvement in the organization of educational activities. The obtained data are presented in Table 4, in which the participants—experts of the group discussion—ranked empirical statements, showing their opinions and points of view.

Table 4. Barriers to the active participation of elderly people.

Statements	M
Paid activities of the organization (e.g., excursions).	4.10
Lack of information and incentives.	3.88
Personal fears and passivity.	3.81
Unsuitable time for organized activities.	3.77
Insufficient adaptation of activities according to the individual abilities of the elderly.	3.75
Overall average: 3.86	

In this respect, paid activities of organizations are at the top of the list of obstacles. The participants of the discussion stated that too few personal financial resources do not allow allocating sufficient funds for fully fledged participation in activities, and that certain manifestations of poverty in the socio-economic life of older people “overcome” the need for self-realization, activity, learning, and participation in activities, i.e., paid educational activities or membership in organizations that carry out these activities become one of the main obstacles to becoming involved and actively participating in the activities of the organization. The participants in the discussion identified the shortage of information and motivation as barriers to engaging in activities. It can be agreed that, due to a lack of external incentives and information regarding opportunities and initiatives, elderly people do not participate in NGOs.

The personal fears and passivity of elderly people occupy a relatively high place in the overall ranking of obstacles. It can be noted that the personal characteristics of elderly people affect not only their psychological quality of life but also their active participation in various activities. The last two empirical statements identify the obstacles that are influenced by the organization of NGO activities, i.e., activities are organized without considering the needs, individual abilities, and time of the focus group—the elderly.

Another question posed to the participants in the group discussion was intended to uncover what elderly people thought about the activities they had to participate in. Table 5 presents the statements supporting the opinions of the discussion participants.

Table 5. Targeted activities identified by the elderly.

Activities	M
Activities that improve competence and knowledge	4.87
Improving a person’s physical condition	4.65
Activities in the artistic direction	3.12
Activities promoting cooperation	2.1
Overall average: 3.68	

The research data show the opinion of the elderly. Importantly, it is expedient and necessary for them to participate in the activities of NGOs, which improve their competencies, i.e., help them to acquire new knowledge and skills. Understandably, elderly people identify activities that improve physical health (e.g., yoga, breathing classes, self-defense courses, training in homeopathic medicine and its preparation, etc.) and artistic activities. According to the author of this study, the thoughts expressed by the participants are important for NGO specialists to initiate activities. They should not be limited to educational activities, e.g., seminars, training, and competence development, but should also focus more on artistic activities that develop the self-expression of older people. Although activi-

ties that promote cooperation are not in a significantly high position, the participants must identify activities that promote cooperation as important and purposeful for them.

This study also aimed to uncover the changes in the quality of life of elderly people by engaging in activities. After summarizing the statements named and ranked by the experts, the category “Qualitative Life Changes” was singled out (Table 6).

Table 6. Qualitative changes in the lives of elderly people through participation in educational activities organized by NGOs.

Statements	M
Decrease in passivity, sadness, senile depression.	4.98
Increased communication and self-confidence.	4.87
Improved competence.	4.82
Expanded social networks.	4.6
Overall average: 4.81	

Experts ranked quality changes in their personal life, which are related to the psychological changes in their life—decreases in passivity and sadness, increases in communication and self-confidence. The research results show that activity and involvement in educational activities are important for the adaptation of elderly people; i.e., they achieved increased communication, self-respect, improved competence, and expanded social networks—by participating in activities, they find more friends, and therefore, their relationships tend to be more active.

4. Discussion

Ensuring that all members of society have the opportunity to act and be active members of the community is important for a sustainable society. Although society is becoming more tolerant, the potential and contribution of the older generation is still underestimated, and NGOs working with elderly people can help to solve this issue. The involvement of the elderly in the activities of NGOs helps this social group to become more active in society and use its experience in organizing activities.

The research results have revealed that elderly people tend to engage in educational activities that are acceptable to them. Research on the social, economic, and cultural needs of elderly people is needed to develop activities for this age group [8]. Researchers note that the main principle of NGOs working with the elderly is to enable them to live independently in society for as long as possible [8]. Governments, in cooperation with NGOs, should encourage the establishment and effective functioning of organizations of elderly people. Strengthening the capacity of local communities and NGOs to collaborate is important for the organization of appropriate activities for elderly people, thus ensuring that elderly people are not marginalized and the development of competencies necessary for independent living is ensured [9].

In fostering age-friendly communities, the recognition of the contribution, participation, and involvement of the elderly is both intrinsically and instrumentally important, as was already emphasized in the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging [26]. The empowerment and capacity building of the elderly should therefore be a top priority of any meaningful age-friendly community initiative. At the same time, promoting positive images of aging does contribute to building enabling and supportive environments [26].

The role of local communities and NGOs as partner bodies is crucial in engaging senior citizens, as well as in creating (new) images of aging [9]. The research results correspond to the regulations of the Plan of Action on Aging adopted at the Second World Assembly on Aging in Madrid in 2002 [26]. “The potential of elderly persons is a powerful basis for future development not only to take the lead in their betterment but also to participate actively in that of society as a whole” [26], p. 11. Generalizing, it can be stated that it is important to recognize the contribution of elderly people and to encourage them

to continue participating in various educational activities by allowing them access to knowledge, education, and training.

Furthermore, the research also found that elderly people who took part in the educational activities carried out by NGOs improved their quality of life, broadened their social ties, and had the opportunity to realize themselves, which reduced their social exclusion. Participation in educational activities depends on the health status of the elderly. Moreover, whenever possible, elderly people are willing to contribute to the organization of activities, are active, and try to help each other. Nevertheless, research shows that promoting meaningful participation of the elderly in NGOs should be an important feature of the new paradigm of an aging society, as it is neither easy nor instinctual for elderly people to participate [9].

Yang's research [9] showed that the dialogue between all interested parties (NGOs, elderly people) alone is not enough for the effective participation of the elderly. "Much depends on how people take up and make use of what is on offer, as well as on supportive processes that can easily build capacity, nurture voice and enable people to empower themselves" [9], p. 358.

Regarding the participation of elderly people in activities, the theory of activity has been confirmed, stating that continued involvement in social roles, relationships, and activities can enrich well-being in later life [27]. The involvement of NGOs has changed the lives of elderly people. It was found that people met their need to interact with peers, became more physically active, and improved their social skills. It can be stated that elderly people became involved in NGO activities to increase security (assistance), interaction (cooperation, social skills), and their sense of value (activity, improved quality of life), which are mentioned by other researchers as important reasons for their involvement [9,15,19]. When working with elderly people, it is essential to encourage them to be proud of their age and experience. This strengthens their self-confidence, which is essential for engaging in educational activities. Lifelong learning, active participation in activities, the ability to work in a group, and accepting the fact of aging—not as a limit to being active but as an incentive to act—are essential for building self-confidence, fostering creativity, and improving communication skills. Age should not be considered a barrier in any form in any society, especially in today's increasingly aging societies [9].

5. Conclusions

Promoting the participation of elderly people in educational activities, thus involving them in lifelong learning, is important for the sustainability of societies. Analyzing the involvement of elderly people in educational activities, it was found that this process was related to people's personal development, and the ability to maintain social roles and remain independent and valuable members of the community.

The educational activities of NGOs with the elderly include the empowerment of the individual to re-adopt societal norms, to discover new opportunities for self-realization, and to respond flexibly to economic and social changes. When organizing educational activities, it is also necessary for the participants of the activities—the elderly—to be involved in the processes of organizing the NGOs' activities.

Reviewing the experience of elderly people participating in NGO educational activities revealed that the motives for becoming members and participants of NGOs are related to the needs of self-expression, communication, as well as social mobility, integration, and social adaptation to constant changes in society. To promote the involvement of elderly people, NGOs must focus on disseminating information on educational activities, promoting active aging, and removing barriers to individual attention and activity in order to improve the competencies of elderly people, helping them to acquire new knowledge and skills. Moreover, they must focus on the organization as well.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Kaunas University of Technology. This investigation was endorsed by the research ethics board of the Department of Educational Studies, Kaunas University of Technology (Protocol No. V19-1204-9).

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Data on the Focus Group Discussion Experts.

Informant	Education	How Many Years Have You Been Involved in the Organization?	Gender	Age
A	Higher	9	Female	77
B	Senior (technical school)	2	Female	64
C	Higher	5	Female	65
D	Secondary	6	Female	68
E	Vocational (vocational school)	3	Male	65
F	Senior (technical school)	2	Male	70
G	Higher	7	Female	65
H	Vocational (vocational school)	5	Female	66

References

1. Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania. *National Strategy for Sustainable Development*; Lutute Publishing: Vilnius, Lithuania, 2011.
2. Eurydice. Lithuania Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions. Available online: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-44_en (accessed on 30 October 2021).
3. Fisher, C.M.; Grettenberger, S.E. Community-Based Participatory Study Abroad: A Proposed Model for Social Work Education. *J. Soc. Work Educ.* **2015**, *51*, 566–582. [CrossRef]
4. Pin, S.; Spini, D. Meeting the Needs of the Growing Very Old Population: Policy Implications for a Global Challenge. *J. Aging Soc. Policy* **2016**, *28*, 218–231. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
5. Griswold, W. Sustainability, Ecojustice, and Adult Education. *New Dir. Adult Contin. Educ.* **2017**, *153*, 7–15. [CrossRef]
6. Casey, C.; Asamoah, L. Education and sustainability: Reinvigorating adult education's role in transformation, justice and development. *Int. J. Lifelong Educ.* **2016**, *35*, 590–606. [CrossRef]
7. Wysocki, A.; Butler, M.; Kane, R.L.; Kane, R.A.; Shippee, T.; Sainfort, F. Long-Term Services and Supports for Older Adults: A Review of Home and Community-Based Services Versus Institutional Care. *J. Aging Soc. Policy* **2015**, *27*, 255–279. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
8. Mohapatra, S.; Narayan, K.L. Caring for the aged: The Role of NGOs. *Int. J. Sociol. Fam.* **2009**, *35*, 105–121. Available online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23028803> (accessed on 30 October 2021).
9. Yang, Y. Aging in community and local NGOs: Empowering marginalized older women in South Korea. *J. Women Aging* **2018**, *30*, 344–362. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
10. Gorman, M. Global ageing—The non-governmental organization role in the developing world. *Int. J. Epidemiol.* **2002**, *31*, 782–785. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
11. Principi, A.; Jense, P.H.; Lamura, G. (Eds.) *Active Ageing: Voluntary Work by Older People in Europe*, 1st ed.; Policy Press at the University of Bristol: Bristol, UK, 2014; p. 272, ISBN 978-144-730-720-4.
12. Zemaitaityte, I. Empowerment of Older People to Participate in Educational Activities. In Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference “Society, Integration, Education”, Rezekne, Latvia, 23–24 May 2014; Rezekne Higher Education Institution: Rēzekne, Latvia, 2014; Volume II, pp. 260–268.
13. Gedvilienė, G.; Krunkaitytė, M.; Trečiokienė, E. Volunteering: Experience of senior adults. In Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference “Society, Integration, Education”, Rezekne, Latvia, 23–24 May 2014; Rezekne Higher Education Institution: Rēzekne, Latvia, 2014; Volume II, pp. 84–94.
14. Stenner, P.; McFarquhar, T.; Bowling, A. Older people and ‘active aging’: Subjective aspects of aging actively. *J. Health Psychol.* **2011**, *16*, 467–477. [CrossRef]

15. Štuopytė, E. *Socio-Educational Activities of Non-Governmental Organizations with the Elderly in Lithuania*; Technologija: Kaunas, Lithuania, 2018; pp. 34–47, ISBN 978-609-021-509-8.
16. Nyumba, O.T.; Wilson, K.; Derrick, C.J.; Mukherjee, N. The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods Ecol. Evol.* **2018**, *9*, 20–32. [[CrossRef](#)]
17. Gaizauskaite, I. The Use of the Focus Group Method in Social Work Research. *Soc. Work* **2012**, *11*, 19–30. Available online: <https://www.ceool.com/search/article-detail?id=60109> (accessed on 30 October 2021).
18. Le Cardinal, G.; Guyonnet, J.F.; Pouzoullic, B.; Maurice, B. *La Dynamique de la Confiance. Construire la Coopération Dans les Projets Complexes*; Dunod: Paris, France, 1997; pp. 132–220, ISBN 2-10-003498-7.
19. Ruskus, J.; Štuopytė, E. Revelation of the factors for permanent learning of socially excluded groups: Results of focus group reflection. *Soc. Sci.* **2004**, *4*, 82–90. Available online: <https://www.lituanistika.lt/content/39165> (accessed on 30 October 2021).
20. Petousi, V.; Sifaki, E. Contextualizing harm in the framework of research misconduct. Findings from a discourse analysis of scientific publications. *Int. J. Sustain. Dev.* **2020**, *23*, 149–174. [[CrossRef](#)]
21. Creswell, J.W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed.; SAGE Publications Inc.: London, UK, 2009; pp. 162–183, ISBN 978-1-4129-6556-9.
22. Orb, A.; Eisenhauer, L.; Wynaden, D. Ethics in Qualitative Research. *J. Nurs. Scholarsh.* **2001**, *33*, 93–96. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
23. Linkaityte, G.M.; Zilinskaite, L. The Prospect of implementing the idea of lifelong education in Lithuania. In *Bildungs- und Kulturmanagement (Baltische Studien zur Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaft)*; Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2008; Volume 15, pp. 343–354, ISBN 978-3-631-57817-9.
24. Linkaityte, G.M.; Zilinskaite, L.; Lapeniene, A. *The Study of Andragogy: The Search for Coherence between Theory and Practice*; Klaipedos Banga: Klaipeda, Lithuania, 2011; pp. 90–98, ISBN 978-995-592-617-7.
25. Miezyte-Tijusiene, J.; Bulotaite, L. Social activity and psychological status of retired people. *Gerontologija* **2012**, *13*, 199–205.
26. United Nations. *Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging*; United Nations Publication: New York, NY, USA, 2002; pp. 17–21. Available online: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/MIPAA/political-declaration-en.pdf> (accessed on 30 October 2021).
27. Harris, J.; White, V. (Eds.) *A Dictionary of Social Work and Social Care*, 2nd ed.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2018; p. 32, ISBN 978-019-183-793-7.