

■ Active ageing and immigrant elders: a possible relation? Exploring the case of Switzerland

Claudio Bolzman* e Laure Kaeser**

Abstract This paper explores the relationship between active ageing and the ways of life of immigrant elders. In the first part of the paper the meaning of active ageing and the context of production of this notion is analysed. A distinction is made between active ageing as a normative notion and the sociological perspective that emphasises the study of realities as they are lived and perceived by the individuals themselves. In the second part of the paper, the life conditions of immigrant elders, their expectations about retirement and the ways they spend their everyday life during their old days in Switzerland are explored. The conclusion discusses their specific ways of being "active" after retirement with regard to the notion of active ageing.

Keywords active ageing, elderly immigrants, ways of life, retirement, social expectations

Resumo Este artigo explora a relação entre envelhecimento ativo e modos de vida dos imigrantes idosos. Na primeira parte do artigo analisamos o significado de envelhecimento ativo e o contexto de produção desta noção. Fazemos a distinção entre envelhecimento ativo enquanto noção normativa e a perspetiva sociológica que enfatiza o estudo da realidade tal como ela é vivida e percebida pelos próprios indivíduos. Na segunda parte, abordamos as condições de vida dos imigrantes idosos na Suíça, as suas expectativas sobre o período de reforma e os modos como vivem o dia-a-dia. Na conclusão, discutimos os modos específicos de ser "ativo" na reforma por referência à noção de envelhecimento ativo.

Palavras-chave envelhecimento ativo, imigrantes idosos, modos de vida, reforma, expectativas sociais.

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This paper explores to what extent the notion of active ageing applies to immigrant elders. In order to understand the relationship between active ageing and the ways of life of immigrant elders, first of all it is necessary to analyse the meaning of active ageing and the context of production of this notion. In our view, active ageing is mainly a normative notion, describing what should be a desired situation for elders at this stage of their lives. From a sociological perspective, what is important is not to describe matters as they should be, but to study realities as they are experienced and perceived by the individuals themselves. Hence, in the second part of our paper, we will explore the life conditions of immigrant elders, their expectations about retirement and the ways they spend their everyday life during their old days in Switzerland. It is particularly interesting to assess if they are still “active” after retirement, or if they disengage themselves from social life. It is also relevant to compare any occurrence of relevant differences according to gender roles.

Our hypothesis is that there is a hiatus between discourses and debates on active ageing, on the one hand, and living conditions, perceptions and expectations about life after retirement by immigrant elders themselves on the other hand. Probably, the normative notion of active ageing needs greater complexity in order to take into account life courses and social realities of former labour immigrants.

We use data from two research projects. The first one, the PRI (pre retired immigrants) research was part of a Swiss National Research Programme on “Ageing”. It was a ground-breaking study in this field in Switzerland. Its aim was to better understand a phenomenon hitherto unexplored, namely, the ageing of the Spanish and Italian workers who had come to Switzerland in the 1950s and 1960s. A quantitative study on a representative sample of 442 Spanish and Italian workers ages 55 to 64 living in Geneva and Basel City in the 1990s allows to clarify these people’s living conditions, their plans for the future and their representation of retirement (Bolzman *et al.*, 1998; 2004). The second one is a research project about the leisure activities of Italian and Spanish older immigrants in Geneva and Basel City. Four focus groups were organised in each region and the collected data was submitted to a qualitative thematic analysis. This study was carried out in the early 2000s (Bolzman *et al.*, 2001).

The notion of active ageing

Current demographic trends show an ageing of the European population mainly due to the decline in fertility and the ageing of the post-war baby boomers (European Commission, 2008). Consequently, there has been a need for a global notion liable to address these challenges and offer solutions to the ageing of the population (Moulaert *et al.*, 2011; Walker, 2009).

There is a close relationship between ageing and public policy in Europe since the golden age of the welfare state. However, in the 1970s policy makers started to question the welfare state and the Keynesian economic policies, partly because of the consequences of the successive economic crises. Moreover, neo-liberalism started to rise in the 1980s and issues related to the cost of ageing emerged as the « burden of ageing ». In the late 1980s and 1990s, the growth in direct political participation among elder people and the success of the EU's pension systems in reducing poverty in old age have increased consumption amongst “young” and healthy older people. Thus, a switch occurred from poverty and dependency towards activity and participation (Walker, 2008).

Consequently to these new trends and in order to tackle the ageing challenges, a new policy discourse emerged. In the 1990s, International Organizations such as the United Nations, World Health Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the European Union began to take over the linkage between public policy and demographical changes. To do so, they started to refer to a new label for their policy discourse on ageing, a label called «active ageing». Most of them have adopted a productivist vision of active ageing (Phillipson, 1998; Walker, 1996). This vision mainly focuses on elders' employment, careers' extension and pension-system sustainability. This approach can be traced back to the early 1960s at the time of emergence of «successful ageing» in the United States (Walker, 2006). This narrow vision of ageing was rapidly criticised for “*making generalisations about the ageing process and homogenizing older people*” (Walker, 2002). In the 1980s, the concept of « productive ageing » tried to meet this criticism by introducing a life course perspective, even if it still gave priority to employment trajectory by presenting alternatives to retirement such as continued full-time or part-time employment (Walker, 2006). In the mid-1990s, International Organizations have produced numerous reports on seniors' employment. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has played a major role by publishing thematic reports on approximately twenty countries sharing the idea of «live longer, work longer» (OECD, 2006).

Nevertheless, a more comprehensive approach to active ageing began to emerge in the late 1990s and has been largely disseminated by the World Health Organization (WHO). In 2002, at the second United Nations World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, WHO defines active ageing as: “*the process of optimising opportunities for partici-*

pation, health and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Active ageing applies to both individuals and groups. It allows people to realise their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout their lives and to participate in society according to their needs, desires, and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security, and care when they require assistance” (WHO, 2002: 12). This approach emphasized the importance of a life-course perspective and the linkage between employment, health and participation (Walker, 2009: 84). Some scholars share this multidimensional definition. According to A. Walker, active ageing is “a comprehensive strategy to maximize participation and well being as people age. It should operate simultaneously at the individual (lifestyle), organizational (management), and societal (policy) levels and at all stages of the life course”(Walker, 2007).

Thus, two contrasting and competing models of active ageing co-exist nowadays: one focusing on a productivist approach of ageing and long-term employment and the other being comprehensive and multidimensional. Most of International Organizations and institutions tend to adopt the narrowest approach to active ageing, including the European Union: “*despite the presence in the EU for nearly a decade of a conception of active ageing based on participation and well being across the life course, the policy instruments still focus primarily on employment” (Walker, 2009: 85).*

Active Ageing of immigrant elders

As mentioned above, European population is ageing and more and more people age in a foreign country. Ageing becomes more diverse in Europe because of various forms of present and past migration (labour migration, family reunification, colonial history, asylum, etc.). Furthermore, most immigrants chose to age in their residence country whereas they were long regarded only as “birds of passage” (Warnes *et al.*, 2004; Bolzman *et al.*, 2004).

The project Active Ageing of Migrant Elders across Europe (AAMEE) promoted by the European Commission defines the concept of active ageing as a “*constant participation in social, economical, cultural, spiritual and civil terms and not only to the ability of being physically active and participating in working life” (European Commission, 2010: 33). In other words, they use the comprehensive approach of active ageing in a life course perspective. According to the concept of «active ageing», the AAMEE project focus on the political, social, cultural and economic participation and integration of migrant elders. Mutual integration, empowerment and equal opportunities, are the key elements to promote active ageing for migrant elders. According to this report, immigrant elders should not be considered as «problem groups», even though academic research focuses more on their deficits than their resources, competencies and potentials.*

Actually, there are few studies on the perception of immigrant elders on active ageing. However, it is important to consider this point of view in order to analyse what the concept of active ageing involves for immigrant elders. Yet it is important to take into consideration the specific trajectories and situations of immigrant elders in order to understand the constraints they face to mobilise their resources at this life stage.

Social and Health situation of immigrant elders in Switzerland

Immigrant elders came to Switzerland as young adult workers within the frame of guest labour migration (Piore, 1979). The first generation of immigrant workers were mainly recruited during the 1950s and 1960s from Italy and Spain, and later from Portugal, Turkey and former Yugoslavia. Even though they became older in the host country and their number is gradually increasing, they are in average younger than the national population. Thus, foreigners represent 22% of the resident population in 2009. But, the same year those ages from 60 to 64 represent 13.7% of the whole resident population of this age group; and those ages 65 and more represent 10.8% of the resident population of the same age group (OFS, 2010).

The socio-economic situation of immigrant elders is lower than that of the Swiss elders. This is related to the types of professions they have practised in Switzerland. Most of them have been manual workers in unskilled or semi-skilled positions in industry, construction, restaurants, cleaning, etc. (Bolzman *et al.*, 2004; Bolzman, 2011). They earned low wages and endured hard working conditions. The PRI survey indicated that when Italian and Spanish immigrants approached retirement many of them were in a precarious social and economic position or in outright poverty. A clear indicator was that a high proportion had been forced to retire early due to long-term unemployment or health problems. Men were particularly affected; for 20% of those ages 55-59 years had already left work, compared to about 10% of all the residents of the same age group (Bolzman *et al.*, 2004). Thus, a productivist perspective of active ageing does not fit with their concrete reality.

Health difficulties are significant among immigrant elders. This is another dimension of their precarious life conditions, which can be observed by measuring self-assessed health. Self-assessment of one's state of health is a subjective but reliable indicator of both physical and mental health and has become a standard indicator in social research. The Italian and Spanish respondents in our PRI survey, ages 55 to 64 reported a high prevalence (19%) of health problems. This is much more significant than the prevalence among the older population in Switzerland. A study carried out in 1994, showed that 5 to 7 per cent of people ages 65 to 79, consider their health as being poor and that is also the case of 13 to 15 per cent of people ages 80 to 94 (Lalivé d'Epinay *et al.*, 2000). Thus, immigrants, though younger, showed a "health age" worse than that of national residents aged 80 to 94.

The problematic health situation of older immigrants has been described as the 'exhausted migrant effect' (Bollini and Siem, 1995). The majority of migrants arrived in Switzerland in good health, for it was mainly the fittest who left their home countries, and they underwent strict health controls at the Swiss border. Moreover, after 30 to 40 years of hard work, difficult living conditions and insecure legal status, many were exhausted and encountered health problems (Guberan and Usel, 2000; Embajada de España en Suiza y Femaes, 2001).

To what extent these precarious economic and health conditions affect the image of retirement among immigrant elders? What are their expectations about retirement and how do they perceive this new stage of their life course?

Older immigrants and retirement perception

The image of retirement is probably influenced by the meaning of this concept in each language. With respect to Italians and Spanish elders in Switzerland, several languages are concerned: the mother tongue and the one of the host country. Like in English, the term used in French is *retraite*, while the one used in Spanish is *jubilación*, two very contrasted meanings.

With respect to the notion of *retraite*, the Dictionary Robert indicates the following significations: 1. action of going behind, of putting himself aside (*de se retirer en arrière, de s'écarter*) 2. action of the troops to go back to the headquarters, abandonment of the battle field 3. action of retirement from active life, situation of the individual who has retired from a function, an employment, and who has the right to receive a pension. Thus, the most common word in French, is related to the notions of abandon, lack of action, inactivity, disengagement. We are far from the idea of "active ageing".

At the opposite, in Spanish, the word *jubilación* makes reference to a highly positive situation. *Jubilación* comes from the latin "jubilare" which means "*alegrarse al cesar la obligación de trabajar*" (to enjoy the fact that work is not a duty any more) (Moliner, 1981) and, in a broader sense to allow somebody to stop the work or the activity he has been doing during 50 years of duty (Real Academia Española, 2009). Here the emphasis is put upon the idea of happiness with the possibility of ceasing activities related to duty within the working world.

In Italian the most common word is *pensione*. Here the emphasis lies upon the fact of receiving an amount of money, and also in a change in the source of income, which is no longer a wage related to work, but a pension provided by the State or other public or private institutions. In German also, the term *Rente*, like in Italian underlines the idea of a change in the source of income (Bolzman *et al.*, 2001a).

It is interesting to explore among these different meanings of retirement the one that predominates among older Italians and Spanish. We have proposed a list of items to our target population, some with a quite positive meaning, others with a more negative or neutral meaning. These items have been inspired by a French survey on transition to retirement directed by Paul Paillat (1989). Among the 12 proposed items, the respondents could select a maximum of 4.

The answers show that Italians and Spanish respondents have a very positive image of retirement (Cf. Table 1). In fact the positive items are more popular than those negatives, only quoted by a small minority of respondents. The order of items shows that retirement has at the same time a meaning close to the French one, combined to the German/Italian one: "a well- deserved rest" is the most popular item. But in the second and third positions are mentioned two items closer to the Spanish meaning of retirement. These items are: "to enjoy life" and "to have time for oneself and friends". It can be observed that these two items are mentioned more often by the Spanish than by the Italians respondents. The fourth most mentioned item is related to the possibility of "Spending more time with the family". Thus, on the one hand retirement is perceived as disinvesting the working world, a right after a life of great efforts. It is something one deserves [here we are close to the German or Italian meaning]. But on the other hand it is the opportunity to begin a new life, to start new activities far from the constraints of work. After a life of accepted burdens it will be possible to enjoy life, to be rich of one's own time. Here we are closer to the idea of active ageing offering a field of new opportunities.

In fact, Italians and Spanish immigrants wait impatiently for retirement: half of the surveyed would like to stop working before the legal retirement age (65 for men and 64 for women), 37% choose to retire at the legal age and only 14% wish to stay in the labour market after the legal age.

Table 1- Images of retirement among Italians and Spanish (% by case)

	All respondents	Italians	Spanish
A well-deserved rest	55	59	49*
To enjoy life	48	45	54
Time for oneself and friends	44	41	50
Time for the family	40	41	40
A new life stage	37	36	39
Freedom	31	35	24*
Being able to choose the Country where to live	27	25	31
Health that gets worse	18	18	15
The end of active life	15	17	10*
Being old	11	17	10
Material problems	09	10	08
Uselessness and boredom	08	08	08

*Statistically significant differences between Italian and Spanish respondents

Even though negative items are less mentioned, they are also part of the respondents' perception. The greatest fear is that health will decline, which is not surprising, because we have seen above that the health situation of immigrants near retirement is worse than that of people of the same age in Switzerland. But surprisingly, only a few people (18%) mention this item. Most of them are the ones that have already self-assessed their health as bad or very bad (Bolzman *et al.*, 2001a).

A minority also fear the arousal of problems related to old age, like boredom and the feeling of not being useful anymore. These items are mentioned more by people who have known early retirement (20%), because of long standing unemployment, disability or collective firing. Actually, 68% of people receiving a disability allowance, and 59% of the unemployed, estimate that their life is less comfortable after having ceased to work. It is the case of only 25% of those that are already receiving a retirement pension. The officially retired feel more legitimated to stop working than the early de facto retired.

Another surprising result, at least from the classical perspective in sociology of migrations (Sayad, 1993 ; Mehrlander, 1993), is the fact that the question of choosing the country where to live is only mentioned in seventh position by the Italians and the six one by the Spanish. The question of return does not appear as a crossroad at the moment of retirement for these immigrants, at least when asked in those terms. In fact, it confirms that the question of return is not a central one for them. They

perceive retirement as a continuity in space, or as a form of living a more intensive transnational life (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006).

It is also interesting to mention that only 15% of the respondents estimate that retirement is the end of active life. In other words, for them retirement is another stage of life, but they hope to continue being active. Of course, the meaning of being active can change in this new stage of life. This is what we will inquire in the following section.

Life after retirement: activism or disengagement?

We have explored through focus groups how Italian and Spanish elders perceive their life after retirement. We have obtained descriptions of their everyday lives, but also about their preferred activities. According to the interviews gender is a significant variable in the ways of experiencing retirement and organising everyday activities. But men and women share the idea that it is important to combine business with pleasure (*joindre l'utile à l'agréable*). This is a core value of the popular culture (Hoggart, 1957; Schultheis *et al.*, 2011).

We must not forget that work has occupied a central place in the lives of this generation of immigrants. After retirement they feel freer from professional life's constraints, but continue to work for their family or for themselves. Moreover, they don't stop their extra-professional activities. However, women and men do not experience in the same way the transition to retirement life. Women stop paid work, but they are in a form of continuity with respect to domestic and family work. Men experience a more important breakdown and try to redefine their place within their family life and to find new occupations and activities.

Women's everyday routines are structured around domestic and care work. They carry out these tasks with mixed feelings of duty and pleasure. They invest more particularly in their relationship to children and grand-children. As stated by this Italian woman:

"I get up at seven in the morning and at eight o'clock I am already at the supermarket. I come back, I cook the meals and my sons are also coming for lunch. I take care of my grand-children and nothing else. And I go to take a walk with my grand-children, that's my life".

Sometimes spouses do not agree about the investment in family care work as we can grasp from this dialogue between wife and husband:

*"I wash their clothes, I iron their clothes and prepare the meals" She says.
"Don't say afterwards that you are tired, you know why you feel tired! You should do just what you can!" - says her husband. But she answers: "I do*

what seems right to me, what I like to do. It is like this for every mother! My son is able to do things by himself, but I do laundry and iron for him. My daughter is with her boyfriend, but they bring their dirty clothes to me. You too, your mother did iron for you!”.

But at the same time many women feel they do not have the same energy they used to have any more:

“I say, we don’t have time for nothing [...] Before I needed two hours to do all the house work, nowadays I need four. And then, the time is getting shorter... because we cannot go faster. When we attain a certain age we think twice before we do things, we ask ourselves “do we do it, or don’t we do it?”.

Thus, they are still active but not at the same pace. Life passes at a slower rhythm.

Several women say they enjoy some of the activities that are part of their everyday tasks and routines. They mention the pleasure of cooking, sewing, knitting, embroidering and even cleaning. Most of them mention how much they enjoy sharing part of the daily life with their grand-children. For the majority of them it is important to feel useful to others, especially the members of their family. They have a feeling of self-fulfilment when they assume their roles of mothers, grand-mothers and wives.

If the morning is usually dedicated to house-keeping, many of them spend part of the afternoon and the evening just to take a rest, watch TV, very often Italian or Spanish spoken programmes, but sometimes also French spoken. Others take care of themselves, make phone calls to friends, read, go to the swimming pool or take a walk. Leisure becomes then part of everyday life.

Men’s lives were organized around manual work. They started to work very early in their lives. Now that they are retired they experience the need to practise some manual activities, handwork. They have acquired practical skills during their professional career and they are proud of this concrete knowledge. Some continue to work at a slower pace, either for their former employer or as independents. Some of them turn to hand work at home or work as gardeners for themselves. These activities replace their employed work. Nevertheless, they do not consider these occupations as “true work”, even though they use their skills and enjoy doing them.

One of the men interviewed summarizes the feelings of many of them with respect to the centrality of being active:

«I cannot stay quiet, I cannot exist without doing something. If I stop, I die”

Even those that suffer from health problems try to pursue a physical activity, as related by this man:

"I had an accident at my worksite. My back was injured (...) I stayed two years in the hospital. It was very hard. But I am still engaged in some do it yourself. Now I am fed up of walking with a stick, I don't take it any more with me. But sometimes I fall down. That is the reason why my wife and my son are watching me, to stop me when I do too much".

At the opposite of women, men are not supposed to be involved in domestic work, besides shopping or driving grand-children to their activities. Home is a women's place and they prefer that their husbands don't turn around them, a source of tensions between spouses. This Italian man explains:

"I realized that, if I spend too much time at home, I bother my wife. Like this I don't hear her complain".

Men perceive home as their wives space, a place where they play a minor subordinated role. One respondent mentions:

"the officer that I have at home. She commands me and I am interested in obeying".

Another one says:

"I am at her disposal and she tells me what to do".

If women complain themselves about the lack of time, men at the opposite, explain that they have plenty of time and they do not know what to do to fulfil it. Basically, they look for activities that can help them to "spend the time" or "to while away" (*tuer le temps*):

"While my wife cooks the meal, I spend that time reading the newspaper, or reading something else. After dinner, the TV, a film and then go to sleep (laugh)".

Like women, Spanish and Italian men, try to combine utility and leisure in their activities. Do it yourself and gardening are particularly appreciated by the interviewed. These are perceived as creative activities, with a healing power:

"It is a very good leisure, because there are some days when the head is too heavy, because of problems that we create to ourselves or that the others create to us. And gardening cleans you, you talk to plants, you observe how a new plant is growing, others that are dying and then you don't see how time runs away. Then you come back home and you forget all that happened before".

Men and women share sometimes some gardening activities. They develop also informal voluntary activities, like helping ill or handicapped older neighbours. They do shopping or prepare meals for them, and sometimes spend some time to share moments with them. At the time of their professional life, Italian and Spanish

immigrants used to go back to their home country during holidays. For most of them, spending part of the year in their home country is part of their retirement life. To keep in contact with the home country is a form of continuity with a space that has been significant for them. It is related to the development through time of a way of life defined by a twofold reference, namely cultural, symbolic, concrete and affective ties with both countries (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006). They return regularly mainly to husband's or wife's birthplace. Length of the stay, number of travels and living arrangements vary considerably from one couple to another. For instance, some immigrant elders spend several months or a whole season in their home country, together with their spouse or sometimes at different moments. Others make several short travels to their home country. These trips represent the opportunity to see again relatives and friends, and to keep in contact physically with the home country. These moments are quite significant for their mental health. A sick old man explains:

"I have to change air because I feel better. I always travel to Spain (...). I need this life experience, because with the medication it is not good".

Immigrant elders enjoy also travelling in couples, or with friends or associations to other destinations in Switzerland, in their home country or elsewhere in Europe, like France:

"Once we went to Paris with the pensioners Association, we went also to Cinque Terre with the Pugliese (regional association) where we spent four days. We went also to Lourdes and to Monte-Carlo".

As we have seen, the activities of immigrant elders are part of a family and community framework. They are integrated in an informal network where personal relations play a major role. In spite of official retirement they have still many tasks to fulfill, in particular women, for their family. These duties are assumed with an amount of stoicism, making sacrifices being part of their lives. On the other hand, they appreciate to carry out manual activities, where the body and the intellect are still mobilised. But they prefer to accomplish these activities at a slower pace.

They also enjoy the pleasure of small things and display the curiosity of everyday life. They appreciate to take a walk and to look at the city show, even if sometimes they find that their existence is boring. They then try to "spend the time" by meeting people, sitting in a coffee shop or a tea room to drink something and share a moment with other people, things that are not expensive but that maintains feelings of being alive.

One could assert that immigrant elders are like Janus, the Greek god with two faces. On the one hand, they identify with a form of hedonism that leads to enjoy life and its small pleasures. On the other hand, they have a strong sense of duty and of perseverance when facing difficulties. For Lalive d'Épinay *et al.* (1983), this "hedonism stoic" is at the core of the ethos of popular classes. It is also certainly the case among Italian and Spanish elders.

One question still remains pending after this analysis: can we conclude that the perception of active live by immigrant elders is in line with active ageing such as it is presented in the institutional discourses?

Discussion

As mentioned above, immigrant elders in Switzerland have specific trajectories and life conditions (hard working conditions, bad health status, precariousness, low wages, etc.) and also have particular perceptions about what is a good retirement life. Thus, the productivist approach of active ageing seems to be hardly applicable to their own reality. The majority of immigrants had an early retirement (and wanted to have it), and expecting them to remain productive (in other words live longer work longer) seems unrealistic. It is interesting to observe that on the European level, the narrowest vision of active ageing has been disseminated for national population while for immigrants the European Commission favours a broad vision, adding a focus on integration, resources and skills of people. This holistic vision seems to, a priori, better reflect their reality because it takes into account their life course. It will be interesting to see what vision will be adopted for which population during the European Year of Active Ageing in 2012.

Despite the fact that the European Commission tends to adopt the holistic vision of active ageing for immigrant elders, the concept itself seems to be hard to operationalize for these populations. Taking into account the vision of the beneficiaries themselves, we observe that many of them don't want or are simply not able to remain active at the retirement age in the way understood by the AAMEE project, and this for several reasons. The AAMEE project advocates for the "*constant participation in social, economical, cultural, spiritual and civil terms and not only to the ability of being physically active and participating in working life*". To what extent can the framework conditions of the host society help achieve this goal? Many barriers still remain for immigrant elders, even for those who spend most of their life time in the host country. During their professional life, time was devoted to work, and leisure was mostly devoted to family and homeland oriented associations. If there had been no space for citizenship during their active life, it seems unlikely that the host society is going to be mobilized to create one at the moment of their old age. By advocating active ageing for immigrant elders, the European Union runs the risk to require the participation and the integration of immigrant elders, or in a more narrow sense, to push them to work longer, without necessarily ensure their rights to age in the way they want.

In fact, the concept of active ageing for immigrant elders at the European level is still unclear and, whether it adopts the productivist vision or the holistic view, it remains a normative concept. It seems that there is a gap between the normative definition and

the reality and expectations of older people, namely immigrants. On the one hand, reflection around the productivist vision of active aging echoes with activation policies in Europe, where the benefits perceived by the individuals are more related to their own activation on the labour market (Barbier, 2002 ; for example, the activation of the unemployed into the labour market against their social security benefits). On the other hand, the holistic vision of active ageing, as thought and disseminated by epistemic communities, advocates mostly for projects of integration and participation of immigrant elders in their host society. One can note that this approach echoes to current migratory policies. In fact, the latter insist on integration and efforts that have to be made by immigrants themselves to integrate their host society whereas the host society does not always ensure the framing conditions to welcome the new comers (Bolzman, 2011a). Of course, this is important to ensure the participation of immigrants into the host society throughout their life course, but it is also essential not to forget to listen to their direct concerns, as pension funds and the social security benefits (in particular in case of back and forth between the origin and host countries) since most of them spent their active life in two different countries.

In Switzerland, immigrant elders have known a certain career path during their professional life. To some extent, their situation reflect the conditions of the working class of national populations in Europe, and the wider category of persons experiencing a painful career for whom a productivist vision of ageing seems far away from reality and their own options and expectations.

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