

ABSTRACT

The topics of gerontology and aging are growing and becoming more focused on improving aging in the US, but that is usually not the case in most parts of the world. Bulgaria, a small country in eastern Europe, faces the same issue of an ever-growing aging population. The country's ways of dealing with the challenges of improving the quality of life for older adults and providing them with the means of successful aging, are close to non-existent in most cases. This presentation will take a deeper look current aging community and cover the housing, outdoor spaces, environment, transportation services, social availability, community support, health, and wellness services available for the geriatric community.

INTRODUCTION

Bulgaria is a small country located in Eastern Europe. The country has one of the highest percentage of aging population in the world, over 21%. Bulgaria has a very high cost of living in comparison to the average household income and government pension. The minimum pension is a little over 110 USD and average pension of around 250 USD per month. Although there is free healthcare, medication is not part of that.

HOUSING

Most often the aging population stays in the same living space as before retirement.

- People in the cities live in block apartments (usually two bedroom).
- Some people move out to the surrounding villages, usually inherited properties.
- Nursing homes are another options, but the quality of living is extremely low due to the low pension funds.
- Newly created residencies for elderly are also emerging in the richer areas (average monthly cost is around 700 USD)

OUTDOOR SPACES & BUILT ENVIRONMENT

There are many parks and in-city forests with pedestrian crossings. In addition to the parks and walking paths there are public fitness outdoor parks spread around bigger cities available for everyone. There are biking alleys stretching along side the main streets within the bigger cities.

There are malls and city centers that are accessible to everyone.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Elderly within the Bulgarian culture are greatly respected. Usually, both due cultural norms and economic situation, elderly live with the families of their children and often look after their grand children.

TRANSPORTATION

Bulgarian public transportation has been the most common mean of transportation for elderly. A public transportation card for one month cost from 15 to 30 USD for retired people.

A big industry is the in-city taxi services, that are relatively cheap (around 5 USD for a 15-minute drive). In case of emergency, taxi services are viable option.

Most of the older adults are not drivers, mainly because of affordability.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

There are multiple charity programs in the country that are helping people in financial need. A couple of them provide many retired people with the opportunity to participate with food preparations, resource distribution and other volunteering opportunities that help elderly. Unfortunately, the Bulgarian community puts very little effort into elderly involvement.

HEALTH & WELLNESS SERVICES

Bulgaria has free public healthcare which is beneficial for elderly. Unfortunately, the low economic standard has drastically lowered the quality of the free healthcare. In addition, to the low quality, free healthcare is often very delayed.

Most of the wellness and health services for elderly are privately sponsored, through programs and charity events:

- Outdoor aerobics classes (offered from private gyms)
- Hiking groups
- Outdoor yoga classes

CONCLUSION

Even though Bulgaria's government and the public needs to focus on creating a better community for its elderly, the cultural family bond and closeness is a strong support system for the aging population.

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