Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol*
Loredana Ivan**

Older People and Mobile Communication in Two European Contexts

Abstract

We analyze the relationships seniors have with mobile communications in two different European contexts, Romania and Catalonia. By means of a qualitative approach, we describe the ways older individuals incorporate mobile phones in everyday life communication practices, and the motivations supporting these decisions. To understand motivations for using a given communication device –as the mobile phone– we took into account the channels individual has access to; individual's personal interest on using available devices in everyday communications; the location of the members of the individual's personal network; and the pricing system that determines the cost of mediated communication.

The empirical analysis is based on two case studies conducted in Romania and in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (Catalonia) in different moments, between 2010 and 2012. Participants were 60 years old or over. Information was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed, while a common methodological design allows an enriched insight. Besides gender, we take into account heterogeneity of ageing for a more nuanced analysis.

This paper constitutes the first step in the exploration of common trends in the relationship seniors have with mobile communication in different European countries.

Keywords: Mobile communication; Older people; Multiple-case design; Romania; Catalonia.

1. Introduction

Older population is growing steadily and will continue to grow in the next 50 years. According to The World Health Organization (2012) the global population over 60 years will double in 2050 and will reach a level of 22% of the whole population, an expectation of 2 billion people. The growing of elderly population is a challenging topic, particularly in Europe, where most of the countries are expected to reach 30% of the population over 60 years in 2060 (Eurostat, 2011). The so called "grandparent boom" is expected to follow a different pattern in Western and Eastern European countries. The higher percent of elderly is nowadays in Western European countries where the ageing growth started in the 20th century and slowly progressed. However, the new demographic projections show an eastward shift of the ageing process, with Romania and Latvia estimating to reach the highest median age after 2040.

* Open University of Catalonia / Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Interdisciplinary Internet Institute (IN3), Barcelona (Catalonia), Spain, mfernandezar@uoc.edu.
** National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Communication Department, Bucharest, Romania, loredana.ivan@comunicare.ro.

Societies with increased number of elders face numerous challenges in terms of social security policies (Biggs, 2001), health care (Zweifel, Felder & Werblow, 2004), consumer and economic behaviour (Bloom, Canning & Fink, 2010), technology use (Charness & Boot, 2009), communication patterns (Tinker, 2002; Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000). Regarding mobile communication, age plays an important role regarding type of use and communication patterns (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qui & Sey, 2006). Still research on mobile communication is mostly focused on teenagers, young people and adults while analyses on the elders are limited (some exceptions are Ling, 2004, 2008; Oksman, 2006; or Zickuhr, 2011).

Ageing is also related to socio-cultural aspects, with particular values and life styles within a society. Yet the current literature on elders and mobile communication use remains rather local and no studies, as for the authors' knowledge, have been conducted cross-culturally. Furthermore studies within the Eastern European countries are scarce and besides the official statistics of mobile phone adoption (Eurostat, 2010; ITU, 2012), there is hardly any evidence of the appropriation of mobile communication in these countries.

The aim of this paper is to contribute with empirical evidence to better understand the mechanism of the acceptance and use of mobile telephony in interpersonal communication among older people. For doing so we develop a qualitative empirical research in two different cultural settings: Romania (rural and urban areas) and in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain – urban area). Preliminary results of the research are presented and discussed here. Independent case studies are interesting per se, while the multiple-case design we propose here allows for understanding differences and similarities, which allow more robust results (Yin, 2003) and enrich the analysis at a European level.

Contexts of the two case studies show similarities in demographic terms but divergences in terms of mobile phone diffusion. The proportion of population over 60 years in Romania and Catalonia is similar (20.3% and 22.8%, respectively; INS 2010, Idescat, 2011) and close to the European (UE27) average (23%, Eurostat, 2013). However, mobile phone adoption is significantly different. Last available data for Romania and the EU27 refers to 2010 (Eurostat, 2010) and indicates that Romania ranked the last in terms of adoption, with 75% mobile phone users in the whole population (16–74 years old) in front of the 87% of the EU27. The same year, in Catalonia mobile phone users accounted for the 93% of the population (Idescat, 2010), showing similar levels than Scandinavian countries – which are above EU27 average. Adoption among older people follows a similar pattern. On the one hand, within the 55 – 64 age group, mobile phone users account for a 62% in Romania, 79% in the EU27 and 88% in Catalonia. On the other, in the 65-74 age group adoption was 35% in Romania, 62% in the EU27 and 75% in Catalonia.

A study using cluster analysis based on Eurostat data on mobile phone adoption at a country level (Fernández-Ardèvol, 2011a) found that Romania was placed in the fourth cluster, together with five other countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece and Poland). This particular cluster gathers countries where adoption of mobile telephony by elderly is markedly below the average, with 62.5% users in the 55-64 cohort and just one third (35 %) in the 65-74 cohort. On the other hand, Spain was placed in the third cluster (together with Cyprus, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, and Slovenia). Third cluster was below the sample average but close to it, with 78.1% users in the 55-64 cohort and 56.3% in the 65-74 cohort.

When the demographic predictions for the next 50 years and the current data on mobile phone adoption for elderly are used, the two selected countries become a relevant case to

study the future of mobile communication in Europe. In addition to the inherent interest of comparing different European contexts, as diffusion of mobile communication is unbalanced between Romania and Catalonia (Spain), we will be able to detect what practices and discourses are present beyond adoption rates. This should inform about trends that are not only based on specificities of the diffusion stage. The qualitative methodological approach we propose is appropriate for achieving the research goals, given the need of empirical evidence on the intersection of mobile communication and ageing.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the analytical framework, whereas Section 3 describes the research method. Section 4 presents obtained results while conclusions are discussed in Section 5.

2. Elderly Use of Mobile Phones in Interpersonal Communication

The available evidence points that elderly have general positive attitude toward the use of mobile phone in interpersonal communication and the device became gradually incorporated in all activities of their everyday life (Ling, 2008). They begin as sceptical users who preferred to wait until the members of their personal network have started to use the mobile phone (Wong, 2011). Most of them have been pressured to adopt the device by their family members for safety reasons (Conci, Pianesi & Zancanaro, 2009). Elders can receive a new mobile handset as a present or an used one previously owned by a family member (Neves & Amaro, 2012). In case the elderly did not decide by themselves about the mobile phone they use – as it was given by their adult children –, there raise important questions of mobile phone ownership, caution in using it independently and intergenerational power (Crow & Sawchuk, 2012).

Regarding the services used by elderly, voice calls constitutes the most popular service and SMS are regularly used among those bellow 70 years with a lower acceptance rate compare to voice calls (Kurniawan, 2008). Here we find also the highest age gap as youth double the average regarding some services (photos, video sending, Internet browsing). The differences in mobile services used among elderly are prominent between the age cohort below 65 years and the age cohort 65 to 75 years. Seniors over 65 are more reluctant to adopt the mobile phone in their lives compare to their fellows bellow 65 years of age and show hardly any use of mobile services besides voice calls (Fernández-Ardèvol, 2011b). Thus, different communication patterns could emerge when investigate the mobile phone use in the two age groups: younger and older seniors. Vital trajectory could shape this relationship, as it is not the same to become old having a mobile phone in your pocket than starting to have your first mobile when you are retired from work.

The acceptance of mobile telephony by elderly seems to mostly follow an utilitarian approach rather than a hedonistic one (Conci, Pianesi & Zancanaro, 2009). Adolescents tend to adopt the mobile phone to strengthen the social ties within their network, whereas elderly are more motivated by the instrumental value of mobile phones in terms of safety and security. Empirical evidence (Kurniawan, 2008) suggests three main aspects that drive elders' mobile phone adoption: (1) people feel safe and less vulnerable when they are alone at home, or when they go out alone and they feel secure they can contact someone in case of an emergency; (2) the mobile phone gives them the possibility to better organize their lives, from the use of alarm clock to the use of reminders to compensate for memory failures; (3) it is a tool for information and micro-coordination to enhance efficiency in daily activities. The utilitar-

ian view of the role of mobile phone could lead to a more rational behaviour in using mobile phone services in the case of elders. There is evidence that they deliberately use missing calls and alternatively call on mobile and landlines to minimize the costs (Fernández-Ardèvol & Arroyo Prieto, 2012). Yet, using the mobile phone has a positive impact on elders' self-independence and self-esteem (Oksman, 2006). Thus, the perceived usefulness of mobile phones, the internal motivation and the need of self-actualization are considered to shape the mobile phone adoption and use in this particular age group (Tang, Leung, Haddad & McGrenere, 2012). Furthermore, their level of engagement and activity in social and professional life could influence both the perception of mobile phone usefulness and individual's need of personal independence in using ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). Nevertheless, the personal need for independence influences the level of accepted assistance in using the mobile phone. The so called "assisted users" (i.e. Fernández-Ardèvol & Arroyo, 2012) depend on others (children, grandchildren, relatives or friends) to a certain degree for using their mobile phones. Their level of dependence goes from not being able to send photos, videos and Internet browsing to not being able to read or send SMS, to increase credit airtime on prepaid phones or even to add a new number in the phonebook. Assisted users utilize the mobile in the way they are told to use it and feel not enough control on their device. As a result, the perceptions of the mobile phone utility, appropriation and limitations are filtered through control person's eyes. For the elderly, one limit of the mobile phone, debated in the literature, concerns the lost of personal autonomy and the increased dependability in interpersonal communication (see Abascal & Civit, 2001). In addition, elders might be concerned that mobile phone use could endanger the traditional communication patterns with family and friends and could diminish their economic resources.

We explore the distinctive characteristics of older mobile phone users by looking into two different contexts: Romanian and Barcelona. Specifically, we first study the frequency of mobile phone use relative to landline communication and the most frequently used mobile services. We then analyze behavioural patterns: When, where, how, with whom do they communicate via mobile phone? Finally, we investigate their history of using mobile phones and whether there has been any pressure from family and friends to adopt mobile communication and also the problem of assistance and control in using their own devices. We want to address also some peculiarities that emerged in the two case studies that could be relevant in research elsewhere.

3. Method

Data analyzed in this paper come from two case studies that follow the same methodological design and goals to allow for an enriched insight (Yin, 2003). We used a flexible, interactive research design to take account of the specific circumstances in which the research was carried out (Maxwell 2005: 7). Main research tool was semi-structured interviews, complemented with direct observation of interviewees' mobile phones (if they carried it with them the moment of the interview).

Firstly, semi-structured interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed for further text analysis. Conversations followed an open, flexible outline. They focused on the communication channels used by the individual (mainly landline, mobile phone, and Internet) and the common uses of these communication channels with a specific focus on mobile phones. From

a more generic point of view, individuals were asked about the problems or drawbacks of mobile telephony as well as the advantages or benefits. The conversation also considered motivations, opinions and personal experiences regarding the decision to have a mobile phone. In addition, mobile phone users were asked about which specific services they used, how the mobile handset was used and how it was adopted in their everyday life.

Secondly, the interviewee's mobile phone was directly observed. We took a picture of the mobile phone, if the participant carried it with them the moment of the interview (not reproduced here). This allowed us to observe how the owner handled the device, and observed the way participants answer them if a call happened during their interaction with researchers. The interest was not the device itself. The picture allowed the researchers to have a short impression on the matching between the participant's discourse regarding their proficiency in using the device and their actual ability to do it.

Participants were 60 years old and over, while individuals studied were identified by means of a snowball sampling process. In the case study of Romania, heterogeneity of mobile phone users was achieved by conducting fieldwork in urban and rural areas: in the city of Bucharest, in two small towns (with less than 20.000 inhabitants) and in other two rural localities. On the other hand, in Catalonia, fieldwork concentrated in the metropolitan area of Barcelona and heterogeneity was sought in terms of housing: participants living in their own private household and participants in retirement homes.

The interviews analyzed here correspond, first of all, to 16 interviews conducted between June and August 2012 in Romania. With a length between two and a half to three and a half hours, the language of the interviews was Romanian. Secondly, to 47 interviews conducted between October 2010 and March 2011 in Barcelona. Conversations were held in Catalan or/and Spanish and their length was shorter, one hour in average. These interviews are part of a wider fieldwork in Romania and Barcelona.

In this exploratory study we only include mobile phone users in the sample, although social perception of mobile phone might be also relevant to be investigated in the non-users group. All the participants also had land line phones at the time we conducted the interviews, except of 10 participants in Barcelona. Tables 1 and 2 show, for each case study, the most relevant characteristics of the sample analyzed here.

In what follows we will refer to participants by indicating their place of residence. We will discuss evidences regarding individuals in each case study and do not assume any generalization of results to Romania or Catalonia.

4. Results

The first analysis of the interviews confirms that elderly participants have integrated mobile phone in daily routine and have a general positive attitude toward the use of mobile phone. In Romania, they reported to use mobile phone in two thirds of their mediated conversations, while for the remaining third they use the landline phone. In Barcelona, for most participants the landline is the most important telephone in terms of number of calls and their length. Some participants from that city decided to dispense with the landline; all of them but one live in a retirement home and made the decision when they moved to the residence.

The respondents preferred to use the mobile phone in various situations from micro-coordination to emotional support, and with a variety of social actors (family, friends, acquain-

tances, relatives). We found evidence that the pricing system is shaping decisions on the communication channel individuals will use in their everyday life (as Donner, 2008). In both case studies we therefore found evidence to support the utilitarian view in the use of mobile phone and the rationale in calling by combining fixed and mobile phones.

In Romania, participants used the landline for longer conversations after 6 p.m., or in weekends, due to the cost advantages offered by providers. They call on fix phone those relatives not having a mobile phone and on mobile phone the ones who have it; and they would use landline for longer conversations in evening time and in weekends to reduce the costs.

When I call somebody who has a fix phone, I use the fix phone when I am at home…. Look, like now I didn't find something and I was about to call her by mistake from my mobile phone to her fix phone (Woman, 63, college educated, Bucharest)

In Barcelona the logic is the same. However, there are slight practical differences in the strategy as the pricing system shows differences in each country. At the time of fieldwork, landline flat rates had already became popular while mobile telephony cost mainly depended on actual consumption. Next two examples correspond to heavy users:

My son tells me "mobile phone to mobile phone, otherwise it's very expensive" (Woman, 78, secondary studies. Barcelona).

If I'm at home I pick up the landline, as it costs me nothing, I've got a flat rate (Woman, 64, secondary studies, Barcelona).

Internet, when used, is a complement to other communication channels more popular among elders. In Romania, only those with relatives abroad use Skype but participants from the 65+ cohort hardly use any Internet: They lack the skills and are completely dependent on others to communicate with family abroad. Because calling in another country has obvious economic barriers, elders from the 65+ cohort would feel frustrated and helpless when relatives move abroad and communication is interrupted.

Interviewee: First of all, I cannot use the Internet. But my son is talking by Internet with my daughter from Germany.

Interviewer: And you, how do you talk with her?

Interviewee: Through them: my son says to me…"I've talked with Flory, she said this and this". She calls me only on my birthday to congratulate (Man, 73, secondary education, Bucharest)

In Barcelona, Internet is popular among younger participants although Skype is barely used. Just one participant reported using Skype frequently. She used to communicate with her international network of friends and colleagues (woman, 66, college studies). Another woman, who already had Internet connection in her mobile phone, explained she managed to talk to her son on Skype in her mobile phone once both were on holidays – abroad and in different continents (64, secondary studies). Her main motivation to explore the use of Skype in this specific situation was to make a voice call in a situation in which other channels were discarded due to their high cost. Finally, only one participant had relatives abroad, she was a German woman who moved to Catalonia in the eighties (also 66 and college studies, as above). Even though she went online daily, she had never used Skype. She explained she did not need it as she had a special flat rate for calls within the European Union associated to her landline.

Still, participants use the mobile phone not only for micro-coordination and for safety and security reasons but also to offer and receive emotional support, in confessions, cheerful conversations and enjoyable moments. The evidence suggests that hedonistic approach in mobile communication is also found with elderly in both case studies. In Romania, reported call duration goes up to 30 minutes per call and people seemed not to regret it. Some individuals in Barcelona report a similar behaviour on the mobile phone. Consistent with other studies on gender and mobile communication (i.e. Iqbal, 2010), we also find evidence that women tend to engage more in longer and supportive conversations, whereas men use mobile phones mostly for micro-coordination.

With family and friends it is great especially when they are in the same network [phone company] …we talk like crazy. I talk long time with my friends, we support each other we give advice. For example when I am at the market, I would call and say: there is this and this product. If you want you can come. Do you want me to buy it for you? (Woman, college educated, 64, Bucharest)

Both case studies also confirmed that voice calls constitutes the most popular service among participants. In addition, younger seniors are the ones who most use SMS. In Romania, all the participants in the 60-65 age group reported using alarm clock while few reported the use of the mobile phone calendar. In addition, only people in this age group who were college graduated reported using other mobile phone services, particularly photos. In Barcelona the trend is similar, with younger seniors reporting wider use of featured applications. Two participants had data subscription on their mobile phones and reported more sophisticated uses (women, 62 and 66 years old, secondary studies both). One of them used the instant messaging service WhatsApp but she could only use it with her daughter because her friends did not use it.

The mobile communication gap between the two elder cohorts seems to be larger regarding specific mobile services than in terms of device ownership. In this sense, one particular finding on younger seniors in Romania concerns sending SMS to congratulate friends and relatives for their birthdays. Participants felt responsible to send such congratulation SMS in order to maintain the relation with that person while they would send also hundreds of SMS on Easter, Christmas and other celebration days. The recipients include not only family members and close friends but also large numbers of ex co-workers. In ex-communistic countries, as Romania, it is common to work in the same organization and have the same co-workers for 20 or 30 years. Therefore, maintaining strong relationships after retirement could be a widely spread practice.

The mobility of the mobile phone is sometimes challenged, as observed in Barcelona. Some older participants did never bring their mobile phone out of home but used it as if it were a fixed phone. We mostly observed this behaviour among seniors who moved to a retirement home and changed their home landline for a new mobile phone subscription. One woman, for instance, kept it always plugged in and used to take care of being in the room in established hours to receive calls planned ahead (64, primary school).

4.1. Forgetting the Mobile Phone

The fact that mobile phones are incorporated in participants' daily routine is shown also through stories about the moments they forgot it – at home or elsewhere. In Romania, participants reported "the event" as a total lost, struggling to recover the device by any means. How-

ever, they would seldom take the way back to pick it up. Among participants from Barcelona, however, forgetting the mobile phone at home did not seem to create such a strong feeling.

When I forget it I feel terrorized because I have all the time the feeling that someone would call and I am not there or that I would have something important to say and I will not be able to do it (Women, 63, college educated, Bucharest).

To me, really, it's another tool, but I don't distress if I leave it [at home]. (…) If I needed to call somebody, even if I don't have the mobile phone, I can manage (…) entering in a bar, or a phone booth or a place like this (Man, 65, secondary studies, Barcelona).

However, a common observation in both countries is that, for people who worry about the safety of a family member, forgetting the telephone is experienced as even more dramatic event and they would fail doing their duties until they recover it.

If I would ever forget it at home, be sure that I would come back and take it, because I want to solve things without worry. When you have a family member who is ill [his wife] and there is nobody at home, you have to call once or twice per hour to be sure that she is ok and whether she needs something (Man, 73, secondary education, Bucharest).

4.2. Hello – "I am on the bus now"

Talking on the mobile phone in public transportation seems to be an issue that preoccupies elders from urban areas, both in Romania and Barcelona. They are not necessary worried that using mobile communication in public could endanger their privacy, but what concerns them is they are forced to share others' private experience, which will make them feel uncomfortable. Specific results for each case study are reported in what follows.

Romanian participants reported having a clear view of the educational level and social status of a person by looking to the kind of private information they share when talking on the phone in public transportation. A "respectable" person should always limit their conversations, as going in too much detail would definitely embarrass others.

I am quite embarrassed, I don't like to have long conversation in the tram, I answer short and lapidary… I stick to the necessary information (Woman, 62, college educated, Bucharest)

I see them [the young people] in the bus: they listen to music and they continuously send and receive SMS. They tape incredibly fast and boys are talking about girls. Then, there are uneducated people, gipsy who desperately listen manele music and their conversations are funny: "How are you dude? Where have you been? I looked all over you. Why didn't you answer to me?"… /Man, I haven't heard/…" I have a new song that you have to listen" (Man, 73, college educated, small town Romania).1

The discourse about the "uncivilized" people who discuss private issues in public is framed in terms of gender, race and ethnicity: The inappropriate conduct is attributed mainly to youth, uneducated, Romani (Gipsy) and women. Participants believe that someone's social status could be depicted just by looking to the way they use the mobile phone in public places.

In Barcelona, some less-experienced older seniors seemed to be less aware of the m-etiquette issues. They described unexpected situations in which the mobile phone rang. They explained what they did, but they report no embarrassment, as in the two situations described by a very basic user:

One day, during a visit in Sant Joan de Déu [hospital], it rang and I turned it off. (…) [Another day] I said to my brother 'I'm in mass, I'll call you.' He called me back later on (Woman, 76, primary studies not completed, Barcelona).

4.3. Master the Telephone

Some participants started using the mobile phone when they were over 60, others much earlier. In any case, they gradually accommodate to the new technology. In Romania, all the participants except one reported receiving their first mobile phone as a present from their children. Interestingly, in almost all cases the phone was an older model that belonged to their children. As a result, the idea of damaging the phone and suffering the consequences of being stigmatized by their own children appeared in their discourses.

At the beginning I would hold it as if I had a bomb in my hand. When it rang I would have the feeling that I was going to drop it and something bad would happen. Then I tried and I discovered new options. Even now I discover new things and I did not manage to master it (Woman, 63, college educated, Bucharest).

The worry about breaking the device also appears in Barcelona but only among basic users that need assistance to use it, regardless whether the mobile phone was a present or not. Acquisition of the first mobile phone is diverse among participants. However, those who had their first mobile phone more recently, that is being already seniors, are those who report more often receiving it as a present from their children.

Elders who are still working or those who are socially or professionally active seem to progress rapidly from unskilled to explorative users. This is because the mobile phone is a tool for accomplishing other tasks for which they are expected to use it. The need to show their expertise in the working environment urged them to accommodate with the mobile phone and we found that elders in the sample who went back to work were using more mobile phone services than those who were retired in pension. Moreover, in Romania, women who were in charge of taking care of their grandchildren were also more familiar with using the mobile phone. They reported calling their children and being called several times per day. In addition they were the participants who reported the most frequent use of photos on their mobile phone.

In Romania, a number of participants received pressures from their children to accept the phone for safety / security reasons, so children would not have to worry about them when out of home. Participants' level of submission in those cases is relevant to express the fact that elderly rarely gave up their "freedom", their agency.[2] They are not passively accepting their adult children to take control of the way they use mobile phones. Participants in Romania mostly do because they feel children are experts; in Barcelona, they explain they understand their children's worries.

The way children take control of their parents' devices by giving them their older phones is a good example of intergenerational power, as in this example from Romania.

When I retired, my daughter told me: 'Mother you are old, you need a phone so we can reach you' (Women, 69, college education, small town Romania).

In the urban areas, elders are caching up with the mainstream in achieving at least basic skills to use the mobile phone. Romanian participants in the rural areas are mostly assisted users. This might be reinforced by the fact that rural areas are characterized by higher per-

centages of population above 65 and lower educational levels and, therefore, elders are less exposed to information and communication technologies. The same is valid for some older seniors living in Barcelona who were introduced into mobile telephony in recent time and have a low educational profile.

> *I don't press the red button, because I can see it is red. Sometimes, by mistake I press the red button…because it was in the left side in my old phone. I [sometimes] lose the number or it is not possible to open it. Sometimes I go wrong because I forget that red is in the left and green in the right side. Look, up to now I lost 100 points, or minutes as they call it. At TV they say we could call somehow and send 2 Euros to help a person…What should I do?* (Woman, 70, secondary education, rural Romania)

> *I know I must open [the clamshell handset] when I got a call and then I must close it. (…) What happens is that I don't know how to work in (sic) it, not at all. (…) It is him [her son] when I have to put credit, he does it for me* (Woman, 76, almost illiterate, Barcelona).

Although the level of mobile phone acceptance in the rural areas is similar to the urban settings among participants in the Romanian case study, elders living in villages reported a higher need of assistance. In this sense, the use of mobile phone in interpersonal communication is strongly controlled by their children who had moved to urban areas. In most cases, children do not only gave them the phone but also pay the bills and decide what numbers to include in the phonebook. Children practically administrate, manage, the device in these cases. This high level of dependence results in keeping the elder alienating from the phone and creates the opportunity of secondary level of assistance. Therefore, "warm experts" (Bakardjieva, 2005), those who support individuals in their everyday use of technology, are found beyond the family sphere. With children being gone, daily operation on mobile phones is carried out through others in the neighbourhood perceived as more skilled: post office workers, school teachers, local elites or younger neighbours.

> *I took the card [the prepaid card], I put it [new credit] in the telephone on Friday and Monday I had nothing. They stole my money [the mobile phone company]. When I called them they said I had used them but it was not truth. Dominica [a friend] called them and made a scandal because this had also happened to her twice. But I thought it was Adela [the person from the post office who actually inserted the card in the phone] who took them"* (Woman, 70, secondary education, rural)

In Romania, the issue of control and ownership among elders and their children is reflected also in the disadvantages using the mobile phones. They mentioned difficulties in keeping the battery properly charged all the time; and frustration when somebody important to them calls and the phone runs out the battery. We believe that such problems also arise because elders use old phones that have been already exhausted by their initial owners (usually children). In some cases, we found that the phone menu was initially set up in English and the language was never changed into Romanian, creating extra difficulties to elders so to accommodate to the device.

4.4. Health Concerns

Finally, all participants in Bucharest addressed concerns of mobile phone use and health issues. They were willing to learn more about the health effects of mobile phone use.

There are questions about the influence on our health. The specialists are going to research if there is any effect. I don't talk so much, but my daughter, she talks for hours plus she is working on a computer at work. I believe in time a person could be negative influenced by this (Woman, college educated, 63, Bucharest).

In Barcelona health was not such a burning question, as few participants raised the issue during interviews. However, those who worried about it took practical decisions to prevent negative effects. Some mentioned they did not leave the mobile phone in the nightstand. Others explained they "wear" the device in specific places when on the move (not close to the heart, for instance). One woman even had a "protector stick" in her mobile handset to reduce radiations. She explained she kept the stuck piece in the three mobile phones she had since the first one she bought 12 years before the interview (63, college educated, Barcelona).

While we need to explore their health concerns in depth, the current findings indicate that participants mostly worry about the long term effects radiations can cause. Notably, Romanian participants also worried about (their) children's health; and these concerns seem to be more important than effects on their own body.

In sum, initial findings of this ongoing fieldwork confirm some of the findings already available on elders from other countries. In Romania findings raise important questions on ownership and control in using mobile phones in interpersonal communication, as well as on the use of mobile phone in public places.

In both countries participants showed different levels of mobile phone expertise. In Romania less autonomous users tend to live in rural areas and tend to be older; while in Barcelona, they also tend to be older and with lower educational level. It is not age itself what explains expertise of use and the relationship with and through mobile phones, but personal trajectories and previous experience with ICTs.

5. Conclusion

The interviews conducted with elder mobile users in Romania and Barcelona allow us to conclude that we find similar mechanisms than those described in previous research on elders' willingness to use mobile communication. This result is confirmed even though the different level of mobile communication diffusion in each country. Safety and security together with the need to organize daily routine appeared in participants' discourses. Mobile phones are used in combination with other communication channels. Besides, pricing system shapes the effective use of mobile communication in reaching everyday life goals of interpersonal communication. Although we find support for the utilitarian view of mobile phone in the case of elder users, our data suggest that, at least in the urban areas elders are using mobile communication to enjoy themselves. Some of them reported having long conversations, supportive talks, and enjoyable moments with their friends on the mobile phone. Consistent with pervious findings, women described – more often than men – having long conversation while men reported more micro-coordination through the mobile phone. It might be that women are more willing to accept mobile phone use for socializing with others, whereas men admit more mobile phone's utility in coordinating with others. Furthermore, the gathered information suggests few aspects that might be relevant for the future research in the area of mobile communication.

First, some participants felt pressured to maintain their social relations using mobile phone. In Romania, this specifically applies for SMS to congratulate several others on their birthday

and others important celebration (Christmas, Easter). Particularly, younger participants from the urban areas (aged 60 to 65) sent a high number of SMS to congratulate not only family members but also former co-workers and relative distant others. Although this might be a peculiarity of the Romanian cultural context, we believe that this pattern will be found in other ex-communist countries, in which people have worked for more than 20 years in the same firm and with the same co-workers.

Second, mobile phones are personal, portable, pedestrian devices (Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2006) for a majority of participants. However, in Barcelona few older seniors used to keep the device always in the same place, as if it was a landline, challenging the embedded idea of mobility. In contrast, participants in both case studies who need to be always reachable, as those who are taking care of close relatives, would stress if they forgot the mobile phone at home. Nevertheless, the common discourse among participants is that they can manage if they occasionally forget bringing the device with them.

Third, participants argued on the appropriation of mobile phone use in public places, as in public transportation. The way mobile communication reshapes the relation between public and private has been largely analyzed by Ling and Pedersen (2005). Particularly, Fortunati (2005) argues that mobile phone use in public reframes people's identities and could alter people's efforts of self-presentation. In Goffman (1959) terms, they would offer something from their back-stage and they will generate embarrassment and disapproval. The interviews point in this direction. Participants described themselves as embarrassed to get into detail in public, when talking on a mobile phone, and also reluctant to accept others who do so. In addition, the lack of ability to control your private sphere when talking on a mobile phone in public becomes a social stigma. Among participants in Romania, young uneducated people, gipsy and women are associated with such conducts. The leak of private issues into the front stage is socially sanctioned also in the realm of mobile communication. In contrasts, while this perception is common in Barcelona, some older seniors seem not to be aware of the social sanction of inappropriate use.

Fourth, our data draws attention to the fact that gaps in using mobile communications are maybe higher within the elderly group that between the younger elders and other age groups. We found different skills in using mobile phone between younger seniors and older seniors, as well as between more active elders (professionally and socially) and less active elders. Particularly relevant for the Romanian case and for countries with high percentage of rural population or elderly living in isolation, our data suggest that some elders will never become autonomous users and will always be assisted users. This is observed in rural areas in Romania or among older elders in Barcelona. In these cases, different layers of assistance appear (children, and tertiary persons – when children are not available) and increase senior's reluctance to use mobile communication.

Fifth, we address the problem of ownership and control in using the mobile phone. In Romania, most part of the respondents got their phones from their children while some of the children even paid their mobile communication expenses. This raises the question of intergenerational control and agency of use. Interviewees were willing to give up the control in using the mobile phone to their adult children. The relation between elder users and their mature children who assist them seems relevant also in discussing the perceived advantages and disadvantages of mobile communication. A similar issue arises in B\arcelona among low-skilled mobile phone users, who tend to be the oldest, more dependent participants. Howev-

er, maybe because of their higher level of dependency, they did not challenge agency and intergenerational control.

Finally, Romanian participants were particularly worried about effects of intensive mobile phone use on health, but more on the heath of their children than on their own. In Barcelona, health concerns did not appear to be that important and worries were focused on the self – not on children. This issue will be further developed in a separate paper.

Main conclusions are two. First, even though we are able to identify specific characteristics in both contexts of research, the two case studies conducted in Europe show common trends of use and appropriation of mobile telephony among older people. Second, and more important, heterogeneity of older mobile phone users must be taken into account for an accurate analysis. Elders who are more active (professionally and socially) describe higher autonomy in mobile phone use. However, it is not age but life trajectories and personal circumstances what shape that use.

Notes

[1] *Manele* is a music style from Romania, generally associated with the Romani (Gypsy) minority, though not exclusively. *Manele* are a strongly disputed genre in Romania, with many representatives of Romanian upper-middle and intellectual class opposing this musical movement (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org /wiki/Manele, accessed 25 October 2012).

[2] A 96 years old woman in Barcelona reported not using the mobile phone her son gave her as a present some months before the interview because she wanted to keep being independent. The way she expressed it was related to who paid the bill, as it was her son who would pay the mobile phone while it was she who assumed the costs of the landline.

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Annex

Table 1. Sample structure, Romania case study (N = 16).

		60-65 cohort	66+ cohort
Gender	Women	4	4
	Men	4	4
Residence	Bucharest	4	4
	Small town (< 20.000 inhabitants)	2	2
	Rural	2	2
Education	Secondary level or less	4	4
	Higher level (college graduated)	4	4
ICT	Internet	5	2
	Fixed phone	3	6
TOTAL		8	8

Table 2. Sample structure of mobile phone users, Barcelona case study (N = 47).

		60-74 cohort	75+ cohort
Gender	Women	20	10
	Men	12	5
Housing	Own home	29	8
	Retirement home	3	7
Education	Up to secondary	10	13
	Secondary studies or more	22	2
ICT	Internet	23	1
	Fixed phone	28	9
	No fixed phone	2	8
Of them, living in a retirement home		*1*	*8*
TOTAL		32	15