Fifty-five years of research into older people's civic participation: Recent trends, future directions

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Abstract

Background and objectives: This study analyzes critically existing knowledge concerning older people's civic participation, pinpoints gaps in the literature, and proposes new directions for research.

Research design and methods: We conducted a scoping review of literature on older people's civic participation. To conduct this review, we followed the five-step framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), and expanded by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010).

Results: Research into older people's civic participation has grown steadily over the past 55 years. However, the increasing number of publications mainly concerns collective forms of social participation, particularly volunteering, with other types of participation being more stable over time. Contextual as well as dynamic aspects of civic participation remain underdeveloped. Diversity of older people is scarcely represented in current research.

Discussion and implications: This scoping review identifies four critical gaps in the literature that should be at the forefront of future research. These are classified as conceptual, contextual, processual, and diverse aspects of research into older people's civic participation.

Keywords: volunteering; social participation; political participation; citizenship; scoping review

Background and Objectives

Older people's civic participation has emerged as a key topic for gerontology and public policy. International organizations, including the United Nations (2002) and European Commission (2012), have prioritized civic participation as a means to promote active and successful ways of aging. Growing scholarly interest has increased the number and diversity of publications on the theme. Existing systematic reviews have explored such aspects of older adults' civic participation as motivations for and barriers to volunteering (Principi, Chiatti, Lamura, & Frerichs, 2012) or benefits of volunteering in terms of physical and mental health (Jenkinson et al., 2013). However, to date, no scoping study has reviewed overall knowledge relating to this field. Responding to this gap, this article has two aims: first, to analyze critically existing knowledge concerning older people's civic participation and, second, to pinpoint knowledge gaps and propose new directions for research.

Older people's civic participation: Mapping the field

Civic participation is often considered the "gold" standard for active and successful aging. Over recent decades, scholars and policy-makers have contributed to the emergence of a "win-win" narrative, which emphasizes the twofold contribution of civic participation to improving older people's health and quality of life and to strengthening and developing their communities (e.g. Gonzales, Matz-Costa, & Morrow-Howell, 2015). Indeed, the literature describes a range of benefits associated with civic participation, which ranges from higher levels of cognitive functioning (Proulx, Curl, & Ermer, 2018) to redressing loneliness following widowhood (Carr, Kail, Matz-Costa, & Shavit, 2018). However, concerns have also been raised regarding the downside effects of promoting civic participation among elders, such as imposing an ethics of forced productivity (e.g. Martinson & Minkler, 2006).

The concept of civic participation itself remains highly contested, mainly due to its complexity and multidimensionality. According to Berger (2009), the term suffers from conceptual stretching. While some scholars assume a restrictive perspective on civic participation, limiting its extension to specific activities such as volunteering (e.g. O'Neill, Morrow-Howell, & Wilson, 2011), others use it as a catch-all concept to refer to any activity having the potential to create social capital (e.g. Putnam, 2000).

What is civic participation?

Referring to activities "…outside the own family and circle of close friends" (Ekman & Amnå, 2012, p. 291), civic participation can be described as active citizen participation "… in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future" (Adler & Goggin, 2005, p. 241). Several authors have created typologies of civic activities based on different classification criteria (e.g. Adler & Goggin, 2005; Berger, 2009; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Notwithstanding differences in the conceptual dimensions of proposed classifications, most authors agree on three basic axes of classification.

First, there is a differentiation between civic engagement (or involvement or attention) and civic participation. While civic engagement simply denotes psychological attentiveness to social and political issues, participation conveys the idea of action and must be conceived as behavioral in nature. Second, civic participation encompasses either activities conducted individually (termed individual, private or informal participation) or within a group or organization (termed collective, public or formal participation). Third, civic activities may primarily aim to help others, solve a community problem, or produce common good, with no manifest political intention (referred to as social, civil, community, pre-political or latent

political participation), or may explicitly seek to influence political outcomes (termed political participation or manifest political participation).

Combining the second and third 'behavioral' dimensions of classification generates a typology encompassing four kinds of civic activities (presented with selected examples in Table 1). Crucially, specified activities may vary in terms of intensity of participation. For instance, participation in community or political organizations may range from passive forms, such as mere membership of an organization, to more demanding forms, such as belonging to an organization's board.

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

What has been researched on older people's civic participation?

Beyond the type of civic activity considered, research on older people's civic participation can be divided according to the process model of participation into studies focused on antecedents, experiences, or consequences of participation (Wilson, 2012). Research on antecedents considers why some older people participate in civic activities while others do not. Factors associated with civic participation studied thus far include higher human and social capital resources (e.g. McNamara & Gonzales, 2011), personality variables such as higher extraversion (e.g. Mike, Jackson, & Oltmanns, 2014), or simultaneous engagement in other active aging pursuits, although the direction of this influence may vary according to the type of active aging activity considered (Dury, De Donder, et al., 2016). Further research addresses motivations for (e.g. Principi, Schippers, Naegele, Di Rosa, & Lamura, 2016) or barriers to (e.g. Petriwskyj, Serrat, Warburton, Everingham, & Cuthill, 2017) participation in civic activities.

A second type of study concerns older people's experiences of participation. There is growing interest in aspects such as the meanings that participants attach to participation (e.g.

Lilburn, Breheny, & Pond, 2018) or the experiential learning processes that occur within organizations (e.g. Piercy, Cheek, & Teemant, 2011). Several studies also focus on factors associated with retention, that is, with longer participation of older people in programs and organizations (e.g. Devaney et al., 2015). An emerging line of inquiry addresses the dynamics of participation across the life-course, such variations in volunteer behavior over the life span in response to life transitions (e.g. Lancee & Radl, 2014).

Studies focused on consequences address the effects of civic participation on people who participate. Thus, civic participation has been associated with better physical and mental health (e.g. Lum & Lightfoot, 2005), higher cognitive function (e.g. Proulx et al., 2018), lower mortality risk (e.g. Okun, Yeung, & Brown, 2013), higher well-being (e.g. Kahana, Bhatta, Lovegreen, Kahana, & Midlarsky, 2013), increased physical activity (e.g. Varma et al., 2016), or decreased loneliness (e.g. Carr et al., 2018).

When studying this issue among older people, regardless of the stage of the participation process addressed, previous literature highlights the importance of considering both who participates and where and when civic participation occurs. First, older people's civic participation may be understood from the perspective of diversity. As a group, older people encompass considerable diversity in terms of "… gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, health status, need for assistance with personal and domestic care, class, political persuasion, work and life experience" (Barnes, 2005, p. 257). This diversity influences who is able to participate in civic activities, as barriers for participation vary according to older people's embodied, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics (Petriwskyj et al., 2017), in which ways they are able to participate, as gender shapes the civic roles expected for older men and women (Nesteruk & Price, 2011), and what benefits accrue from participation, as these vary according to older people's socio-economic status (Morrow-Howell, Hong, & Tang, 2009). Second, older people's civic participation is shaped by the socio-political

contexts in which participation occurs (Goerres, 2009). Cross-national research (e.g. Haski-Leventhal, 2009) highlights the importance of understanding context when addressing older people's civic participation.

Research Design and Methods

We conducted a scoping review of literature on older people's civic participation. Scoping studies aim to identify the current state of knowledge and summarize gaps in research. Our review adopted the five-step framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), and expanded by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010), with a systematic team approach characterizing each step of the review.

Step 1: Identifying the research question(s)

The team identified two research questions for the scoping review: 1) what is the current knowledge on older people's civic participation?; and 2) what are the challenges that future research on older people's civic participation should address?

Step 2: Identifying relevant studies

Drawing on the help of a professional librarian, we developed an iterative process of selecting search terms and databases. Final searches were conducted in four databases in April 2017 (PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, Web of Science, and Scopus) using the keywords: (*Ageing* OR *Aging* OR *Aged* OR *Old age* OR *older people* OR *older persons* OR *older adults* OR *seniors* OR *senior citizens* OR *elder** OR *later life* OR *third age*) AND (all the combinations between *civic* OR *civil* OR *citizen** OR *political* OR *social* OR *community* AND *participation* OR *engagement* OR *involvement,* AND *volunteering*). It is important to note that from the list of civic activities detailed in Table 1 only volunteering was used as a keyword as the remainder did not produce additional results. While we limited our searches to empirical, review, or conceptual papers written in English, we did not use any year of

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publication limit. Searches were updated in May 2018 following the same criteria in order to add recent papers.

Step 3: Study selection

We scanned titles and abstracts, applying two inclusion criteria: (1) the paper's focus was on civic participation; (2) the paper's focus was on older people (defined as those aged at least 50) or on comparisons between older and younger age groups. Papers not focused on civic participation or having a broader focus, as well as papers not focused on older adults or including older adults and younger people but not analyzing results as a function of age, were therefore excluded from the review. Decisions about excluding or including papers began with a title and abstract review, followed by a full-text review when abstracts provided insufficient information to make a decision. Decisions about ambiguous papers were taken together by two or more authors.

Step 4: Charting the data

We extracted key information from each paper included in the final sample, and charted it using a data-charting form in Microsoft Excel (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). We developed and updated the data-charting form in meetings preceding data extraction, and at the initial and middle points of the process. Besides bibliographic information, we charted the type/s of civic activities considered in papers (according to the typology presented in Table 1), the type of paper (empirical, conceptual, review), and its objectives, key findings, and conclusions. We also gathered data on the methodology used in empirical papers (research design, data collection technique, and sample characteristics). To ensure consistency of approach to data extraction across the author team, on completing data-extraction, two authors reviewed independently a random selection of 15% of papers included in the sample,

classified them according to the above-mentioned criteria, and compared results (Levac et al., 2010). Agreement between researchers was full.

Step 5: Collating, summarizing, and reporting results

The last step involved two kinds of analysis (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). First, we calculated the frequencies of each of the categories included in the data-charting form using SPSS 20 in order to describe general trends in research on older people's civic participation, such as its extent, main characteristics, and distribution by type of civic activities. Second, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of the papers classified under the four types of civic activity.

Results

The initial search identified 1,178 papers after removal of duplicates. Screening of titles and abstracts and, when necessary, full-texts resulted in exclusion of 749 papers (Figure 1). Results from analysis of the remaining 429 papers included in the scoping review are presented in two sections. First, we provide a descriptive summary of the extent, characteristics, and distribution (according to type of civic participation addressed) of the reviewed papers. Second, we synthesize results from the qualitative content analysis of the papers included under each of the four types of civic activity identified in Table 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

The 429 papers included in the scoping review were published between 1963 and 2018, with a significant increase in the number of publications from the late 1990s and, notably, from 2006 (Figure 2). The number of publications peaked in 2006 (n = 31), corresponding with the publication of a special issue of the journal *Generations* which included 18 papers on older people's civic participation. The increasing number of

publications was mainly accounted for by collective forms of social participation, with other types of participation being more stable over time.

INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE

The number of papers published by type of civic activity revealed significant differences. While the overwhelming majority of papers (83.4%) focused on Type 2 of civic participation (social participation – collective forms), far fewer addressed Types 4 (political participation – collective forms; 13.3%), 3 (political participation – individual forms; 11.2%), and 1 (social participation – individual forms; 6.1%). Most papers included in the review were empirical (81.4%), with a smaller proportion of conceptual papers (16.6%), and only a few review papers (2.1%), almost all of which addressed Type 2 of civic activity (Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 AROUND HERE

Further analysis of the 348 empirical papers included in the review showed a clear dominance of studies using United States samples (54.7%), with samples from Australia (6.6%), the United Kingdom (4%), Canada (3.7%), The Netherlands (3.1%), and Spain (2.9%) lagging far behind. Other regions and countries of the world were underrepresented or absent altogether (Table 3).

INSERT TABLE 3 AROUND HERE

In terms of methodology, most empirical papers used quantitative designs (75.1%), with a small proportion of qualitative designs (21.8%), and very few mixed-methods designs (3.2%). Two-thirds of papers adopted cross-sectional (66.8%) and one-third longitudinal designs (33.2%). Most papers focused on older adults (84.2%), with few comparing older with younger age groups (15.8%). Table 4 presents methodological characteristics of the papers by type of civic activity.

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INSERT TABLE 4 AROUND HERE

Concerning conceptual aspects, most papers focused on antecedents of civic participation (61.3%). This applied especially to papers classified under Types 3 (100%) and 4 (85%) of civic activity. While slightly more than one-third (37%) of papers addressed outcomes of civic participation, this proportion varied significantly across types of civic activity (Table 4). Studies addressing older people's experiences of participation were far less frequent (14.3%), with most of these considering Type 2 of civic activity.

Most empirical papers included in the review treated participation as a dichotomous variable (71.6%), with a minority considering the intensity of this participation in terms of frequency (28.4%). Dynamic aspects of civic participation were considered only by 6.9% of papers. With regards to contextual aspects, 18 papers (5.2%) addressed the influence of organizational characteristics on civic participation, such as the relationship between organizational support provided to older volunteers and the benefits they accrue from participation (Tang, Choi, & Morrow-Howell, 2010), only three (0.9%) explored municipality and neighborhood influences, nine (2.6%) focused on rural areas, and 16 (4.6%) considered civic participation from a cross-cultural perspective. Diversity (defined as a central focus of the study on diverse and potentially marginalized groups of older people) was scarcely addressed, with only 16.3% of papers considering the characteristics of such groups as older people with disabilities or health problems (4%), older women (2.3%), older people belonging to racial or ethnic minorities (1.7%), institutionalized elders (1.1%), or older migrants (1.1%). Fifteen papers (4.3%) considered more than one dimension of diversity.

Type 1: Social participation – Individual forms

Twenty-six papers addressed individual forms of social participation. Most such studies focused on helping behaviors outside the family or 'informal' volunteering (n = 18),

with a smaller number addressing financial donations to charities, non-governmental organizations and/or philanthropic foundations (n = 5), and three papers including both types of activity. Individual forms of social participation were always discussed within the broader framework of formal volunteering activities, with only three papers addressing these activities by themselves. Two of these studies focused on charitable giving (e.g. James, 2009) and one on informal volunteering (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006).

Most papers in this type of civic activity addressed the antecedents of participation, including such aspects as older people's motivations (e.g. Jones & Heley, 2016), human and social capital (e.g. Cramm & Nieboer, 2015), transition into retirement (e.g. Van den Bogaard, Henkens, & Kalmijn, 2014), or previous experience with the activity (e.g. Erlinghagen, 2010). Seven papers focused on the outcomes of participation in terms of psychological well-being (e.g. Kahana et al., 2013), health (e.g. Burr, Han, Lee, Tavares, & Mutchler, 2018), or mortality risk (e.g. Ayalon, 2008). Only two papers addressed older people's experiences of participation; one explored the meanings attached by older women to this activity (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006), the other was a longitudinal study analyzing patterns of change and stability (Choi & Chou, 2010).

Contextual aspects were nearly absent, with only one paper exploring this type of participation in rural settings (Jones & Heley, 2016), and one cross-cultural study (Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006). Diversity was also scarcely addressed. Beyond the above-mentioned study of older women, two papers focused on the oldest old (e.g. Cramm & Nieboer, 2015), and one on older migrants' participation (Wright-St Clair & Nayar, 2017).

Type 2: Social participation – Collective forms

Three-hundred and fifty-eight papers considered older people's participation in formal volunteering. These papers addressed a broad array of volunteering organizations, including

health, educational, social, religious, entrepreneurial, and community organizations. Around half of papers focused either on antecedents (55.5%) or outcomes (42.8%) of older people's participation in this type of civic activity, with a significantly smaller proportion addressing experiences of participation (16.1%). Factors associated with volunteering studied thus far include human and social capital resources (e.g. McNamara & Gonzales, 2011), personality variables (e.g. Mike et al., 2014), or simultaneous engagement in other active aging activities (e.g. Dury, De Donder, et al., 2016). Papers also addressed motivations for volunteering, which have been explored using mostly Clary and colleagues' (1998) Volunteering Function Inventory (e.g. Principi, Schippers, et al., 2016), or barriers to participating in volunteering, which range from structural factors, such as financial costs, to socio-cultural influences, such as age discrimination (e.g. Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyj, 2007). Four of the nine review papers included in the sample addressed antecedents of participation in this type of civic activity.

Regarding outcomes of participation, 125 studies focused on understanding the effect of volunteering in variables such as physical and mental health (e.g. Lum & Lightfoot, 2005), cognitive function (e.g. Proulx et al., 2018), mortality risk (e.g. Okun et al., 2013), well-being (e.g. Kahana et al., 2013), physical activity (e.g. Varma et al., 2016), health-care use (e.g. Kim & Konrath, 2016), loneliness (e.g. Carr et al., 2018), or prospective engagement in lifestyle (e.g. Parisi et al., 2015) or productive activities (e.g. Morrow-Howell, Lee, McCrary, & McBride, 2014). Seven of the nine review papers on this type of civic activity focused on outcomes of participation.

Experiences of participation have been studied much less, with only 16.1% of papers focused on this issue. Most of this research addressed factors associated with retention of older people within volunteering organizations (e.g. Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Choi, 2010). Other papers addressed volunteers' perception of stressors (e.g. Varma et al., 2015),

satisfaction and enjoyment (e.g. Okun, Infurna, & Hutchinson, 2016), training experiences (e.g. Hainsworth & Barlow, 2003), or transformative learning processes (e.g. Lear, 2013).

While contextual and diversity aspects featured more frequently than in the case of other types of civic activity, only 12.3% and 16.4% of papers respectively addressed these aspects explicitly. The influence of organizational aspects on participation was present in 15 papers (e.g. Greenfield, Scharlach, & Davitt, 2016), neighborhood and community influences in only three papers (e.g. Gonzales, Shen, Wang, Martinez, & Norstrand, 2016), and issues related to volunteering in rural environments in seven papers (e.g. Warburton & Winterton, 2017). Eleven papers provided cross-cultural comparisons, mostly between European countries (e.g. Hank & Erlinghagen, 2010). Regarding diversity, volunteering by people with disabilities or health problems (n = 12; e.g. Principi, Galenkamp, et al., 2016), older women (n = 7; e.g. Seaman, 2012), elders belonging to racial or ethnic minorities (n = 5; e.g. Johnson & Lee, 2017), or institutionalized older people (n = 4; e.g. Leedahl, Sellon, & Gallopyn, 2017) were the more common subgroups explored.

Type 3: Political participation – Individual forms

Forty-eight papers addressed individual forms of political participation. Most of these focused on voting behavior (n = 45), either by itself (n = 24) or explored conjointly with other individual forms of participation, such as contacting representatives, writing letters/emails/articles with political content, signing petitions, or donating money to political parties and organizations (n = 21). Of the remaining papers, two addressed contacting behaviors, and one politicized forms of consumption.

All papers included under this type of civic activity focused on antecedents of participation, and explored therefore the association of this type of participation with such aspects as human and social capital variables (e.g. Nygård & Jakobsson, 2013), political

attitudes (e.g. Kam, Cheung, Chan, & Leung, 1999), or public policy changes (e.g. Campbell, 2003). Contextual aspects were scarcely addressed, with only two papers exploring this type of participation in rural settings (e.g. Erol, 2017), and four cross-cultural studies (e.g. Melo & Stockemer, 2014). Diversity was nearly absent. Two papers addressed this form of participation in older people with disabilities or health problems (e.g. Schur, Shields, & Schriner, 2005), and one each in people belonging to racial or ethnic minorities (Morrison, 2014), institutionalized elders (Leedahl et al., 2017), and older migrants (Rosenbaum & Button, 1989).

Type 4: Political participation – Collective forms

Fifty-seven papers focused on older people's collective political participation. Most of these studies analyzed either participation in political organizations or forums (n = 25) or in social movements (n = 15). Four papers addressed older people's volunteering for political campaigns and a further four their participation in protest activities. Nine papers considered more than one form of collective political participation. Most studies focused on antecedents of participation (85%), with smaller proportions addressing experiences (7.5%) or outcomes (12.5%) of participation.

Studies of antecedents assessed the association of participation with such aspects as human and social capital (e.g. Burr, Caro, & Moorhead, 2002), motivations (e.g. Serrat & Villar, 2016), political attitudes (e.g. Goodwin & Allen, 2000), political generation (e.g. Brown & Rohlinger, 2016), or personality variables (e.g. Serrat, Villar, Warburton, & Petriwskyj, 2017). Studies of experiences were less frequent, and explored issues including the meanings that older people attach to participation (for instance, as a key component of their personal identities; e.g. Fox & Quinn, 2012), opinions on different aspects of the process of participation (such as their perception of supporting and facilitating factors; e.g. Reed,

Cook, Bolter, & Douglas, 2008), or experiential learnings acquired while participating (which relate to social, political and instrumental domains; e.g. Serrat, Petriwskyj, Villar, & Warburton, 2016). Five studies explored outcomes of participation, analyzing the impact of participation in variables such as psychological well-being (Serrat, Villar, Giuliani, & Zacarés, 2017) or individuals' collective identity (Fraser, Clayton, Sickler, & Taylor, 2009).

The influence of organizational aspects on participation was present in three papers (e.g. Serrat et al., 2016), and issues related to participation in rural environments in two (e.g. Erol, 2017). Five papers provided cross-cultural comparisons, mostly between European countries (e.g. Nygård, Nyqvist, Steenbeek, & Jakobsson, 2015). Diversity barely featured, with only one paper addressing each of the following groups: older people with disabilities (Schur et al., 2005), older women (Jirovec & Erich, 1995), migrants (Rosenbaum & Button, 1989), and the oldest old (Kruse & Schmitt, 2015).

Discussion and Implications

This study aimed to analyze critically existing knowledge concerning older people's civic participation and to pinpoint knowledge gaps and propose new directions for research. A first conclusion arising from our scoping review is that research into older people's civic participation has grown steadily over the past 55 years, and particularly during the last two decades. This reflects a growing interest in academic research in promoting active and successful ways of aging, which echoes policy and practice recommendations by major international organizations (e.g. United Nations, 2002). However, our review also identifies four critical gaps and leading-edge research questions that should be at the forefront of future research (see Table 5). These can be classified as conceptual, contextual, processual, and diverse aspects of research into older people's civic participation.

INSERT TABLE 5 AROUND HERE

Critical gap 1: What do we know about participation? Broadening the scope of research into older people's civic participation

Results from this scoping review reveal that not all types of civic activity have received the same attention in research. While collective forms of social participation, especially formal volunteering, have dominated academic discourse on older people's civic participation, the other three types of civic participation have been largely overlooked. Regarding individual forms of social participation, authors (e.g. Nesteruk & Price, 2011) have consistently warned about the risks of ignoring the numerous contributions made by older people outside the sphere of formal volunteering, such as helping neighbors or friends who do not live in the same household. In a recent example of research addressing this gap, Burr and colleagues (2018) show that health benefits accruing from informal helping behaviors and formal volunteering differ by gender. However, while informal helping behaviors are the most common forms of older people's civic participation (e.g. Kruse & Schmitt, 2015), our review demonstrates that they have received the least attention in research. This may be due, in part, to the fact that informal helping behaviors could be more difficult to study, as they tend to occur in a more private sphere in comparison to other civic activities, but especially because these behaviors have been barely included within the most prominent models of active and successful aging (e.g. São José, Timonen, Amado, & Santos, 2017), even if they are of greater importance for older people than other activities commonly included within these models (e.g. Huijg et al., 2017).

There is also a striking difference between the number of papers concerned with individual and collective forms of political participation, and those addressing collective forms of social participation. This suggests that research into older people's civic participation has favored a conception of older people as 'contributors' to sustaining welfare states rather than as 'political activists' who may challenge the social and political processes

underlying welfare states (e.g. Martinson & Minkler, 2006). This implies a necessity to broaden the scope of research on older people's civic participation and advance towards a more nuanced understanding of what it means to participate civically in later life. In particular, research may benefit from bringing politics back into studies of older people's civic participation to consider not only ways in which older people may contribute to their communities but also ways in which they may support or contest prevailing social and political values and processes. Recent research on organizations representing seniors' interests (e.g. Doyle, 2014; Serrat, Warburton, Petriwskyj, & Villar, 2018) goes clearly in this direction. Thus, we need to move beyond conceiving of older people as social actors and consider them simultaneously as political agents, as a collective whose voices and opinions must be acknowledged in decision-making processes.

Critical gap 2: Where and when does participation take place? Addressing contextual aspects of older people's civic participation

Since older people's civic participation is decisively shaped by the particular contexts in which participation occurs, considering where and when participation takes place is essential to enhancing understanding of this phenomenon. However, our review shows that contextual aspects of civic participation remain underdeveloped at three levels. First, at the micro-contextual level, we need more research addressing organizational dimensions of participation. An emerging body of studies suggests that organizations play an important role in such aspects as the recruitment and retention of older participants (e.g. Devaney et al., 2015) or the benefits individuals obtain from participation (e.g. Hong & Morrow-Howell, 2013). Especially valuable are studies, such as that of Hong, Morrow-Howell and colleagues (2009), which incorporate systematically an institutional perspective on civic participation into their designs.

Second, at the meso-contextual level, civic participation is better understood when considering the broader context of neighborhood and community influences. The work of Dury, Willems, and colleagues (2016) shows that older people's perceptions of physical and social dimensions of neighborhood as well as objective municipality features are associated with participation in formal volunteering in later life. However, this meso-contextual dimension has not yet received sufficient attention in research, emphasizing the need for more research on neighborhood and community influences on civic participation in later life.

Third, at the macro-contextual level, most research has been conducted using U.S. samples, with other nations and world regions clearly underrepresented, if not absent. Socio-political contexts, which vary across countries and cultures, determine not only such aspects as possibilities and constraints for older people's civic participation, but also understandings of what it means to be civically involved (e.g. Chen & Adamek, 2017). Notwithstanding recent attempts to compare patterns of civic participation across countries in different world regions (Nygård et al., 2015; Serrat et al., 2018), too few studies address this macro-contextual level. Thus, there is a need for more evidence drawn from countries other than the USA, and especially for cross-cultural research comparing older people's civic participation across diverse socio-political contexts.

Critical gap 3: How does participation develop? Exploring experiences and dynamics of older people's civic participation

While our scoping review identifies a large literature on antecedents and outcomes of older people's civic participation, less is known about the process of participation in two key respects. First, older people's experiences while participating in civic activities are far less addressed than antecedents or outcomes of participation. Such experiences are important in understanding, for example, individuals' decisions around continuing or withdrawing from

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participation (e.g. Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Hong, 2009). To date, research has covered several related issues, such as the meanings participants attach to their participation (e.g. Lilburn et al., 2018) or the learning process they experience while participating (e.g. Piercy et al., 2011). However, more studies should explore older people's experiences of civic participation, and also the role of these experiences on individuals' decisions to stop or continue participating.

Second, older people's civic participation may also be considered a dynamic process, as individuals participate and withdraw from participation over the life-course. However, most previous studies focus exclusively on later life conditions and experiences to understand civic participation in old age. An exclusive reliance on this approach obscures the causes and consequences of civic participation trajectories over the life-course. Research needs to move on from identifying factors associated with civic participation among older people to examine how these factors unfold over time and influence individuals' participation in (or withdrawal from) civic activities across the life-course. Although some researchers have addressed dynamic facets of civic participation, showing for instance the variations in volunteer behavior over the life span in response to life transitions (e.g. Lancee & Radl, 2014), we need more studies that encompass individuals' biographical experiences and changes in civic participation as people age.

Critical gap 4: Who participates? Taking into account older people's diversity when studying civic participation

Older people's civic participation may also be understood from the perspective of diversity (Barnes, 2005). Older people, as a group, encompass considerable diversity and this influences who is able to participate in civic activities, as barriers for participation vary according to older people's embodied, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics (e.g.

Petriwskyj et al., 2017), the ways in which they are able to participate, as gender shapes the civic roles expected for older men and women (e.g. Nesteruk & Price, 2011), and what benefits accrue from participation, as these vary according to older people's socio-economic status (e.g. Morrow-Howell et al., 2009). Although consideration of diversity in studies of older people's civic participation has progressed considerably, there is merit in exploring challenges faced by marginalized groups of older people in achieving full inclusion in civic activities.

The small number of papers identified by this scoping review considered only one dimension of diversity, mainly having a disability or health condition, being a woman, or belonging to a racial or ethnic minority. In this respect, recent developments in intersectionality theory emphasize the importance of considering the non-additive effects of multiple systems of inequality experienced by people with particular social locations. Age by itself represents a system of inequalities, as it has material consequences and influences life chances. Analysis of older people's civic participation would benefit, therefore, from considering the interaction of age as a system of inequality with such other systems as gender, race, class, disability, or sexual orientation.

Limitations and conclusions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting this study's results. These include its focus on literature published in English and in peer-reviewed journals, which may exclude relevant literature published in other languages and/or formats. Moreover, space limitations preclude a more detailed presentation of results from the qualitative content analysis. Notwithstanding these issues, this is, to our knowledge, the first scoping review to address older people's civic participation. In highlighting the extent, range, and characteristics of research in this burgeoning field, the review confirms the key role of civic

participation as a way for older people to keep active and socially involved, and to have their voices heard and represented in political arenas. By synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying critical gaps in research, we hope that we can contribute to the further advancement of this important field of study.

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Table 1. Types of civic activity

	Civic participation	
	Social participation	Political participation
Individual forms	Type 1: Prosocial/helping/altruistic behaviours outside family Donation of money/in-kind supports to charities/NGOs	Type 3: Voting Contacting political representatives Donating money to political parties and organizations Signing petitions Writing letters/emails/blogs/articles with political content Boycotting and political consumption Other individual political manifestations
Collective forms	Type 2: Participation in volunteering, community, or charitable organizations	Type 4: Running for or holding a public office Working on campaigns Participation in political organizations or forums Protest activities Participation in social movement organizations Other collective political manifestations

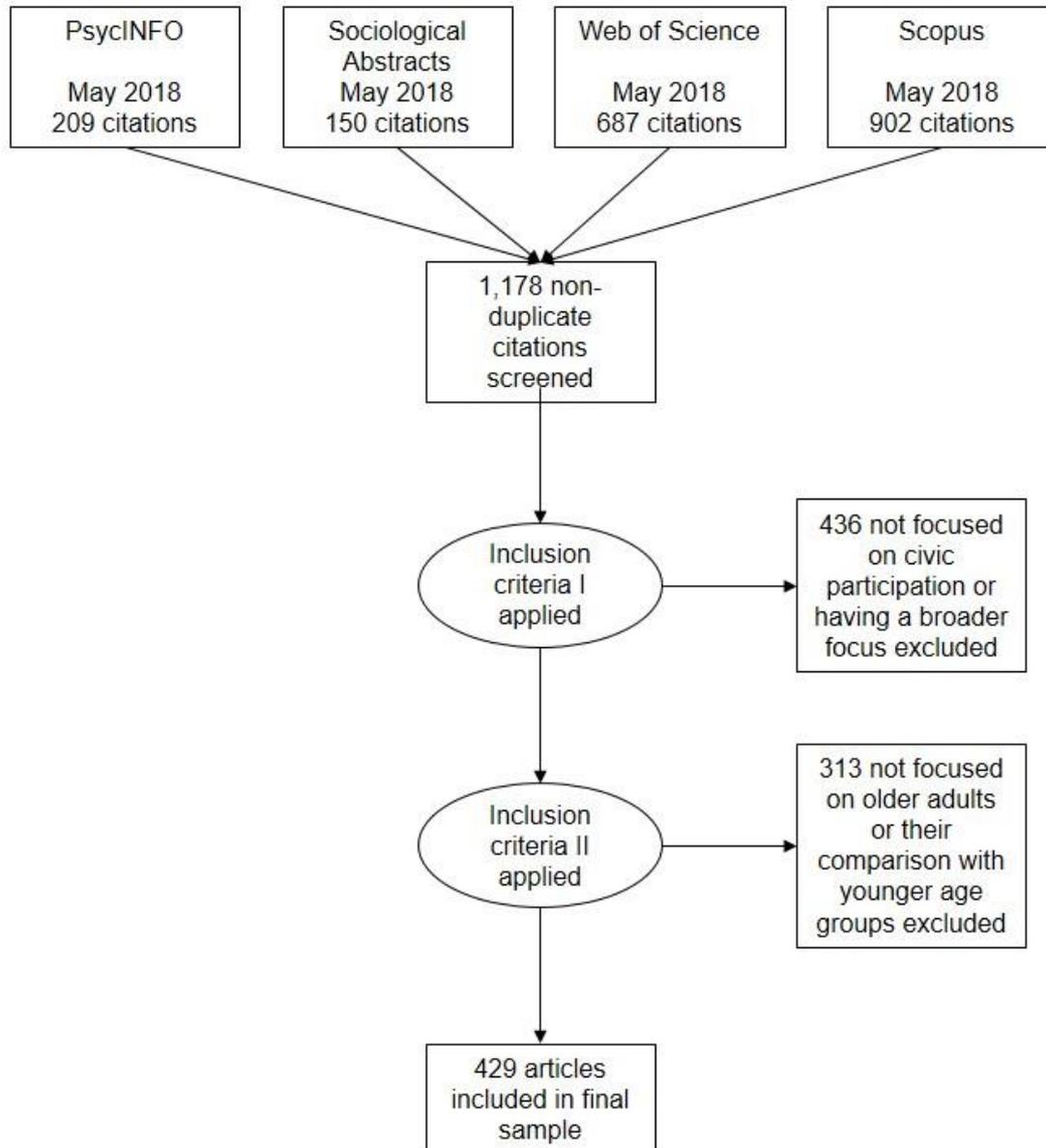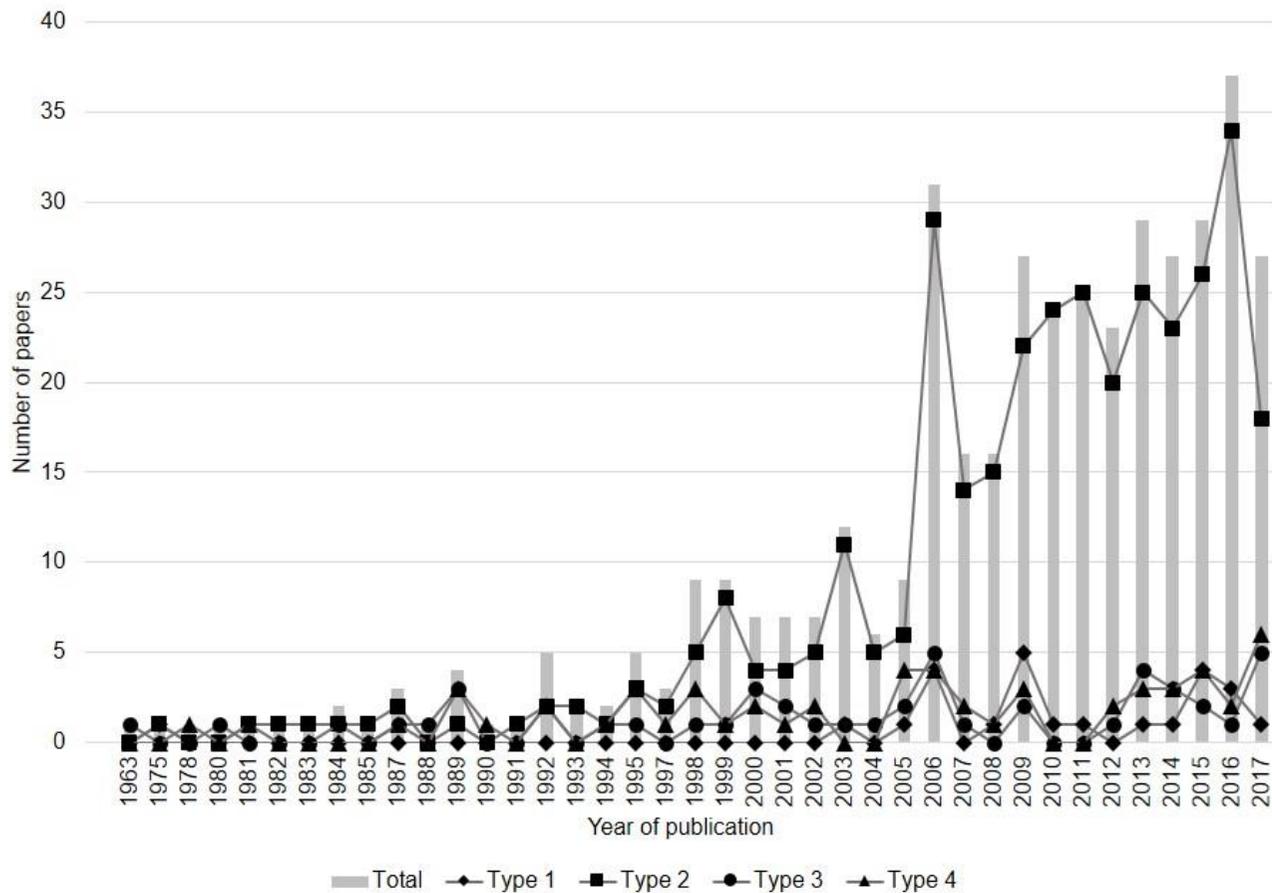Figure 1. Flow chart. Scoping review on older people's civic participation

Figure 2. Number of publications on older people's civic participation, by type of participation and year of publication. Period 1963-2017 (N = 429).

Note: Type 1: social participation, individual forms; Type 2: social participation, collective forms; Type 3: political participation, individual forms; Type 4: political participation, collective forms

Table 2. Number and types of paper included in the scoping review (in frequencies and percentages), by type of civic activity (N = 429).

	Type 1 (n = 26)	Type 2 (n = 358)	Type 3 (n = 48)	Type 4 (n = 57)	Total [a] (N = 429)
Types of paper					
Empirical	19 (73.1)	292 (81.6)	36 (75)	40 (70.2)	349 (81.4)
Review	1 (3.8)	9 (2.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9 (2.1)
Conceptual	6 (23.1)	57 (15.9)	12 (25)	17 (29.8)	71 (16.6)

[a] The sum of n may exceed N as a same paper could address more than one type of civic activity

Note: Type 1: social participation, individual forms; Type 2: social participation, collective forms; Type 3: political participation, individual forms; Type 4: political participation, collective forms

Table 3. Country of origin of the sample (empirical papers; N = 349)

Country of the sample	N	%
One country	323	92.6
USA	191	54.7
Australia	23	6.6
United Kingdom	14	4
Canada	13	3.7
Netherlands	11	3.2
Spain	10	2.9
Germany	8	2.3
China	7	2
Ireland	7	2
Hong Kong	6	1.7
Israel	4	1.1
Taiwan	4	1.1
Japan	3	0.9
Finland	3	0.9
New Zealand	3	0.9
Other countries (two or less publications)	16	4.6
More than one	26	7.4
Total	349	100

Table 4. Empirical papers' key methodological and conceptual characteristics (in frequencies and percentages), by type of civic activity (N = 349).

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Total [a]
	(n = 19)	(n = 292)	(n = 36)	(n = 40)	(n = 349)
Methodological aspects					
Methodology					
Quantitative	15 (78.9)	219 (75)	35 (97.2)	23 (57.5)	262 (75.1)
Qualitative	4 (21.1)	64 (21.9)	1 (2.8)	15 (37.5)	76 (21.8)
Mixed-methods	0 (0)	9 (3.1)	0 (0)	2 (5)	11 (3.2)
Research design					
Cross-sectional	6 (31.6)	186 (63.7)	29 (80.6)	37 (92.5)	233 (66.8)
Longitudinal	13 (68.4)	106 (36.3)	7 (19.4)	3 (7.5)	116 (33.2)
Data collection					
Questionnaire	14 (73.7)	220 (75.3)	33 (91.7)	25 (62.5)	264 (75.6)
Interviews	2 (10.5)	41 (14)	2 (5.6)	8 (20)	48 (13.8)
Focus-group	1 (5.3)	5 (1.7)	0 (0)	2 (5)	7 (2)
More than one	2 (10.5)	26 (8.9)	1 (2.8)	5 (12.5)	30 (8.6)
Age focus					
Focus on older adults	18 (94.7)	253 (86.6)	22 (61.1)	34 (85)	294 (84.2)
Focus on the comparison					

with younger age groups	1 (5.3)	39 (13.4)	14 (38.9)	6 (15)	55 (15.8)

Conceptual aspects

Process model [b]

Antecedents	12 (63.2)	162 (55.5)	36 (100)	34 (85)	214 (61.3)
Experiences	2 (10.5)	47 (16.1)	0 (0)	3 (7.5)	50 (14.3)
Outcomes	7 (36.8)	125 (42.8)	0 (0)	5 (12.5)	129 (37)

Frequency of

participation

Yes	8 (42.1)	84 (28.8)	10 (27.8)	7 (17.5)	99 (28.4)
No	11 (57.9)	208 (71.2)	26 (72.2)	33 (82.5)	250 (71.6)

Dynamic aspects

Yes	3 (15.8)	18 (6.2)	6 (16.7)	2 (5)	24 (6.9)
No	16 (84.2)	274 (93.8)	30 (83.3)	38 (95)	325 (93.1)

Contextual aspects

Organizational	0 (0)	15 (5.1)	0 (0)	3 (7.5)	18 (5.2)
Neighborhood	0 (0)	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (0.9)
Rural	1 (5.3)	7 (2.4)	2 (5.6)	2 (5)	9 (2.6)
Cross-cultural	1 (5.3)	11 (3.8)	4 (11.1)	5 (12.5)	16 (4.6)
No	17 (89.5)	256 (87.7)	30 (83.3)	30 (75)	303 (86.8)

Attention to diversity

Disability / health issues	0 (0)	12 (4.1)	2 (5.6)	1 (2.5)	14 (4)
Women	1 (5.3)	7 (2.4)	0 (0)	1 (2.5)	8 (2.3)
Racial / ethnic minorities	0 (0)	5 (1.7)	1 (2.8)	0 (0)	6 (1.7)
Institutionalized	0 (0)	4 (1.4)	1 (2.8)	0 (0)	4 (1.1)
Immigrants	1 (5.3)	3 (1)	1 (2.8)	1 (2.5)	4 (1.1)
Oldest old	2 (10.5)	2 (0.7)	0 (0)	1 (2.5)	2 (0.6)
Low-income	0 (0)	2 (0.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.6)
Veterans	0 (0)	1 (0.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.3)
Caregivers	0 (0)	1 (0.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.3)
More than one	0 (0)	11 (3.8)	2 (5.6)	3 (7.5)	15 (4.3)
No	15 (78.9)	244 (83.6)	29 (80.6)	33 (82.5)	292 (83.7)

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Note: Type 1: social participation, individual forms; Type 2: social participation, collective forms; Type 3: political participation, individual forms; Type 4: political participation, collective forms

Table 5. Overview of critical gaps and future leading-edge research questions

Critical gap	Future leading-edge research questions
Critical gap 1: Conceptual aspects	How do antecedents, experiences and outcomes of older people's participation differ according to the type of civic activity considered?
	In which ways do older people informally contribute to others in their communities? To what extent do older people engage in different types of political activity? How do these types of civic participation differ from formal volunteering?
Critical gap 2: Contextual aspects	To what extent do diverse socio-cultural and public policy contexts affect older people's civic participation?
	How do organizational, neighborhood and community aspects affect older people's civic participation?
Critical gap 3: Processual aspects	How do conditions early in life and at key stages in individuals' life courses affect their opportunities for civic participation in later life?

To what extent do current and past life experiences from and outside civic life affect older people's recruitment to and retention in civic activities, or benefits accruing from these activities?

Critical gap 4: Diverse aspects

What challenges do older people belonging to diverse and potentially marginalized groups experience when seeking to be fully included in civic participation?

To what extent do older people's experiences of participation and benefits arising from participation differ according to their embodied, cultural and socio-economic characteristics?