



Photo: Participants in the Luxembourg 'Get Involved' Event, European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012, in Luxembourg, 7 March 2012.  
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# Ageing Modernity: Growing old in the EU in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

How do urban growth and an ageing population affect or inform planning at the national and regional level in the European Union? At a time when economic stagnation, environmental concerns and demographic changes are affecting social and political discourses, they are also influencing urban form and development. Furthermore, as people are living longer, they still have much to contribute in their later years to their communities and to the economy. As a result, the policy and urban design paradigm is shifting as the relative importance of older people grows. By looking at the connections between ageing, design and the environment, and the role of policy and planning strategies, this brief seeks to understand how the EU plans for an ageing population and attempts to reshape communities in an increasingly challenging socioeconomic context. This brief looks at some of the regional initiatives and guidelines and highlights the role the EU is playing in influencing some of the development trends, particularly those in urban centres.

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# Ageing Modernity: Growing old in the EU in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Introduction

Two global trends that will have a significant impact on life in the foreseeable future are population ageing and urban growth. This brief provides a background to the issues that are being discussed in the European Union (EU), and the EU's efforts to address them at a regional level. This paper will focus on the urban dimension of ageing, reviewing regional efforts to plan for, and to address the needs of an ageing population, while they are at the same time coping with the pace of urban growth, highlighting that their solutions are very much intertwined.

An ageing population will have an impact on societies, in particular employment and the labour market, quality of life<sup>2</sup>. As the dependency burden increases, it will put a strain on health and social services and the pension system, and will have significant implications for public spending. At the moment, Europe has the highest proportion of older people globally,<sup>3</sup> and as such, its policies and practices are closely observed by nations that will have to deal with a greying population in time to come. The EU has recognised the challenges posed by population ageing, and considers addressing them as part of its regional agenda, as pointed out in the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs.<sup>4</sup> It

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<sup>2</sup> 'Quality of life' has been described as "a broad ranging concept, incorporating in a complex way, a person's health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs, and relationship to salient features of the environment" (*A Guide for the Development of a Comprehensive System of Support to Promote Active Ageing*, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (2011) *Active ageing and solidarity between generations: A statistical portrait of the European Union 2012*

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2010b) *A challenge and an opportunity for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth*. COM (2010)2020, 3 March 2010.

recognises that solutions will come from innovative products, services, and business models that are at the same time more cost effective. This is why the EU is encouraging innovation, supporting R&D, and providing funding for activities that address the attendant issues of population ageing, as this background brief will detail. Addressing the twin problems of demographic change and urban growth needs initiatives that target all three dimensions of living: home, work, and the wider community.

People are now both living longer and having fewer children, an ageing population being the result of the doubling of the life expectancy of individuals and the halving of the birth rate during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The full extent of the impact of ageing populations has yet to emerge, but it will have significant consequences on the restructuring of the economy, reshaping the family, and will perhaps even redefine politics, and hence indirectly impact the geopolitical order. With the proportion of older people rising, the power of the 'grey vote' is getting stronger, and the alienation of older voters could lead to losses at the polls, especially if this constituency were successfully mobilised to vote together to protect their common interests. National and local administrations need to be prepared for the changing composition and lifecycle needs of the communities to establish cities that are conducive to active ageing. Furthermore, changing physical capabilities of older populations and health-related issues associated with older populations like chronic diseases also impact on individuals' mobility, and as such needs to be considered when looking at the built environment.

The EU has thus far maintained a high level of social protection for its population, but increasingly there are questions over how this can be sustained. This is especially critical in light of the rapidly expanding numbers of older people in the present context of the imposition of national austerity measures across the EU and concomitant spending cuts to address the debt crisis faced by several of the EU member states.

The EU is adopting a different approach towards older people as a growing number of people continue to enjoy good health way beyond their 'retirement' age. They are now viewed as both an economic opportunity, and as valuable participants in the labour market. This is affecting both society and the economy as they are being re-organised to encourage the continued active participation of older people with their skills and experiences.

The year 2012 has been designated the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.<sup>5</sup> The Slovenian presidency in 2008 first called for a European Year dedicated to the theme of Active Ageing. According to the Commission, the European Year's objectives are to (1) promote active ageing in employment, (2) facilitate active ageing in the community, (3) promote healthy ageing and independent living, and lastly (4) encourage solidarity between generations.<sup>6</sup> The European Year offers an opportunity to raise awareness and generate support toward the EU's goal to 'create an age-friendly environment allowing all citizens to lead more active and independent lives for longer',<sup>7</sup> and works toward the goal of creating an "age-friendly Union" by 2020 by "fostering solidarity between generations", through the participation and interaction of all age groups, and by providing adequate support and social protection. While population ageing affects all dimensions of life, this brief will pay particular attention to the urban dimension, to see how it figures in the EU's ageing policies.

## Overview and definitions

Population ageing shifts the balance between the number of young and old people and generally results in an increase in the proportion of seniors, and a decrease in the proportion of children. As a result, the workforce shrinks and the numbers of pensioners and retired continue to increase. Population ageing can be measured by projecting the time taken for the proportion of seniors or older people to double from 7 per cent to 14 per cent. In developed economies, this is generally faster. Additionally, while the term 'older people' is vague, in demographic studies, it generally refers to people aged 50 and over. This brief focuses more on demographic change and implications on the elderly, aged 65 and above.

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2011a) Decision No 940/2011/EU, on the European Year 2012

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32011D0940:EN:NOT>

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2010c) *Accompanying document to the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year of Active Ageing (2010)*. SEC(2010) 1002 final. 6 Sep 2010.

<http://europa.eu/ey2012/BlobServlet?docId=6780&langId=en>

<sup>7</sup> AGE Platform Europe (2012) 'European Year 2012'.

<http://www.age-platform.eu/en/2012-european-year-on-active-ageing-and-intergenerational-solidarity>

Europeans are living better and longer – it is estimated that over half of the population of Western Europe will be over 50 years of age in 2030. In terms of population age, 19 of the world's 20 "oldest" countries can be found in Europe. For example, Germany, which has had a low birth rate for the last 35 years, has been seeing its population decline since 2003. By 2030, it is expected that over 26% of its population will be above 65 years of age, and the total number of people over the age of 60 will have risen by more than 50 per cent between 2004-2030.<sup>8</sup>

The most pressing and apparent effects of population ageing will be its socioeconomic and budgetary impacts. Opinions from the population are understandably different across the member states, towards how they view work, retirement, pensions, voluntary work and the challenges of ageing.<sup>9</sup> But there is consensus that population ageing has implications on social care and services. An increase in public spending toward age-related issues, such as healthcare and adapted housing, can be expected. They however, will be less affordable as there will also be an overall shrinking in the size of the workforce, and a likely corresponding reduction in GDP growth rate, which in turn will put a strain on social spending.<sup>10</sup>

While there are currently four persons working for every retired person in Europe, there will only be two persons working for every retired person in 2060. The size of the working-age population (those between 15 and 64) in the EU will shrink by 40 million by 2050 and the number of people in the actual workforce will drop by 30 million, from 238 million (2008) to 207 million (2050). It is obvious that these demographic developments will have serious economic and social consequences.

The European Commission is now pursuing an active ageing agenda in the hope that it will relieve the dependency burden and revive the economy. Its 2009 Communication, *Ageing - A Renewed Strategy to Tackle Europe's Demographic Challenge*, sought to address the

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<sup>8</sup> Eurostat (2011) 'Active ageing and solidarity between generations: A statistical portrait of the European Union 2012'.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of perceptions of ageing and older people in the EU, see: European Commission (2012a) *Special Eurobarometer 378, 'Active ageing'*. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Jan 2012.

<sup>10</sup> For a background to the debates on the future of pension systems in the EU, see: European Commission (2010d) *Towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pension systems*, SEC(2010) 830.

challenges that an ageing population poses in the economic, budgetary and social dimensions.<sup>11</sup> The EU uses the World Health Organization definition of active ageing, it being the ‘process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age’.<sup>12</sup> As a result of integrating active ageing approaches to policies, individuals can ‘participate in society according to their needs, desires and capabilities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they need assistance’.<sup>13</sup>

In the EU, the concept of active ageing places an emphasis on the continued participation of older people in the labour market and in economic and social life, while at the same time providing for the needs of old age, such as assisted living, adult care, health monitoring, etc. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion László Andor has stated that ‘The key to tackling the challenges of an increasing proportion of older people in our societies is “active ageing”: encouraging older people to remain active by working longer and retiring later, by engaging in volunteer work after retirement, and by leading healthy and autonomous lives’.<sup>14</sup>

The EU’s commitment to the active ageing agenda is based on its core values, found in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights, where article 21(i) prohibits discrimination based on any ground, including disability and age, and article 25 ‘recognises the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life’.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note how the elderly is now additionally being viewed in basic economic (or even prognosticating econometric extrapolation) terms, possibly brought about by a different understanding of work and

retirement, and the necessity of their participation in the labour market to relieve the dependency burden. The EU provides financial support to projects that contribute toward active ageing primarily through the European Social Fund (ESF), whose active labour market measures for the 2007-13 programming period amount to €29 billion. However, funding initiatives and implementing policies that encourage active ageing are not enough, and more has to be done to prevent the marginalisation of older people. This can be done, for example, by addressing potential barriers to continued employment, preventing age discrimination and redesigning the lived environment so that as many people as possible are able to be self-sufficient.

One of the emerging issues of active ageing is the question of intergenerational solidarity, which has implications on social cohesion and productivity. Creating a socially cohesive inter-generational society needs the awareness of each individual’s role in his/her community and in society. The idea of solidarity between generations aims to ‘reverse the idea that older persons are a burden on society’.<sup>16</sup> As the working population is increasingly asked to pay for the needs of a growing elderly population, there is a potential conflict between generations over the distribution of resources. In the context of demographic change, policy and institutional changes are necessary, so as to ensure intergenerational solidarity and reduce any potential conflicts.

With rising life expectancy, increasing numbers of older citizens feel they still have a lot to experience and contribute after retirement<sup>17</sup> (**see Box 1**), or in later stages of life, whether as workers, consumers, volunteers or carers. The participation of older people in the labour force and in social life also serves to limit the isolation many of them may experience as a result of old age. To this end, extending life-long learning and providing opportunities for self-improvement are widely encouraged, allowing for older people to actively contribute to society, and maximising opportunities for their physical, social and mental health. The EU is trying to achieve this by allowing the elderly to play a larger role in society, by keeping them active both in the community and in the economy, while at the same time making adaptations to family policies and generating innovative solutions for new working careers which are life-cycle based.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission (2009b) *Dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the EU (2009 Ageing Report)*, COM(2009) 180 final. 29 April 2009.

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organization (2002) *Active Ageing – A Policy Framework*, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission (2007a) *Ageing Well in the Information Society. An i2010 Initiative. Action Plan on Information and Communication Technologies and Ageing*. COM(2007) 332 final. 14 June 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Andor, László (2011) ‘Active Ageing: The European Union’s Employment Initiatives’, *The Journal* (AARP International, Winter 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Official Journal of the European Union (2010) ‘Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union’, (2010/C 83/02). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:EN:PDF>

<sup>16</sup> European Commission (2010a) ‘Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Active Ageing (2012)’ COM(2010) 462.

<sup>17</sup> Eurobarometer 387, op cit.



**Box 1****Retirement**

The concept of a retirement, or a social insurance programme for old age, was first introduced in Germany by Bismarck in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The retirement age is the age at which one is expected to cease employment, and is eligible to receive a pension or other government benefits. The statutory retirement age varies across the EU. When it was first introduced, one's life expectancy was about 65 years. It is now about 30 years longer in Europe.<sup>18</sup> As such, this means that many can expect up to 30 years of retirement, even though there are many more 'workable' years in one's life. Often, the lack of gradual retirement options hinders longer careers. With this in mind, more flexible work arrangements that encourage people to work longer, such as combining part time work and partial pension and volunteering programmes for older people are being encouraged in EU member states. Attitudes towards retirement are changing, with a more flexible concept of work being adopted, and many individuals are continuing to work into their later years or volunteer in other organisations. According to *Eurobarometer* (Special report 378 on Active Ageing), 27 per cent of Europeans aged 55 and over engage in activities and voluntary work in a variety of organisations and devote on average 14 hours per month to such activities.

### **Ageing and the Urban Environment: Towards a framework of urban design for greying cities?**

Considering demographic trends, cities need to be designed with an ageing population in mind, and where possible adapted to be age-friendly. Already, 75 per cent the EU's population resides in cities (2007), a figure expected to reach 85 per cent by 2050, and 85 per cent of the EU's GDP is created in cities.<sup>19</sup> However, while cities are vibrant and attractive places for the young and economically active, they do not necessarily

<sup>18</sup> See the report by: European Commission (2009c) *2009 Ageing Report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU-27 Member States (2008-2060)* for details on retirement ages in the EU, and demographic statistics and prediction. (DG Economic and Financial Affairs, 2009)

[http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/publication14992\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication14992_en.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Eurocities (2011) *EUROCITIES Response to the Fifth Cohesion Report* p.3

cater for older persons as well. Many barriers, physical or otherwise, abound that make cities and the urban environment unattractive or unsafe for older people. This then results in many choosing to retire elsewhere, though many wish to remain or are unable to leave. As the urban environment has a large impact on the health and quality of life for older persons, a radical shift is necessary in terms of designing social and physical infrastructure catering for an ageing population, and to make cities ideal environments for older people. It is also far more efficient to provide health and age-related services in cities, and thus cities must remain attractive places for people to age. The smart transformation of cities has the potential to solve many of the most pressing issues, though barriers such as high start up costs and uncertainty with regard to investment returns need to be addressed.

Lifestyle changes are accompanying changing economic and social needs of seniors, and to this end, architects and urban planners have a central role in planning and redesigning for "senior living", and providing many of the answers that revolve around ageing, community, mobility and quality of life. The challenge is making it possible for individuals to live actively and independently for longer, in their preferred environment, so that they can take care of own health and well-being. Making cities friendly for all ages by adaptations to the physical environment that have an effect on personal mobility will also improve the social environment. The move toward pedestrian-friendly, high density and green living will also encourage older citizens to remain in cities, allowing for more efficient delivery of services and care.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought about new perspectives on form, function and history. Architects and planners are facing different circumstances as demographic shifts, together with technological innovation and the need for a low-carbon economy have necessitated a new paradigm for urban planning and design. According to Nan Ellin, 'urban design theory and the study of society are harking back to their pre-modern humanistic traditions, with implications for the roles of the designer and the social scientist and for their respective methods and goals', and she explains this as a result of a broader definition of architecture, an increased sensitivity to physical and social contexts, more collaboration with other specialists and users and an emphasis on local solutions.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ellin, Nan (1999) *Postmodern Urbanism*, p.289.

The changing political and social landscape is also redefining the role of architecture and design, prompting a shift in how urban design and planning is being approached with regards to ageing and urbanisation. Spaces and places are becoming ever more tailored to the elderly, the 21<sup>st</sup> century's new social subject, and these practices have the potential to change our approach toward our living environment. Instead of large-scale urban infrastructural developments, now innovative products and services have the potential to make the greatest impact: objects, tools, and devices that are more user-friendly, functional, and have the potential to make larger numbers of individuals even more self-sufficient,<sup>21</sup> and adaptations to the home and environment that will allow older people to remain in their homes instead of in institutional care.

Experimental architect and designer Antonio Scarponi has coined the term 'Ageing Modernity' to describe the current reality of an ageing population in the EU, defining it:

The European territory was designed to control the fast demographic growth that occurred with the modern era and its socio-sanitarian achievement. The evolution of the modern process reached now a state of demographic balance that would collapse without the migration of other populations from other geographical areas of the world. Modernity generated an ageing society that brings at stake the social state of Europe: who will pay our retirement? A new modern program is now installed. A program that redesigns our city to support an elderly population and to prevent their falls: major cause of impairment and socioeconomic cost of an ageing modernity.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, to allow older people to remain living in cities and to live independently at home for longer, they must be attractive to older people and conducive to active ageing, as this will contribute positively to the social and economic life of cities. As such, urban planning, universal design, accessibility, and ageing-related services must be considered together. This includes, but is not limited to adapted housing, affordable and accessible health assistance, transport, civic engagement and personal safety.

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<sup>21</sup> Scarponi, Antonio (2012) 'Design for Eternal Youth', *Domus*, issue 959 (June 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Scarponi, Antonio (2008) 'Ageing Modernity', in 'An Incomplete Dictionary of Europe's Future', *East Coast Europe* (Markus Miessen, ed.)

Demand for specialist housing is on the rise, and much more can be done to increase the range of housing options available and for different living arrangements suited to older people that might require assistive adaptations to housing and infrastructure. If low-level support and housing maintenance schemes can be provided, they might prove highly cost-effective methods of promoting the well-being of older people and reducing dependency, with the potential to reduce expenditure on public services. As housing is central to well-being and social inclusion, meeting the housing needs of older people should be seen as a priority policy goal. Acknowledging that senior communities need not be isolated from the communities around them, efforts are being made to provide more senior-friendly designed and accessible homes within cities so that individuals can continue to contribute to its social and economic life and are better integrated into the wider community, thus improving the intergenerational mix.

Fortunately, independent and active living might be possible with the widespread adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) solutions, which has the potential to deliver remote and personalised healthcare, and better communication between citizens and authorities. However, political and legal frameworks and barriers remain in a fragmented market, with a lack of interoperability between services and across borders. Furthermore, there are high costs to the development of various ICT services.

Suchat Udomsopagit posits a future, of which early indicators show many trends he predicted already taking place, where physical space has to interact with information space and cognitive space. With regard to ageing societies, this will have an effect on three areas: system innovation, service innovation, and architectural innovation.<sup>23</sup> The first refers to the organisation form of communities and the transformation in society and institutions that have an effect on the outlook, values and behaviour of individuals. He uses the example of information technology that has enabled the 'overlapping of physical and virtual worlds' to show how the ways people live have been changing, and the possibility of how system innovation and its effects on the organisation form of communities have the potential to accommodate marginalised groups like the elderly and disabled. Next, as a result of ICT infrastructure, the dissemination of knowledge and

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<sup>23</sup> Udomsopagit, Suchat (2011) 'Innovation and the Megacity: Reflections from a Grey City', *Trendnovation Southeast* (Issue 7: Grey Cities), pp 6-8.

information, the increasing importance of networks, both physical and virtual are shaping information processing, and are referred to as 'service innovation'. Universal access to resources and changing forms of interaction between knowledge providers and users are enabling life-long learning, and are making ubiquitous health monitoring possible. Preventive medicine and self-care will also reduce the burden on health services while developments in health and information technology will also allow the infrastructure for telemedicine and personalised medicine.

City planners and communities need to respond more effectively to challenges posed by an ageing population to ensure the built environment is well-suited to address the range of emerging issues posed by a growing and ageing population. People of different ages share the city but not all public spaces are suited to young and old alike. The connections between social policy and urban design is more evident as the design of the built environment moves towards spaces that aim to be accessible to all, and that facilitates generational interaction, allowing for urban environments for healthy and active ageing. Adapting homes and local environment, services, and transport to make them more accessible for older people so they can continue with social activities has positive implications on the isolation that older people normally experience as a result of limited mobility, especially as a large proportion of them are reliant on public transport. This requires designing public space and the built environment that is accessible to individuals from a wide spectrum of age group and for the use of the greatest possible number of people, a concept known as 'Universal Design'. Pioneered by architect Ronald L. Mace, this concept stands for simple, flexible and equitable design that allows for objects to be accessible to both able-bodied and disabled individuals.

While the forces influencing urban change tend to be economically focused, with attention paid to the needs of the labour market, engaging older-people in decision-making within their neighbourhood and making sure older people feature in policies of regeneration and sustainable urban development ensure that age-friendly considerations are part of the planning and development equation.

In the UK, the establishment of elder councils at the local level has done much for long-term sustainability in cities such as Newcastle and Manchester (e.g. Elders Council of Newcastle, Valuing Older People Manchester), but this has yet to be replicated at the

national or regional level.<sup>24</sup> We are already seeing new forms of living adapted to the ageing social structure and to integrate the perspective of ageing into the design of urban landscapes and its communities, city planners are moving towards dense, mixed-use communities. City planning networks have also been playing an important role in functioning as knowledge networks, highlighting the ageing agenda, and have been working to incorporate the ageing perspective into the planning agenda (**see Box 2**).

#### *Box 2*

##### ***City planning networks***

City planning networks play an important role in incorporating the ageing agenda into urban planning, and are useful for information exchange, planning education, and the consolidated and availability of urban research and data. The Council of European Municipalities (CEMR) for example, aims to 'create an inclusive and accessible local environment that facilitates active ageing and has a positive effect on health and on the quality of life for all generations', supporting policies, services and structures will provide support and enable people to contribute to their communities and to age actively and independently. The ESF Age Network,<sup>25</sup> co-funded by the Dutch Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment and comprising of public authorities from 14 EU Member States and regions, functions in a similar way, making use of European Social Funds to manage the ageing workforce in the EU. It also makes recommendations and guidelines to support policy-makers in the development and implementation of programmes that promote healthy and productive working lives. Lastly, Eurocities is a network of major European cities open to those with over 250 000 inhabitants, with 133 members in 34 countries, also functions in a similar way, and its Social Affairs Forum has been bringing together representatives from civil society, city councils and European institutions for discussions on how to make European cities more age-friendly, focusing on how cities can adapt their services and infrastructure to ageing.

<sup>24</sup> AGE Platform Europe was established in 2001 to coordinate the work of older people's organisations at the regional level, and to promote the interests of people aged 50+. Co-financed by its members and the Commission, it now counts over 165 organisations in its network, with the European Year 2012 as one of its biggest achievements. However, it does not have any formal influence in policy and decision-making processes at the EU level.

<sup>25</sup> European Social Fund Age Network (website: [www.esfage.eu](http://www.esfage.eu))

## Planning for age-friendly environments: What role for the EU?

As the European continent deals with an ageing society, the EU is attempting to drive policy change in a number of areas relating to ageing through various regional frameworks and guidelines. Policy responses being taken at the member state level to accommodate an ageing population entail pension reform, increasing the state pension age, and outlawing age discrimination. The open method of coordination is used to benchmark social protection and social inclusion policy and monitors pension reform in member states.

The EU complements these national strategies with a number of region-wide programmes which aim at raising awareness and building consensus around issues related to ageing, such as programmes to involve older people more in social and economic life, and to improve technology and infrastructure so as to facilitate autonomous living. However, it has a more important role to play in developing initiatives that respond to barriers such as coordination failures, lack of interoperability and regulatory barriers at the national or sub-national level.

Fostering healthy, cohesive communities that accommodate a wide range of age groups needs planning that involves a range of stakeholders and different agencies, all of which have a critical role to play. The challenge for policy makers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the incorporation of the ageing agenda to the urban agenda – to understand, evaluate and plan for the needs of older people in cities that are growing denser, where individuals are increasingly living in smaller urban households, and engaging with each other differently, while ensuring that urban regions remain competitive, productive, inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

Policies that aim to cope with the EU's ageing population date back to the Stockholm European Council (2001),<sup>26</sup> which pointed toward a diminishing working-age population, and a strategy was laid to increase productivity and employment rates. Plans were also made to reform healthcare, pension and long-term care systems. Active and healthy ageing is also one of the key initiatives of the European

<sup>26</sup> European Council (2001) Presidency Conclusions of the Stockholm European Council, 23-24 March 2001. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.%20ann-r1.en1.html](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.%20ann-r1.en1.html)

Innovation Partnership (EIP-AHA), a Europe 2020 initiative that makes use of structural funds for research and innovation projects. Some of these projects include those that promote age-friendly environments across the EU (see Box 3).

### Box 3

#### **Age-Friendly Cities**

The Global Network of Age Friendly Cities is a global initiative by the World Health Organization to create a network of likeminded cities focusing on the health and well being of older individuals. It functions as a learning network for city administrations to prepare for ageing populations and increased urbanisation, through partnerships, exchange of best practices and by providing technical support and training. Age-friendly cities focus on the eight domains of city life that influence the quality of life of older people, and that support active and healthy ageing, with city councils working alongside urban planners to make necessary changes in: 1. Outdoor spaces/buildings, 2. Transportation, 3. Housing, 4. Social participation, 5. Respect & social inclusion, 6. Civic participation & employment, 7. Communication & information, 8. Community support & health services. Over 40 cities signed the 'Dublin Declaration' at the culmination of the first WHO international conference on age-friendly cities in September 2011, committing to work towards meeting actions based on the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide.<sup>27</sup>

As noted above, digital technologies are now playing a central role in adapting public policy and the urban environment to an ageing population, especially in providing the data and means for the development and delivery of services, and in making them more accessible and effective for an ageing population, especially in the area of health.<sup>28</sup> The EU is encouraging governments and local administration to adapt and prepare for greying societies with the use of ICT.<sup>29</sup> The

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organization (2007) *Global Age-Friendly Cities, A Guide*.

[http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global\\_age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> European Commission (2007a) *Ageing Well in the Information Society*.

<sup>29</sup> See also, the European Union's brief *ICT for Societal Challenges* for an overview of how it is using ICT to address current challenges such as healthcare, transport, public services and independent living for older people, and profiles of a number of projects funded by the EU.



Commission's ICT agenda supports ageing as part of the Digital Agenda for Europe, with the goal of better quality of care and controlled medical costs.<sup>30</sup>

It regards older people as potential users of technology and aims to encourage the use and adoption of ICT technologies by health authorities, and to foster the development of technologies for them by industry actors with the goal of encouraging and enabling citizens to continue staying active and to live independently for longer.<sup>31</sup> With 'eHealth' and the better management of health data, individuals and health service authorities will be able to manage the health and lifestyles of the public and patients with far more efficiency and accuracy, encouraging the prevention early diagnosis of diseases and making personalised therapy on a large scale possible.<sup>32</sup>

This action plan is complemented by the Communication 'Ageing Well in the Information Society', adopted by the Commission in 2007,<sup>33</sup> seeking to coordinate and develop ICT technologies to enable older people to prolong their social and working lives, and to encourage a higher quality of life and degree of independence. Similarly, the Commission's Smart Cities and Communities - European Innovation Partnership (SCC)<sup>34</sup> that was launched in July 2012 focuses on urban technology solutions to urban challenges by pooling research resources from energy, transport and ICT, in partnership with cities.

Through a 'joint technology agenda' between cities and industry, the SCC uses cities as labs and testing grounds for market-oriented smart urban solutions to demonstrate their advantages, with subsequent EU-

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<sup>30</sup> For an overview of the Digital Agenda for Europe, see [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/newsroom/cf/digital-agenda.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/digital-agenda.cfm) and [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/newsroom/cf/pillar.cfm?pillar\\_id=49&pillar=ICT%20for%20Social%20Challenges](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/pillar.cfm?pillar_id=49&pillar=ICT%20for%20Social%20Challenges) for an list of actions it is supporting under Pillar VII (ICT for Social Challenges).

<sup>31</sup> A list of research projects funded by the EU under the Sixth (2003-6) and Seventh (2007-13) Framework Programmes in the area of ICT for ageing well can be found at: [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/einclusion/docs/ageing/rtd\\_projects.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/docs/ageing/rtd_projects.pdf). You might list some here

<sup>32</sup> See eHealth Governance Initiative (eHGI) for more information: <http://www.ehgi.eu/default.aspx>

<sup>33</sup> European Commission (2007a) *Ageing Well in the Information Society*.

<sup>34</sup> European Commission (2012b) Communication 'Smart Cities and Communities – European Innovation Partnership' C(2012) 4701 final, Brussels, 10 July 2012.

wide implementation of successful applications. SCC funding has been increased substantially from €81 million in 2012 to €365 million in 2013, and 'Smart Cities & Communities' an important part of Horizon 2020, an EU framework programme for research and innovation in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020). Mobility and Transport is one of the Working Groups in the Smart Cities Stakeholder Platform that aims to make a big difference in the quality of life of older people in urban areas.

The EU has been encouraging age-related research and development and in light of a greying and shrinking workforce, providing incentives for more flexible labour market arrangements. In terms of solutions to ageing-related issues, the EU is aiming to foster the growth and expansion of the EU's industry in this field and many actions take into account the economic dimension, encouraging the contribution and partnership of private organisations to research and delivery of services, all while encouraging active ageing. The Commission repeatedly highlights the economic significance of ICT technologies in enabling more independent living and efficient delivery of services.<sup>35</sup> As it is a potentially large market for ICT providers of products and services, efforts are being made for the removal of regulatory barriers and encouraging interoperability towards a single European market of ICT services for the ageing population. Additionally, encouraging entrepreneurship in older age groups and skills upgrading and lifelong learning opportunities will facilitate older persons' involvement in the economy and prolong their contribution to the labour market.

The EU has also been building an anti-age discrimination agenda, providing incentives for older people to stay in employment and for companies to employ older people, and in encouraging volunteering. For example, 2011 was designated the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship. Under EU law, discrimination based on age in employment is prohibited, but barriers still exist in terms of access to goods and services, for example in social protection and healthcare and insurance products. There is certainly more room for improvement, and additionally, responsibility must be placed on local authorities towards developing better

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<sup>35</sup> European Commission (2007b) *Accompanying Document to the Communication 'Ageing Well in the Information Society. An i2010 Initiative. Action Plan on Information and Communication Technologies and Ageing'*. SEC(2007) 811. 14 June 2007. p.26

regulation and higher standards in auditing for healthcare and social services.

It is also encouraging the adaptation of the local environment to make it more liveable and accessible for people of all ages. As individuals in communities become older, movement patterns change as mobility becomes more limited, giving rise to the shift toward more walkable, transit-friendly communities. Improving mobility and providing accessible transport allows older people to have the same opportunities for social and economic inclusion. The European Commission, in 2009 adopted the Action Plan on Urban Mobility,<sup>36</sup> following its 2007 Green Paper on Urban Mobility. This action plan provides a framework for the implementation of 20 EU-level actions, including the issue of accessibility for disabled individuals, through local and bottom up initiatives, and recognises the position of towns and cities in tackling EU and global challenges. It also encourages dialogue and broad contribution to the coordination of transport infrastructure, and the participation of local and regional bodies, with town and national planning.

In terms of making the living environment more inclusive, the European Commission's Design for All (DfA), part of the 'eAccessibility' programme, embraces similar principles to the concept of universal design, and is encouraging urban design that consciously incorporates the concept of universal design in shaping environments that expect a higher proportion for elderly people, encouraging manufacturers and service providers to develop technologies that are as inclusive as possible, so that everyone can participate and benefit from ICT-generated products and services, while aiming toward society inclusion and equality.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Age-friendly design and the development of assistive technologies, products and services have economic potential prompting 'a transformation of the welfare state to a market opportunity', especially with more effective delivery of such services through decentralisation and privatisation that is currently being explored.<sup>38</sup> The EU already sees the potential for market-generating opportunities for the ICT industry in

<sup>36</sup> European Commission (2009a) *Action Plan on Urban Mobility*, COM(2009) 490 final. 30 Sep 2009. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52009DC0490:EN:NOT>

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, information page on Design for All (DfA): [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/einclusion/policy/accessibility/dfa/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/accessibility/dfa/index_en.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Scarponi, Antonio (2012) 'Design for Eternal Youth'.

Europe and the possibility of the creation of new businesses in this field, and is, for example, supporting Ambient Assisted Technology solutions to living (**see Box 4**).

#### Box 4

##### **Ageing-related R&D Support**

The Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) Joint Programme is an EU Action under 'Ageing well in the information society', a research initiative involving 23 countries and the Commission, supporting cross-national collaboration on projects enabled by ICT that 'addresses in particular the issues facing an ageing population and targets the needs of the individual person and their caretaker'.<sup>39</sup> It has a budget of €700 million for the period 2008-13 used to co-finance R&D and innovation in services, products, processes that aim to deliver solutions for independent living and ageing well. More than 50 projects are under way at the moment, heeding its call for proposals that have included ICT based solutions for the prevention and management of chronic conditions of elderly people, advancement of social interaction, advancement of older persons' independence and participation in the society, and mobility. As such, solutions range from smart products and smart living spaces, to digital information services. With the provision of equipment and services, and the integration of information technology within homes, independent living is encouraged and a possibility for older individuals with these solutions that reduce the need for them to be institutionalised as they provide assistance in carrying out their daily activities and health monitoring and access to emergency systems.

#### Summary

The ageing demographic is bringing about a cultural and ethical shift that is restructuring the economy and redefining politics, a shift that is prompting new roles, responsibilities and new value chains. Discussions surrounding ageing are no longer limited to concerns over pensions and care, and are regarded as an important area for policy makers as ageing also has implications on economic growth policies and the long-term sustainability of cities and communities. Cities are becoming progressively more age-friendly as they begin

<sup>39</sup> Ambient Assisted Living (website) <http://www.aal-europe.eu/about/>

to recognise the practical needs of different generations within them, alongside recognising diversity, promoting inclusion, and adapting to people's needs. At the same time, the ageing population is also becoming more valued as its ability to boost the social, cultural and economic capital of communities is appreciated more. The growth of elder councils and their increased participation in planning will help to better identify the needs of older people and bring about a more age-friendly agenda to urban planning and development.

The EU's role in a regional level of policy making and design is valuable in providing regional stewardship, to develop a political framework, and in promoting cross-sectoral interests and the participation of different levels of authority in planning for an ageing society. However, with the increasing decentralisation of urban planning functions and decision-making, coordination between planning and other line function departments is necessary to develop sustainable policies and action programmes, with municipalities and city councils acting as coordinators and facilitators, especially as this level has a direct impact on the quality of life of older people in their communities, and prescribing top-down solutions to local contexts is not the most efficient method of addressing challenges.

As reflected in its long-term planning and the Europe 2020 roadmap, the EU acknowledges the importance of active ageing to its economic and social goals. For cities to remain attractive to the older generation, there needs to be a revitalisation of cities to facilitate active ageing. Efforts are also being made to integrate health issues and older people in all policy areas, but with regards to the physical environment, development plans must be more supportive of older people, regardless of their socioeconomic background. However, the EU still lacks a coherent and integrated policy framework for urban areas. Furthermore, it must be recognised that because of the wide variation in demographic trends at the sub-national level, regional responses must vary and there is no consistent one-size-fits-all approach. Action plans relating to ageing fail to appreciate the architectural and urban planning *zeitgeist* of ground-up, community approaches to social and public policy issues, especially in the post-global financial crisis period, where moves towards local, consensus-based solutions that are often more cost-effective and sustainable are becoming the norm.

Additionally, while cities and urban areas are the locus of activity worldwide, European cities do not necessarily benefit from belonging to the EU. The importance of cities cannot be understated; often they are fast rivalling countries in terms of importance. Cities increasingly conduct autonomous diplomacy on issues such as investment, security and the environment, and as such, perhaps the EU can bring them more closely into the framework of policy-making, as the issues of demographic ageing and the urban environment are so closely related. It can also provide a valuable role in the dissemination and scaling-up of local and regional best practices. Regional planning approaches adopted by the EU that aim to address population ageing and the urban environment are often static and lack innovation when compared to those at the nation-state level, where post-modern policy making is data-driven and done through real-time consultation. In many instances local alternatives to broad strategic policies are immediate, reversible and more economically viable. The EU is right in focusing on innovative technological sectors, but to attract investment and funding for ICT solutions and research to ageing issues, the EU can also play a role by offering public guarantees for capital invested and loans offered.

This brief has highlighted some of the many funding programmes towards ageing-related issues available at the EU level, and the numerous similar objectives found is a variety of action programmes and initiatives from across a number of Directorates-General. While this shows that the dimension of ageing is being taken into consideration in a variety of policy fields, there is a need to coordinate them, both horizontally across Commission DGs and vertically, between the Commission, and the national and local levels. More importantly, despite the EU's initiatives for the exchange of practices, supporting research and development of ICT solutions to ageing-related issues, and raising awareness of these issues, barriers still exist, such as the fragmentation of regulation at member state level that limits wide-scale uptake at EU-level, the lack of clear or quantifiable targets defined, and limited regulatory action. The European Year has had the effect of EU-level policy cooperation across policy fields and across industry and the EU would do well to continue the role it has been playing as facilitator.

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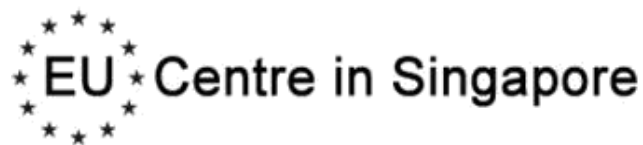
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