



GRAGE

Grey and Green in Europe: elderly living in urban areas



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 645706.

Policy Brief

Europe has one of the largest elderly populations in the world, with the EU counting 94 million people aged over 65, accounting for nearly 24% of the world total. Moreover, by 2050, 19 of 20 countries, worldwide, with the oldest population will be located in Europe; over the next two decades, the on-going demographic shift could put a significant strain on the European economy, society and the sustainability of public finances. Along with the demographic changes, ageing society challenge is strictly linked to urbanization and environmental issues, since cities worldwide host 43% people aged over 65. Main threats to the European urban development model include demographic decline and the depletion of natural resources. However, these issues are frequently tackled from a mere technical perspective, without paying necessary attention to the social process underlying urban trends and without estimating important links to European citizenship and to the needs of elderly citizens.

GRAGE Project aims to fill this gap, by increasing the availability of interdisciplinary, international and intersectoral studies supporting researchers to provide a comprehensive overview on suitable urban solutions for an aging society. In this framework, GRAGE intends to develop winning ideas to promote an active, harmonious and inclusive citizenship for elderly people living in urban contexts, while understanding cultural, psychological and societal factors that influence elderly attitudes, values and behaviour is a priority. GRAGE Project gathers innovative expertise from different scientific backgrounds (including legal, economic, humanities and engineering), belonging to several countries (from EU and Ukraine). Different, but complementary research perspectives have been integrated under the common idea of citizenship as a collector of interest, healthy environment and suitable urban solutions for an aging society with the research focusing on four topics:

- **Human rights in age friendly cities (WP2)**
- **Building (WP3)**
- **Resource efficiency (WP4) and**
- **Information and language technology (WP5)**

Research Findings

Human rights in age friendly cities (WP2)

This part investigated the interaction between rights and age friendly cities, with particular reference to the city of Kiev, focusing on the awareness of older people of their rights, while specific attention was paid on the right of the city and the awareness of people concerning this.

- The results showed the strategic role of the implementation of the right to the city in order to make cities more green, inclusive and age friendly: The effectiveness of the right to the city implies the protection of older people human rights as well as the participation of the elderly in the social and economic life of the city.
- Moreover, in a digital world the cities consist bases on a triad space: material environment, social environment and digital environment which means both access of older people to the digital city and participation in the governance of the digital space.

Building (WP3)

An aging society poses an energy challenge to the built environment already responsible for 40% of CO₂ emissions in the EU. An investigation of the benefits of poly-generation technologies for houses with elderly inhabitants has been carried out in WP3. Even though this study was based on a specific case study in Northern Ireland, results are applicable to other EU countries facing similar challenges.

- Results demonstrate that poly-generation is a viable economic solution with government supporting mechanisms, in particular when PhotoVoltaic incentive and Renewable Heat Incentive are available.
- For the best case scenario analysed within the research, the merits of poly-generation are: i) 26% CO₂ emission reduction compared to standard energy generation, ii) 80% reduction in the energy bill, iii) no excess electricity from solar production to be exported to the grid, and iv) positive contribution to the management of congestions of the electricity network through the use of a Time Of Use electricity tariff.

Resource efficiency (WP4)

The general aim of the WP4 was to investigate the role that food supply could play in an urban context, through reconciling urban development, sustainable natural resources management and the needs of an ageing society.

- As for the main outcomes achieved in the perspective of interdisciplinary, the most relevant results pertain to the analysis of the barriers to the development of urban agriculture and to the solutions for overcoming such obstacles.
- The research results included a special focus on the taxonomy of sustainable food and gastronomic cities initiatives developed at European level, on the active role of elderly in maintaining and promote traditional food habits and local culinary practices, on the legal discipline of urban agriculture, on social farming for the elderly and on new planning models and recommendations for spatial design of urban agricultural areas.

Information and language technology (WP5)

The main goal of WP5 was to investigate the role that information and language technology can play in transforming cities into environments that support green and healthy lifestyles for the ageing population. We asked *whether the elderly can play a role in re-shaping the environmental sustainability discourse (through social media)*.

- By focusing on frailty, a feature that is usually associated with old age, we show that ageing can be the means to highlight the constitutive vulnerable condition of human beings which makes them exposed to others.
- The analysis reveals that the elderly do not seem to be interested in the current sustainability discourse that focuses mainly on economical sustainability but they do have an interest in environmental sustainability and in nature being strongly related to the place they live.
- Furthermore, they have an active local and international network in Twitter to broadcast their messages.

Policy Recommendations

EU institutions need to tackle the demographic change of European population and turn the phenomenon of ageing into a resource for the society. This challenge heavily depends on the urban social policies that will be developed in Europe. Cities are the place for bridging across policy sectors to address the concerns of ageing populations in an integrated and cohesive way, taking into account the following aspects:

- The aim is not only to design cities that are efficient from an economic point of view but also liveable for people who live there.
- Cities are structures based on complex and interdependent relationships. Urban political processes are the result of this interaction between public and private, municipalities and stakeholders, citizens and social organizations. Therefore, the real goal is only achieved when all these forces think, act and work together
- The control for the optimal management of poly-generation technologies could be easily incorporated to smart technologies for assisted living that will be necessary to allow elderly people to live at home longer.
- Any additional dedicated incentives to help reduce the initial investment cost could help elderly people in need, allowing them to get advantage of an important reduction of their energy cost.
- Environmental sustainability consists a theme disappearing from the political discussion, even though it is now more current than ever.
- The elderly can help re-establish the bond between human beings and the natural environment through social media and they could act as brokers linking the local to the global.
- Raising awareness on the importance of “silver hair” from a business perspective, even in the light of the role that European SMEs can play an important role in the global economy leveraging on their expertise in urban solutions.

The challenge is to build a sustainable model of society and urban life, based on the principles of solidarity, freedom, equity, dignity, and social justice, and founded in respect for different urban cultures, while at the same time transforming cities in environments that support green and healthy lifestyles.

For further information: <https://www.grageproject.eu/>