

## Towards smart, sustainable and inclusive places for all ages

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### Introduction

Since its creation in 2001 AGE has been campaigning for a society for all ages where older people can participate in their community. For years now AGE has promoted the concept of Age Friendly Cities developed by the World Health Organisation as a useful method for local authorities and municipalities to assess the needs of their ageing populations and develop solutions adapted to the local context and with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, public authorities, the private sector and voluntary organisations. This is why AGE welcomes this Peer Review on 'a good place to grow old' and the opportunity it provides to exchange experiences with local actors. In the framework of the European Year 2010 for combating poverty and social exclusion and in view of the upcoming European Year 2012 on Active ageing and solidarity between generations, AGE has developed a paper describing what an age-friendly environment is. The document focuses mainly on the built environment, housing and transport and its objective is to raise awareness on these key components to fight against social exclusion and isolation of older people. It does not mean that other areas like healthcare and long-term care, retirement and pensions, or age discrimination are not as important, but the three identified topics can be considered as a pre-requisite to ensure a dignified ageing and active participation in the society and are usually the responsibility of local authorities while the competences for health, LTC and pensions policies often lie at national level.

If we continue to consider an accessible physical environment and our older people's health and welfare needs as burdens to be accommodated by the fruits of the labours of our 'at work' generations - we are missing the point. Older people are an enormous economic and social resource that will grow in quantity and we need to provide smart, sustainable, inclusive and connected places for all of us to engage, contribute and prosper.

This contribution to the Peer Review 'A good place to grow older' takes up main ideas and especially a series of 10 undertakings or ambitions to make 'age-inclusive places' in Europe a reality by 2020.

### The Rights-based framework

The first four elements are based on a 'rights-based' framework which addresses underlying principles, processes and commitments that are enablers, drivers and attractors for change.

1. **Participation.** We need to shift from a model of older people as passive recipients, consumers, users or subjects of care – to an active model of citizen-centred engagement in innovation and change, based on processes of co-design and co-creation.
2. **Motivation.** Our actions and responsibilities need to be energised by a shared understanding of a 'highly desirable and attracting' unified social, economic, environmental and ethical framework for 'inclusivity', that recognises and values the active and passive contribution of older people to our evolving future within and beyond employment.

3. **Inclusive Design.** Based on a coherent model of social and functional inclusion, we need to embed the principles of inclusive design into the fabric of our social, technical, political and economic processes that underpin place-making.
4. **Organisation.** To resource change – we need to harness our individual and collective energies, imagination, knowledge and wisdom – and to exponentially scale them through alignment, creativity and innovation, over a long haul. This demands new models of collaboration, knowledge sharing, resource sharing, and leadership at all levels – individual, corporate, regional, member state, and union.

At a tangible level, the alignment and convergence of these elements can help us to shape and evolve richly inclusive places for all. It will be difficult to progress robustly without them.

### Aspirations and ambitions at urban environment, housing and transport levels

Reinforcing the three environmental themes within the WHO's age-friendly cities framework, the next six elements address qualitative aspirations or ambitions that can guide our place-making activities at urban environment, housing, and transport levels.

5. **Desirable and sharable urban places.** Our ambitions for urban inclusivity demands places that are desirable to all and shareable by all. We know the urban elements; we experience the rich variety of urban outdoor life; and we better understand human ergonomic and anthropometric variation across the life-course. We have different demands and expectations of our urban living between day and night, across the seasons, across communities, and across the generations. We need to focus on the quality of how we fuse these demands together, to create dynamic, living and life-enriching places for all that are a joy to experience.
6. **Health and well-being in our publicly used buildings.** Our ambition is for inclusive buildings, that promote dignity, health and well-being for users of all ages. We can identify the buildings we visit. To most, we are visitors, customers or clients. But for many older people over the coming years, these will also be our workplaces. Our understanding of the accessibility elements is growing and we're learning about frailty. We need to work on the quality of how we synthesise these factors with climatic, spatial, and sensory quality, within the contexts of their functional programmes, so that our shared buildings are fit for their purpose within an ageing society.
7. **Sustainable neighbourhoods for all ages.** Our ambition is for living, life-enhancing, vibrant, diverse, safe, inclusive and trust-based neighbourhoods that are sustainable environmentally, economically, socially and emotionally for individuals, families and communities, across all ages. While cohesive internally, they must be open to inward and outward flows of people as we grow, explore and settle. We have an intuitive sense that a better mix of housing, housing tenure, adaptability, amenities, schools, employment, local health and care services, and the urban and technical connectivity fabric to glue them together will make a big difference. But we need to learn rapidly from our early endeavours, to provide the evidence that these 'urban-village' models work for us, at all ages, and from all perspectives – economic, social and emotional.

8. **Wellness in Sustainable Housing.** Our ambition is that housing for older people should be of the highest quality and that it should lead, rather than follow, as an exemplar for mainstream housing. We need to move beyond the provision of minimum accessibility requirements, to embrace standards of space, quality, flexibility and adaptability that can accommodate our varied life-styles over varying life-courses. Daylight and brightness, balconies, outdoor spaces and the natural environment, adaptability and 'care ready' design are pre-requisites. For multi-unit apartments and clustered living centres, the positive use of circulation space, shared facilities open to the neighbourhood, and adequate storage for belongings are all needed. While different in detail and execution, these characteristics are even more essential in our assisted living, residential care, and nursing homes, where the dignity and autonomy of older people is at greater risk. In any case apartments/houses should be suited for implementing modern technologies so that older people and people with disabilities are able to profit from their potential for sustaining an autonomous life according to their individual needs.
9. **Seamless public transport.** Once available and affordable, our ambition for inclusive public transport is that it is experienced as 'seamless' within and across our varied modes of transport within and between cities, regions and member states. Putting the older person's 'experience of the journey' at the heart of inclusive systems design, the experience of ticketing, terminal and vehicle accessibility, information services supporting route-planning and way-finding, and the sense of safety, all influence the 'quality' of the trip. Beyond the infrastructure, the helpfulness and friendliness of transport staff, drivers, platform attendants and security personnel can smooth the travelling experience.
10. **Responsive and integrated personal transport.** Personal transport, cycling, motorcycles and driving, provides people with maximum flexibility to make point to point journeys as and when they need them. Our ambition is that older people can continue to cycle and drive for as long as possible, and that the experience, vehicles, signage and parking are designed for inclusivity. As cycling and driving becomes more difficult, personal alternatives such as affordable taxis, car pooling, and volunteer networks should be available, interconnecting with public systems.

## Conclusion

Whether it is urban fabric, housing, or transport, to create fully inclusive 'places for all' i.e. 'good places to grow old' requires us to bring different dimensions of 'inclusivity and exclusivity' into a common framework. Social inclusion and the problem of combating poverty, economic participation and emancipation, needs to be seen in relation to functional exclusion and the challenge of inclusive environments – 'sharing places for action' for all. Not for some, or for more, or for most – but for all! For this we need multiple strategies, some based on principle and some based on pragmatism, that can tackle the different aspects of our inclusivity spectrum.

Not alone do the exclusion barriers need to be both pushed back and dissolved, but our desirable future 'centre ground' needs to illuminate an attractiveness that can animate and motive policies and actions that will intensify and accelerate social, economic and environmental cohesion. This is the case, whether it is for longer active economic participation in the workforce, or for longer active, dignified and graceful ageing, with all the 'good-will' and 'off-balance sheet' economic contributions that older peoples' social participation accrues. This also needs to be both inter-generational and trans-generational.

There are many examples of good practices and guidelines throughout the European Union. While many may be bound to their regional and cultural contexts, there are the seeds of replicability in all good practice models. We hope that the outcomes of this Peer Review will help mobilise many regions and local authorities to commit to make their public space more age friendly in the framework of the upcoming 2012 European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. The WHO Age-friendly Cities Conference to be held in September 2011 (26-28) will be another important occasion to better know this programme and contribute to its dissemination.