



Reorganize urban spaces and society to cope with the demographic change

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Urban planning, traffic and transport, accessible cultural and sport facilities, stimulating neighbourhoods, work-life balance, health and social care, appropriate housing and assistive technologies are some of the main issues to deal with in order to manage the demographic change we are seeing, with the continual increase of older people.

This is what Dr. Heidrun Mollenkopf, a sociologist and gerontologist, suggested to More Years - Better Lives JPI to support practically good policy and practice for meeting the challenges related to demographic change to the benefit of European states, regions, municipalities and the persons living there. Dr Mollenkopf was Senior Researcher at the German Centre for Research on Ageing (DZFA) at the University of Heidelberg. She is Chair of the Societal Advisory Board (SOAB*) of the JPI and in this function acts as a mediator between the stakeholders, the Scientific Advisory Board and the General Assembly. She will attend at the next Annual Conference of the MYBL JPI in Brussels, to be held in February.

It is necessary to create urban space and societies that are age-friendly and allow intergenerational relationship, she explained. If these priorities aren't met, quality of life of all age groups will decrease.

"Many regions and municipalities have already started planning the future, albeit not enough", Dr Mollenkopf said. It is high tide to do so. Manchester in the UK, The Hague in the Netherlands, or Radevormwald in Germany are just a few examples of cities that have developed work plans involving local authorities, organisations, volunteers, business and older residents to improve the quality of life for older people in their cities. In Manchester, an Older People's Board and Forum were established, acting as a consultative body, providing an opportunity for older people to voice their concerns and advice directly to decision makers. Pools around the city offer free swimming to persons aged 60 or older, and housing trusts work together with tenants and several organisations to deliver appropriate services to improve quality of life for people within their neighbourhoods. The Hague has - among other initiatives - set up dementia meeting places and day care facilities for senior citizens. The focus of Radevormwald is on accessible public transport and age-friendly public places.

"It is important to make clear that if today's older persons are neglected, this will continue for the following generations. What you do to the benefit of today's older people will be to the benefit of the older people of tomorrow - and to all generations", Dr Mollenkopf said.

"MYBL JPI has started a variety of adequate measures, she explained: research projects, special workshops and publications, and conferences. What is needed now is to provide the respective findings to the relevant stakeholders. This needs various approaches, e.g., conferences and seminars with policy makers, press releases and campaigns, TV series - all of them as interesting and attractive as possible".

"I would define the More Years - Better Lives JPI as successful if the outcomes serve to supporting good policy and practice for meeting the challenges related to demographic change to the benefit of European states, regions, municipalities and the persons living there", she concluded.

Short intro/bio of the person.

Dr. Heidrun Mollenkopf is a sociologist and gerontologist. She was Senior Researcher at the German Centre for Research on Ageing (DZFA) at the University of Heidelberg until she retired in December 2004. Her main research focus is the interplay among personal, societal, technical, and environmental conditions with regard to maintaining autonomy and social participation and, by this, quality of life in old age. She has pursued this interest in several large-scale research projects on technology and ageing and on the outdoor mobility of older people first at the University of Mannheim, then at the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) and the Free University of Berlin, and finally at the former DZFA. She has published widely in the fields of ageing and technology, mobility, senior friendly neighbourhoods and quality of life of older people. In addition, Heidrun Mollenkopf worked as a lecturer at several universities in Germany and Switzerland. At the same time, she served as a consultant and evaluator in several European bodies of experts such as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS).

2007-2014, Heidrun Mollenkopf has been member of the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations (BAGSO) Expert Council and Chair of the "Universal Access and Independent Living" Expert Group of AGE Platform Europe. Besides, she was Co-Chair of the working group 'User requirements' of the BMBF/VDE Innovation Partnership AAL; Freelancer at the Department of Psychological Ageing Research at Heidelberg University; Consultant at Dementia Support Stuttgart; and speaker of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection's committee of experts "Mobility, construction, housing, leisure, social participation, information and communication" to promote the German National Action Plan for translating the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into action. In 2012, she was awarded the order of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Since 2014, she is Board Member of BAGSO and Vice President of AGE Platform Europe.

* The Societal Advisory Board ensures that the societal aspects connected to the research and other actions of the JPI are considered from the stakeholders' perspectives and that the research and actions have also useful policy implications and societal value.

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Notes for editors:

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