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# AGE-FRIENDLY SOCIETY SUPPORTS ACTIVE AGEING

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This review looks into the prerequisites of active ageing, and how developing an age-friendly society can support active ageing. As one viewpoint to the age-friendly society we look at and develop the concept of age-friendly enterprise.

### ACTIVE AGEING

The ageing of population is usually viewed from two different perspectives. On one hand, the population's ageing is seen as a social and economic threat, and on the other hand as positive societal development, progress and an asset. In problem-centred thinking older people are a growing crowd of passive people in need of care. In contrast, in asset-based thinking older people are considered to be skilful and capable members of the society (see, for example, Kulmala 2019; Jämsén & Kukkonen 2017, 6–7.).

Ageing well or “correctly” is described using various terms. Some examples include active ageing, successful ageing, healthy ageing, positive ageing, profitable ageing, and skilful, capable ageing. All of these concepts contain an idea of the possibilities of ageing. (Foster & Walker 2015.)

The most used positive descriptions of ageing are active ageing (for example Paul, Ribeiro & Teixeira 2012, Walker & Maltby 2012; Liotta, Canhao, Cenko, Cutini, Vellone,

Illario, Kardas, Poscia, Dinis Sousa, Palombi & Marazzi 2018), and successful ageing (for example Martin, Kelly, Kahana, Kahana, Willcox, Willcox & Poon 2015).

Both terms share the idea of positive, asset-based thinking. Older people are not a compilation of problems, but a group of individuals whose skills and strengths should be highlighted. (Foster & Walker 2015). Instead of considering the life of older people as a time of rest, the viewpoint of active, successful ageing emphasises attempts to find new opportunities for the people to participate. Foster and Walker (ibid) do remind that in this line of thinking there is a risk that the focus is entirely on the active and participating “younger older”, and the “older older” with their possible severe illnesses are still not considered.

Comparing the two terms, Foster & Walker (2015) consider active ageing to be a more comprehensive one, which takes into consideration the person's entire course of life. According to the principles of active ageing, older people are

supported so they can maintain their health for longer, stay longer in the working life, and also take part in the social life within their community and society. However, the term currently lacks an internationally accepted definition, and the concept is used to describe “all things good”. The commonly used definition, especially in Europe, is the one by World Health Organisation (WHO) from 2002:

*“Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” (WHO 2002, 12).*

This emphasises the opportunities for better health, participation and safety in the process of active ageing, which promotes a better quality of life.

Both as a concept and in action, active ageing has encouraged people to actively partake in the society and highlighted the skills and knowledge of older people. It should be noted that activity doesn't refer only to physical activity or participating in the working life. Activity is seen as more extensive participation in social, economic, cultural and societal life. (for example Foster & Walker 2015; Timonen 2016.)

## AGE-FRIENDLY SOCIETY AND PRE-REQUISITES OF ACTIVE AGEING

The concept of active ageing highlights the activity and participation of older people in all sectors of life and society. Active ageing is not just a process of the individual, but it requires changes in the contexts and structures of ageing. Developing an age-friendly society can be seen as one way to support the premise of active ageing.

Age-friendly thinking shifts the questions of ageing from an individual and his or her care needs and life situation towards communal and structural solutions. The primal focus is not on the problems and restrictions of an individual, nor on the issues, costs or strain that older people “cause” by ageing. (Jämsén & Kukkonen 2017a.) Instead, the inspection focuses on the age-friendliness of the society and communities. On a general level this means that there is an aim to develop the society so that it is friendly for the aged. An age-friendly society is built on a positive overtone, understanding and an attitude that sees older people as meaningful actors and real assets to the society. (WHO 2002, 2019a, 2019b.)

The means and solutions of age-friendly thinking vary. They can be both extensive strategic policies and concrete actions.

### Three viewpoints on age-friendliness

In European development work, the concept of age-friendliness has three different viewpoints:

- 1) age-friendly environment or matter is generally positive to older people, “good” in one way or another,
- 2) age-friendliness as a political concept by the World Health Organisation WHO, and
- 3) an age-friendly environment defined through eight concrete dimensions and sectors (Handler 2014, 9).

Age-friendliness is society means having an appreciative attitude and way of working. It concerns strategies, policies and ways of thinking in a society or community that enables and supports the emergence of age-friendly structures and concrete age-friendly actions. (Handler 2014.)

Age-friendliness does not emerge on its own, nor through judicial resolutions alone. A deeper understanding regarding the questions of ageing is needed. This calls for strengthening of the expertise of professionals in various fields, as well as that of the citizens. Competence in ageing and versatile communication are key features in this. (Jämsén & Kukkonen 2014; Jämsén & Kukkonen 2017b, 44–49.)

The World Health Organisation WHO aims for an age-friendly world that enables older people to participate fully and actively in society. An age-friendly society is good for people of all ages, and respects everyone, no matter their age. Age-friendliness can be seen in all the policies, services and structures in society that support older people in ageing and good life.

The WHO has created concrete instructions and tools to support building age-friendly cities and communities (WHO 2019b, WHO 2007b). The WHO has also founded a network of age-friendly cities to promote age-friendliness, and to strengthen mutual learning. In Finland, Kuopio and Tampere are among the cities that have joined the network. (WHO 2019a.)

## The dimensions of age-friendliness

The dimensions of age-friendliness proposed by the WHO (2007a; see also Handler 2014, 15) can be divided to those that are part of a society's infrastructure (physical environment and buildings, transportation, housing and communication), the dimensions that emphasise participation and the experience of belonging (social participation, respect, social inclusion, civic participation and employment), and community and health services (figure 1).

THE DIMENSIONS OF AGE-FRIENDLINESS							
The infrastructure of an age-friendly society				Requirements for participation and the experience of belonging			Community and health services
Physical environment and buildings	Transportation	Housing	Communication	Social participation	Respect and social inclusion	Civic participation and employment	

Figure 1: The dimensions of age-friendliness [adapted from WHO 2007a, Handler 2014, 15]

In Finland, the focus has first been on the age-friendly housing and residential areas (Rappe, Kotilainen, Rajaniemi & Topo 2018, Hynynen 2015). For example, the city of Kuopio has devised the Age Friendly Kuopio program for 2009–2030. The program is built on the socio-cultural view of older people, and the well-being and course of life are examined in a multidisciplinary way. Social relations and physical and psychological assets are seen as central features. Another key observation is that the ability to function is closely tied to the environment. (Kuopion kaupunki 2014, 4). The innovativeness of age-friendly city thinking is based on the participation of older people. They are involved in the planning, and their experiences and ideas of city spaces are highlighted. The ethical grounds for this arise from regional equity, and older people's rights for the city. (Handler 2014, 22-24.)

In addition to age-friendliness in housing and residential areas, the Alzheimer Society of Finland has used the WHO's dimensions of age-friendliness to build the criteria for a memory-friendly and safe environment, and for age- and memory-friendly municipalities. These will work as a comprehensive, versatile checklist and a useful tool in the work for creating an age-friendly municipality. After the age-friendliness of a municipality has been evaluated, it can be used as a basis for development proposals for policy making, as well as for other local, regional and national operators. (Muistiliitto 2019; Ikäystävällisen kunnan arviointilomake 2017; WHO 2007a; Jämsén & Kukkonen 2018.) The guide "10 vinkkiä muisti- ja ikäystävällisiin yhteisöihin" (10 tips for memory- and age-friendly communities) was created to support age- and memory-friendly communities. It provides practical guidance utilising international models, and follows examples and experiences from other communities, for example in Scotland. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan Muistiyhdistys ry 2019a.)

## AN AGE-FRIENDLY ENTERPRISE

### The idea of an age-friendly enterprise

The dimensions of age-friendliness were divided earlier into the infrastructure of an age-friendly society, requirements for participation and the experience of belonging, and community and health services. The demands – and opportunities – of age-friendliness thus extend throughout society, and to public, private and voluntary sectors. In their daily lives, older people are more likely to encounter representatives of private than public sectors. The actions in shops, means of transport, banks, communications resources and different service businesses can either support or hinder the wellbeing of older people.

This section focuses on age-friendliness from an enterprise's viewpoint: how does developing age-friendliness relate to entrepreneurship? From a company's viewpoint, does it showcase just as additional work? Can enterprises find commercial incentives for age-friendliness? These questions bring the topic back to the idea on how older people are viewed in society: as a problem or as an asset.

The concept of an age-friendly enterprise is multidimensional, and it entails the ideas of active ageing and the wellbeing of older people. At the same time, the profitability of a business is also important. Thus, the concept has two viewpoints: a business that has an age-friendly approach towards older people which is also commercially profitable. The age-friendliness provides wellbeing for older people and when this goal has been reached, the profitability showcases in increased demand. Based on this, developing an age-friendly enterprise should be started by developing



the products and services to serve older people, and this will result in commercial gain. (Irving, Beamish & Burstein 2018, 9; Jämsén & Kukkonen 2017b.) The age-friendliness of enterprises is financially important not only for the profitability of individual companies, but also on a national scale. The growth in the amounts of older consumers and in their spending power highlight the importance of this client group.

When discussing the significance of older people from an economic viewpoint, the term Silver Economy is often used. This means that the market adjusts to the society's intensive ageing. (European Commission 2018; Irving et al. 2018; Hodin 2014; Dychtwald 2014; Kolbacher & Herstatt 2011.) In Finnish, the term senioritalous, "senior economy" has been used (Jämsén & Kukkonen 2017b). Another term that precedes this is vanhuustalous, "old age economy", by Penttilä and Rehn (2012, 87–88), which refers to older people's role as producers, actors and end users.

## THE BASIS OF AN AGE-FRIENDLY ENTERPRISE

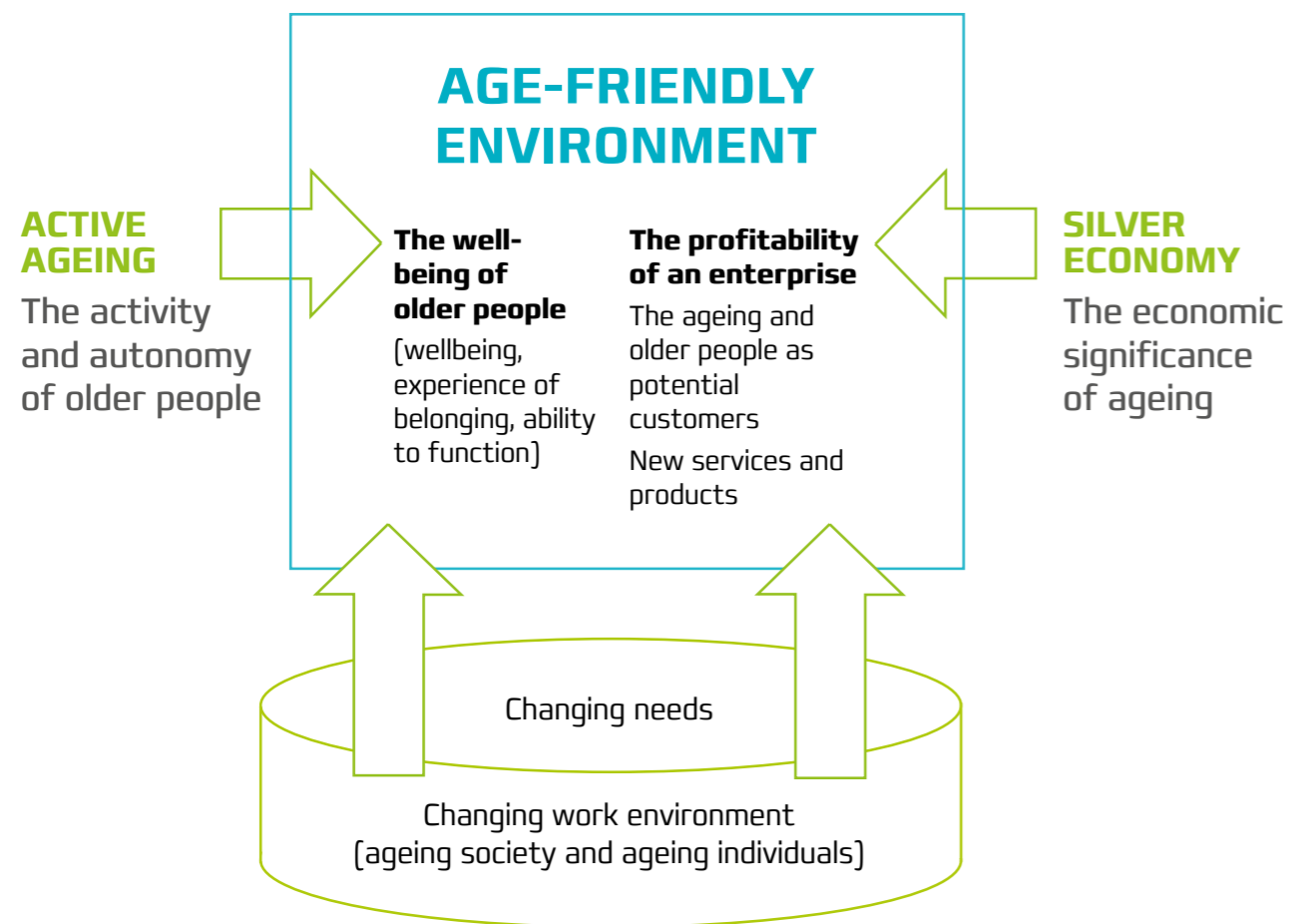


Figure 2: The basis of an age-friendly enterprise

### An age-friendly enterprise on the interface of active ageing and Silver Economy

As already discussed, the concept of an age-friendly enterprise lands on the interface of active ageing and Silver Economy – or, more precisely, brings these starting points together, and creates a link between them. Active ageing is based on strengthening the activity and autonomy of older people, and Silver Economy recognises the economic significance of ageing.

Figure 2 sets autonomy as a prerequisite for active ageing. Maintaining autonomy is an important part of active ageing, and it is also significant in the process of enterprises developing their age-friendliness. How can an age-friendly enterprise support the ageing and older people with their products and services? To what extent is it possible to use the products and services autonomously? (Kohlbacher, Herstatt & Schweisfurt 2011, 11.)

The wellbeing, health, functional ability and experience of belonging call for comprehensive and wide-ranging approach. Ageing of the population is a global phenomenon, but ageing is also always about the individual, and everyone ages in their own, unique way. At the same time, it is important to note the generational aspect of ageing. The people who are ageing now also represent their generation as they are ageing, and remain distinctive from earlier and future generations (Saarenheimo, Pietilä, Maununaho, Tiihonen & Pohjolainen 2014).

Acknowledging older people as potential customers calls for recognising the diversity of the phenomenon. This is also reflected as the changes in the demand for products and services, and as a need to develop new products and services.

The development work on age-friendly enterprises is globally active. The term used most commonly is age-friendly business. In Finland, Etelä-Pohjanmaan Muistiyhdistys ry's development project Muisti- ja ikäystävällinen Etelä-Pohjanmaa (memory- and age-friendly South Ostrobothnia) supports the functional ability of people who are ageing or who have memory problems, by promoting the competence in ageing in communities and supporting the enterprises and their service concepts. The enterprises will see their own role in the everyday lives of people who are ageing and suffering from memory problems. The enterprises can be from different fields, and of different sizes. Participating enterprises include taxi operators, banks, shops, opticians, hairdressers, tyre dealers, and so on. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan Muistiyhdistys ry 2019b). Karelia University of Applied Sciences' development project Silver Economy – Turning the Silver Tsunami into a Silver Lining improves the enterprises' age-friendliness and Silver Economy trade, organises pilot programs and supports collaborative development processes (Karelia-ammattikorkeakoulu 2019).

## THE CRITERIA FOR AGE-FRIENDLY ENTERPRISES

### ACTIVE AGEING

»  
The wellbeing of older people

### AGE-FRIENDLY ENTERPRISE

#### CUSTOMER SERVICE

Individuality, interaction, safety

#### COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

Channels, content, implementation

#### AGE-FRIENDLY EMPLOYER

Recruiting, support, development of competences

#### ACCESSIBILITY

Moving, seeing, hearing, communication

#### AVAILABILITY

Web services, applications, publications, knowledge and attitudes

#### PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Aimed at the elderly

### SILVER ECONOMY

»  
Profitable for the enterprise

#### COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Determining needs and recording experiences, experiments

Changing needs

Changing operational environment (ageing society and ageing individuals)

### The criteria for age-friendly enterprises

The criteria for enterprises being age-friendly have been developed all over the world. The criteria can be structured in a way shown in figure 3. The cornerstones of age-friendly enterprises are individuality, interaction and safety. An age-friendly enterprise takes its clientele into consideration in its selection of products and services, and allocates its communications to the elderly. Age-friendly marketing presents age-related matters without stereotyping. The availability and accessibility of the enterprise is relevant for age-friendliness. Additionally, the actions of an enterprise

as an age-friendly employer is significant for both the ageing employees and the ageing and older customers.

When developing an age-friendly enterprise, it is essential to recognise the role of the ageing and older people, not just as users and buyers of products and services, but also as active participants in the development. In addition to looking into the needs and experiences of the aged and older people, collaborative development processes using, for example, service design enables participation in the whole process. (Östlund 2011, 15; Pericu 2017; Steen, Manschot & De Koning 2011; Farrelly & Deans 2014; Jämsén & Kukkonen 2017b.)



Figure 3: The criteria for age-friendly enterprises

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS OF AN AGE-FRIENDLY SOCIETY

Developing an age-friendly society improves the conditions for active ageing, and recognises the opportunities in the ageing and older people. This kind of thinking challenges to a change in viewpoint, aiming it towards the surrounding society, which should be developed to better fit the ageing and older people.

What is needed next are the ways to realise the participation of the ageing and older people, who for too long

have been left out of the discussion about ageing, and the development work regarding ageing.

Another important field of development is the working life. Applying the age-friendly society thinking to the working life could offer new perspectives on how the ageing could keep working, and the aims and conditions that come with it. What would an age-friendly workplace be like, from the viewpoint of the ageing worker? Or from the viewpoint of the work community? How does an age-friendly employer act?



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