



## Analysis of meso- and micro- level discursive frames on active ageing in Galicia

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**Abstract.** This study aims to identify discursive barriers to transferring the EU strategy for active ageing. It also offers policy recommendations in this field. This is an exploratory study conducted in Galicia, a Spanish region with a particularly aged population and extensive competences in health and social affairs. It applies Goffman's definition of "frame" that refers to ideas that allow people to confer meaning to their experience. It examines the macro-level frame (European), the meso-level frame (policy area), and the micro-level frames (actors). New data were created at both meso and micro levels. The research techniques used are interviews with experts and focus groups composed of active older people living in both urban and rural areas.

**Keywords:** European Union, ageing policies, discursive frame, policy transfer.

## Análisis de meso y micro marcos en materia de envejecimiento activo en Galicia

**Resumen.** Los objetivos de esta investigación son identificar barreras discursivas para la transferencia de la estrategia de envejecimiento activo de la UE y hacer recomendaciones de mejora en las políticas de envejecimiento. Se presenta un estudio exploratorio realizado en Galicia, región española con un perfil poblacional particularmente envejecido y amplias competencias en asuntos sanitarios y sociales, temas sustanciales en la estrategia europea de envejecimiento. Se emplea la palabra "marco" en el sentido de Goffman, en referencia a las ideas que permiten a un individuo conferir significado a su experiencia. Se examinan marcos de nivel macro (europeo), meso (área de políticas) y micro (actores). Se analizan datos a dos niveles: el de la comunidad epistémica regional en materia de envejecimiento activo, y el de las personas mayores activas tanto de entornos rurales como urbanos. Las técnicas de investigación empleadas son la entrevista en profundidad a expertos y los grupos de discusión con señores.

**Palabras clave:** Unión Europea, políticas de envejecimiento, marco discursivo, transferencia de políticas

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. The EU's active ageing strategy. 3. Discourses on ageing in the Galician epistemic community (meso-level frame) and among active seniors people (micro-level frame). 4. Conclusions. 5. References. 6. Methodological appendices.

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## 1. Introduction

Ageing is a demographic change of global scope that began in developed countries. Its main cause is the extension of life expectancy associated with improvements in health conditions. This demographic change has also been fostered by the increase in birth rates from the end of the Second World War until the 1970s (the *baby boom*), and by the more recent decline in the average fertility rate below the generational replacement level of 2.1 children per woman (Nagarajan *et al.*, 2016: 6).

The social and political effects of ageing vary among ageing societies. Nonetheless, there are common elements (United Nations, 2016: 67-99). The first is the growth in the proportion of older people or seniors in the total population. In addition, there is an increase in the number of "young older adults" (Torp, 2015: 8) or active seniors who are in good physical and cognitive condition. Likewise, new generations of older people tend to have a higher level of education than previous cohorts and greater heterogeneity in their life experiences (Kolb, 2014).

Ageing also has consequences for public finances. On the one hand, it increases the need for spending on pensions and services aimed at seniors. On the other hand, when it is not offset by the inflow of immigrant workers, it reduces the number of adults of working age. This demographic change may even coincide with an employment crisis and/or a contraction in social contributions, which contributes to higher expenditures and lower revenues (Boeri *et al.*, 2001). Finally, the ageing process is occurring in a context of economic globalization that may in itself put the stability of public revenues at risk (Held and McGrew, 2002; Higgs and Gilleard, 2015; Kohli, 2015; Phillipson, 2006; Schulz and Binstock, 2006; Torp, 2015).

There are different definitions of "elderly." The most frequent one refers to a person who has reached the age of 65. Depending on the objectives of the research or policies, other chronological ages such as 55, 60, or 75 years may be used. Given its prospective component, this study analyses people aged 55 or older and defines different stages of ageing: 55 to 65 years, 66 to 75, and over 75.

The term "frame" is used to refer to the ideas that allow an individual to give meaning to aspects of their experience, "something that an individual actor can perceive, not the organization of the social structure" (Goffman, 1974: 13). Discourses can be intentional, with the purpose of influencing the preferences of actors (voters, politicians, etc.), or unintentional, which is common when they become hegemonic. A distinction is made between macro-level frames (in this case, that of the EU), meso-level frames (those of the policy area), and micro-level frames (those of the actors).

It is important to understand the relationship between structures (regulations, institutions responsible for formulating or implementing a policy, their relationships with civil society organizations, etc.) and actors (Cram, 2011; Falleti and Lynch, 2009; López-Santana, 2006; Lynch, 2006; Schmidt, 2002 and 2010; Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004; Thatcher and Schmidt, 2013). Frames, as mediating factors of the impact of public policies, affect not only the configuration of preferences but also the very definition of problems and implementation (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016; Schmidt, 2002 and 2010; Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004).

In fact, discourse is often the missing factor in political science studies of policy continuity and change (Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004: 207; Thatcher and Schmidt, 2013: 428). It is also essential to contextualize discourses, because "the indeterminacy of outcomes does not lie in the [causal] mechanism [such as framing] but in the context" (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1151). "Depending on the nature and contextual attributes, the same causal mechanism can lead to different outcomes" (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1161).

Every active ageing strategy is based on the vision of a society for all ages, which values and provides opportunities for any person regardless of their chronological age (Walker, 2002: 134). To achieve this, it must combat age discrimination, for example in the labour market, maintain people's employability throughout their lives, promote flexibility in retirement age, encourage healthy lifestyles and senior volunteering, guarantee the well-being of all retirees above minimum safety nets, and care for the people in the "fourth age", who are the most fragile and vulnerable (Walker and Maltby, 2012). In theory, the ageing model would operate simultaneously at the macro-level frame, meso-level frame, and micro-level frame, and the design of these policies involves coordination across different departments (Walker and Maltby, 2012: 128).

In the EU, the average lifespan after leaving the labour market upon reaching retirement age is 19.8 years; in Spain, it is 21.4 years. In response to demographic change, the European Commission (1999, 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2014) has developed a multidimensional ageing strategy, which involves aspects related to the labor market, retirement pensions, the health and well-being of older people, as well as their social and political participation (Eurostat, 2011). The European framework on ageing is a deliberate discourse reacting to the public sector's financial difficulties in maintaining social spending allocated for the senior population. It seeks to contain the influence of neoliberal ideology, which opposes the idea of the intergenerational contract and revises the Christian democratic and liberal-conservative contributions to the welfare state (Windebank and Whitworth, 2014). This framework, regardless of its economic and demographic constraints, is also linked to a broader cultural shift that advocates for greater involvement of policy beneficiaries, as well as other affected actors, in the different stages of the policy-making process (Hamblin, 2013).

The main objectives of this study are to identify discursive barriers to the transfer of the European ageing discourse to the meso-level and micro-level frames in the EU, and to make recommendations for improvement in the design and implementation of ageing policies.

An exploratory study is presented that analyses data from Galicia, an autonomous community with an ageing population profile.<sup>3</sup> Like the rest of the Spanish regions, it has extensive powers in health and social affairs, which are central to the European ageing strategy, and it belongs to a welfare system in which local authorities, both provincial and municipal, also play a role. It should

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<sup>3</sup> According to data from the Continuous Population Register as of 1 January 2015, compiled by the National Statistics Institute, the average age in Galicia was 45.7 years, compared to 41.9 for Spain as a whole.

also be noted that this Autonomous Community has been recognized by EU institutions as one of the European reference regions in the field of active ageing, highlighting its innovative work in the application of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Furthermore, active ageing is one of the pillars of the innovation strategy of the Autonomous Community of Galicia.

Data are examined at two levels: that of the regional epistemic community on active ageing, and that of active older people in both rural and urban settings. To obtain these data, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts, and focus groups were held with seniors.

Qualitative research techniques, especially interviews, are increasingly used to study old age, although adapting sampling, data collection, and analysis to the specific characteristics of these age cohorts remains a pending task. Focus groups are useful for understanding how active seniors define ageing and for identifying stereotypes and negative attitudes that limit their social and political participation (Walker, 2002). As an example, it is worth noting that older people rarely consider themselves "old," and generally do not identify with the labels assigned to them by younger generations (Goerres, 2009; Walker and Maltby, 1997: 17-18). Therefore, neither in research tasks nor in positions of responsibility in policy design is it advisable to impose top-down definitions and discourses without first observing the priorities and ways in which older people frame their expectations and experiences.

The remainder of the text will follow this structure. The following section defines the EU's active ageing strategy. In section three, the results of the in-depth interviews with experts and focus groups with seniors are presented. Finally, the conclusions suggest proposals for improving the development of ageing policies.

## **2. The EU's active ageing strategy**

Following the first strains on welfare systems caused by the oil crisis, from the 1970s onward, a discourse on intergenerational relations has emerged forcefully from the United States, one that is at odds to the European Social Model.

This framework is contrary to the idea of intergenerational equity characteristic of EU welfare states (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015a; Macnicol, 2015; Moreno, 2013).

This neoliberal-inspired discourse opposes the differentiation of stages in the individual's life cycle, in line with the postmodern turn (Bauman, 2007; Giddens, 1991), and the recognition of citizens' right to receive public protection in the last years of their lives. This framework was successful in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1980s and explains the first cuts in pensions and public services received by seniors in these countries.

The neoliberal discourse on old age interprets intergenerational relations as a zero-sum game in which different age cohorts compete for scarce public resources. It argues that young people are disadvantaged by income transfers to the elderly. It further claims that, given their growing weight among a country's total electorate, seniors may come to control the democratic process to impose their supposed common interests, which would turn ageing societies into pensioner democracies

(Bengtson and Putney, 2006; Biggs, 2006; Goerres, 2007 and 2009; Minkler and Robertson, 1991; Quadagno 1989; Schulz and Binstock, 2006; Vincent, 1996; Walker, 1990 and 2006).

In the EU, the adjustment of national welfare states to the increase in the elderly population is an important political issue because, as previously mentioned, it affects the continuity of the European Social Model of growth and welfare—especially at times when it is difficult to maintain budgetary balance and public debt levels, such as those experienced by some Member States during the Financial crisis that began in the United States in 2008.

For this reason, the EU institutions dedicated the year 2012 to Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity, and they are promoting the new framework on ageing based on an update of the concept of solidarity between generations.<sup>4</sup> The Commission has designed a multidimensional active ageing strategy inspired by the original idea of the World Health Organization (2002) of adding "life to years" and not only years to life.

In view of increasing life expectancy and the birth-rate crisis, and within a context of budgetary constraints, this strategy prioritizes macro-level challenges. This includes the adaptation of fiscal and budgetary policies, pension and social security systems, the labour market—due to the possible shortage of active workers—and healthcare and long-term institutional care systems—due to the need to increase the number of trained professionals (Eurostat, 2011:7). Although it focuses on issues of security and well-being, and on the participation of older people, it explicitly refers to the challenge of combating fears of a possible intergenerational conflict over the distribution of public resources, stirred by neoliberal discourse (European Commission, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2012, and 2014).

The EU model of ageing seeks to combat discrimination based on biological age and negative attitudes and stereotypes toward older individuals, without questioning public responsibility for the security and well-being of seniors. The Commission's idea is to replace negative stereotypes associated with ageing with positive images that frame old age as an extension of active life. The aim is to facilitate continued participation in the labour market, senior volunteering, and other possible contributions by older people to social well-being. Likewise, it seeks to activate the entire population as a whole in order to delay physical and cognitive decline and, thus, the loss of autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

Even though there is no shortage of those who approve measures such as changing

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<sup>4</sup> Within the framework of the European Year of Active ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity, the Spanish Institute for Older People and Social Services (IMSERSO) produced a comprehensive *White Paper on Active ageing* on this issue, which includes contributions from experts in various disciplines. From Political Science, studies on active ageing policies have also begun to be published, among which the work by Navarro, Egea, and Alba (2016), using data from the Community of Madrid, can be highlighted.

<sup>5</sup> The differences between neoliberal discourse and the discourse of the new intergenerational solidarity promoted by EU institutions are clear. The neoliberal framework attacks intergenerational equity as a value, which is an essential component of the different welfare regimes of the Member States. This discourse, which is alien to the European tradition, is being promoted by economic interests that benefit from cuts to pensions and public services for older people, as well as by international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, or, to a lesser extent, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Walker, 2006: 343). Therefore, any potential discursive shifts away from the European consensus on the European Social Model, or cuts to national social policies, cannot be attributed to the EU's ageing strategy.

the official retirement age to "reduce the percentage of older people with a stroke of the pen" (Bond *et al*, 2007: 305), the European Commission has been criticized for giving greater importance in practice to labour market adjustments—for example, by promoting a delay in the retirement age—than to those aspects of this strategy more closely linked to the well-being of the current cohort of senior (Hamblin, 2013: 55-64; Walker and Malby, 2012: 119). Without downplaying this criticism, it should be noted that EU institutions have very limited powers in the area of welfare, for examples, in matters of health care, long- term care, or social assistance, which remain the responsibility of member states.

In reality, the challenge of ageing for the EU lies in adapting public welfare systems in which actors at different levels of government play a key role: regional ministries— for examples, of healthcare— local departments— such as those responsible for telecare services— Ministers of Finance, and many others. This vertical dispersion of competences, which also varies greatly from country to country, requires a great effort at coordination.

Eventually, the European macro-framework on ageing promotes a positive image of older people while at the same time defending the idea of public protection for citizens at all stages of their life cycle. If this framework were being successfully transferred from the top down, there would be no ideas contrary to the social and political participation of older people in meso-level and micro-level discourse. Examples of such ideas include expressions such as: "seniors have earned the right to remain detached from social and political issues"/"they should only be mobilized when their family, their parish, or their party asks them to," "people who remain in the labour market longer than required or take on volunteer roles," or "people who remain in the labour market longer than required or take on volunteer roles are taking job opportunities away from young people."

The following section presents the data from this research corresponding to the Autonomous Community of Galicia.

### **3. Discourses on ageing in the Galician epistemic community (meso-level frame) and among active older adults (micro-level frame)**

#### *3.1. Meso-level frame*

The meso-level discursive framework on active ageing in Galicia is defined on the basis of in-depth interviews with members of the Galician epistemic community in this field. The results are presented in four thematic blocks: the definition and seriousness of the problem; the concept of active ageing; priorities and basic instruments of ageing policies in Galicia, and the role of associations of older people and other non-profit organizations in their design and implementation.

##### **3.1.1. Definition of the problem**

Experts agree in assigning high or very high importance to this issue. It is argued that

the increase in the percentage of people over the age of 55 relative to the total population requires public authorities to manage the effects of demographic change within their areas of competence.

They are aware of the heterogeneity of older cohorts and tend to distinguish between people aged 55 to 65, 66 to 75, and over 75. They are also mindful of the underlying trends of increasing life expectancy and longer years of autonomous living. They favor speaking of "ageing generations," as well as analysing and adjusting measures to the specific characteristics of each generation. They know that the cohort that has just turned 50 includes more people with higher education, highly qualified professionals, and a more democratic political culture. They also know that these people are likely to be more proactive and demanding of public administrations in old age compared to current older generations, making it essential to diversify the instruments of active ageing policies.

Most experts advocate expanding measures aimed at people between the ages of 51 and 55, and even from the age of 46 onward, particularly in periods of rising long-term unemployment. The argument is that it is easier to keep a person active if they remain so after remaining active after leaving the labour market than to reactivate them later.

### 3.1.2. Concept of active ageing

For experts, active ageing is synonymous with living longer in good physical and cognitive condition. They draw on the concept developed by the World Health Organization, which distinguishes three dimensions within the idea of active ageing: health, participation, and security.

In the meso-level discourse, there is a strong conviction that active ageing policies are a sound investment because they significantly reduce current and future spending on long-term care. The argument of expenditure rationalization is used to support the idea of keeping older people in their homes for as many years as possible.

In addition, non-institutionalization is considered preferable because it allows seniors to remain within their traditional social networks, which protect them from loneliness. This idea— the importance of personal relationships for the well-being of older people— also emerges in discussion groups with seniors and constitutes a relevant shared element across frameworks at levels closer to the lived reality of old age. However, active older adults also value the new networks generated outside their traditional professional and personal environments. Emotional support among peers is a significant source of well-being that complements that derived from family interactions.

All members of the epistemic community agree that, except for occupations that require great physical effort, the ideal situation is to remain in one's profession while reducing work intensity.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, they place especially positive value on active ageing measures in the workplace, such as promoting older workers as mentors

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<sup>6</sup> In the methodological appendix, the different professional profiles of the interviewees belonging to the Galician epistemic community in the field of active ageing can be consulted.

or tutors for younger employees, as well as introducing a gradual process of partial retirement.

The interviewees linked to the Galician Society of Gerontology and Geriatrics, as well as others belonging to the third sector, place greater emphasis than other experts on the importance of social participation for the well-being of older people. Within the circles of this Society are present the concepts of "successful ageing" and "healthy ageing," widely used in gerontology (Minkler and Fadem; Rowe and Kahn 1987 and 1998).

The first concept (successful ageing) refers to the maintenance of physical and mental functions and the importance of ensuring that people accumulate the psychological and physical reserves needed to cope with stressful experiences in the later years of life. Healthy ageing starts from the premise that older people, far from being a burden, are highly valuable members of society. It highlights the importance of keeping them active and eliminating discrimination based on chronological age.

Experts from the Society of Gerontology and Geriatrics express disappointment at the resistance to incorporating more participatory approaches in the development of ageing policies. The emphasis on the technification of care, the fear among gerontologists and geriatricians of professional intrusion, and characteristics of earlier cohorts of older people— less educated and with a less democratic culture than those now entering old age— help explain the difficulties in overcoming the old conception of older people as passive objects and replacing it with one that gives them a leading role.

### 3.1.3. Priorities and basic instruments of active ageing policies in Galicia

In a context of scarce resources, public actors give priority to the prevention of dependency and support for people with limited autonomy. Other experts, without questioning the priority nature of these preventive measures, discuss how to pursue this objective, arguing for the allocation of more public resources to disease prevention and the early detection of cognitive decline. The latter experts draw attention to the lack of data to monitor changes in the profile and situation of the older population in Galicia. Some propose opening a conceptual debate on the notion of dependency. They emphasize that the definition used in the design of active ageing policies is debatable, arguing that a person should be considered dependent only when they require assistance from others to perform basic activities, and they emphasize the value of new technologies as tools to prevent the loss of autonomy.

For the regional administration, coordination between departments responsible for health, on the one hand, and social services for the elderly, on the other, is essential. The latter would play a key role in the sustainability of healthcare spending. Some experts note the lack of sufficient coordination even at the planning stage of actions undertaken by both departments.

Public actors are also engaged in the design of new services specifically for people with limited autonomy, with the aforementioned objective of enabling them to live longer in their own homes under satisfactory conditions. Many other experts value and are interested in this line of action. However, they call for a greater effort to expand the range of products adapted to these people. Some see this as fertile

ground for applying information and communication technologies (ICTs) more intensively and for continuing to innovate. Experts agree that older people tend to be wary of ICTs until they learn how to use them and make them their own. For this reason, they consider training activities in this field to be especially positive for as long as older cohorts continue to need them.

Although many experts assess the role of municipal administrations in improving the well-being of seniors positively, they also point out that municipalities do not always adhere to regional planning and that it would be advisable to clarify more clearly the role of provincial administration. Some interviewees mention the need for greater cross-sectoral coordination in addressing the specific needs of seniors at across the different levels of government. Several actors from the private and non-profit sectors express concern about the decline in public resources allocated to older people, which would complicate the extension of active ageing policies.

Experts also agree in emphasizing the persistence of stereotypes associated with chronological age and/or pensioner status. In this regard, some draw attention to problems in the design of volunteer programs for older adults. The contribution that the seniors make to the younger volunteers who provide emotional or instrumental support is almost never made visible. As a rule, in the relationships established through such volunteer activities— whether, for example, retirees teaching painting to older people, their language or customs to immigrants, how to carry out certain procedures to university students, or games to children— the leading role should fall to the older person. Some experts are more cautious about senior volunteering, arguing that there is still a risk of replacing the work of active workers or those of working age who have difficulty accessing the labour market.

#### 3.1.4. Role of associations of older people and other non-profit organizations

There is also consensus among experts regarding the importance of the contribution made by associations of older people and other non-profit organizations to the promotion of social participation among seniors. However, some insist that these organizations should never replace the work of geriatric professionals or other disciplines in dimensions of active ageing other than social participation.

There is also agreement in highlighting the difficulties that associations of older people tend to face when their traditional leaders disappear, as well as on the need to adapt senior associations to the demands of the new ageing generations. Several experts draw attention to the importance of retaining qualified professionals within associations of older people, even as facilitators for expanding senior volunteering. This idea also emerges in the discussion groups. Older people prefer to participate in activities organized by their associations rather than directly by public administrations. In addition, it can be expected that new cohorts of older people will show greater resistance to activities organized by "politicians." On the other hand, access to volunteering is more likely to occur through an association (generally, through a network of active people), and professionals in senior associations can provide information and technical assistance in the development of these volunteer activities.

The discourse of active seniors is presented below.

### 3.2. *Micro-framework*

The information gathered in the focus groups allows us to define the micro-level frameworks on ageing among active older people in this Autonomous Community. The sixteen people selected to form the groups are committed to the idea of active ageing and frequently participate in activities organized by members of the Galician epistemic community itself. An expert with extensive experience in senior associations collaborated in the participant selection process to ensure that all participants stood out for their dynamism. In addition, the composition of the groups allows for a more nuanced portrayal of the participatory seniors, identifying relevant differences by gender, place of residence, and level of education.

One group was conducted in a more urban setting, the regional capital, Santiago de Compostela, and another in the town of Padrón, with representation from both residents of the municipal center and its rural parishes. The groups were also balanced in terms of gender, education, and age. There was representation of men (8) and women (8); urban residents (8), people living in the town (3) and in rural areas (5); individuals with higher education (7), secondary or basic education (6) and those who did not have the opportunity to attend school (3); participants aged 55- 65 (3), 66 - 75 (8), and over 75 (5).

In these discussions, the aspirations, strategies, and practices of participation of different cohorts of active older people at various stages of ageing emerged naturally. Of particular interest are their definitions of old age and the identification of some barriers to social and political participation.

To present these data, five thematic blocks are used: the concept of older persons and self-perception, motivations for participating in active ageing activities, the advantages of staying active, ageing in employment, and participation in society.

#### 3.2.1. Concept of older persons and self-perception

The most active older people observe that the concept of what it means to be “older” has changed over the course of their lives. They emphasize that their public image has improved in recent years and express no doubts about their own ability to continue contributing to society. However, they believe that there is still much room for improvement in structuring their contribution, as they are willing to offer more.

"Before, being old meant disappearing from society. Nowadays, I think society has really understood—well, partly— that older people can be very valuable" [Woman, 69, city].

They frame old age as a continuation of their previous life. All of them categorically deny feeling old.

"I am 77 years old and I don't consider myself old, not yet" [Woman, 77 years old, city].  
 "I think that as long as you feel eager to go out, to move around, to do things with friends, to be doing something, you don't feel old. You feel old when you start staying home alone." [Woman, 60 years old, town]

"At meetings, there's always someone who says, 'The only time they call me old is when

I go to a Xunta meeting or to a conference,' and for us, at least for me, I think it's a continuation of my life." [Woman, 69 years old, city]

"I feel just as vital at many moments as when I was younger, except when you have those little aches and pains." [Woman, 69 years old, city]

"Apart from the shock you get from the mirror, which worsens your image, I think we all have a defense mechanism, the tendency not to feel old, either physically or mentally, and to try to be consistent in that approach so that old age doesn't take hold in your body." [Man, 70 years old, city]

They highlight positive aspects of ageing such as: accumulating experience and wisdom, getting to know yourself better, gaining confidence, and caring less about "what people will say."

"For me, being older is a biological state: you accumulate knowledge and experience, and you start to forget. It is necessary to begin forgetting certain stories we have stored away, because many times they can become a burden on our lives right now." [Man, 70 years old, city]

Among the negative aspects, they acknowledge being affected by the loss of loved ones and by fear of loneliness, falling, and death.

"For me, it's very sad (...) at the age I am now, I actually live with a bit of fear..." [Woman, 73 years old, town]

### 3.2.2. Motivations for staying active

Active older people understand social participation, above all, as a means of delaying ageing.

"I think it's a defense mechanism (...) to keep yourself going, to stay in contact, as a way to survive, (...) and also to get out of the house!" [Man, 70 years old, city]

"As the priest said, 'as a child you run, in middle age you walk, and when you're old you walk with a cane— but you keep walking, you don't stop.' He's right, you can't stop." [Man, 82 years old, rural area]

They suggest that staying active requires a great deal of willpower and effort.

"What matters is getting there, not dropping out along the way, doing what it takes to arrive in good shape. And you have to put a lot of yourself into it, a lot, to arrive well." [Woman, 72 years old, city].

"You need a lot of drive, a lot of willpower" [Man, 76 years old, city].

"Life is a state of mind. So, depending on your state of mind, on how you want it to be, you enjoy yourself, you relate to others, you empathize, and you look for your own defense mechanisms" [Man, 70 years old, city].

In the activities in which they participate, they seek friendship and integration into a social network of peers.

"I mean, if one day I go somewhere else, I go to a social center, if there is one, and that's it. You get started right away, and there you'll make friends." [Woman, 59 years old, rural area]

When asked why other people are not as active, they attribute it to a lack of willingness to integrate into a group, a lack of information about the range of available activities, and even to the rejection that activities linked to the Church or to "politicians" may generate.

"We are people who are always looking for something to do, not to stay at home, not just to go to the park; there are many people who don't know what to do, they don't have support or easy access, they don't know about these places (...) People's freedom also plays a role. Many people say: it's an organization that depends on religious groups or politicians; and people shy away from that and say it's their freedom and go to the park instead (...) and then they don't really have the drive either (...) Many people don't have that drive, what they've already done is enough for them." [Man, 74 years old, city].

Differences between men and women are significant. Regardless of whether they had paid employment in the past or of their level of education, women tend to assume and acknowledge the difficulties other men have in integrating. They note that quite a few start attending an activity but soon drop out. They emphasize that most men only take part in trips. However, they point out that in recent years the number of men participating in weekly activities has increased.

Differences are also observed according to type of habitat. In cities there are more opportunities to remain active. Rural seniors argue that the time and cost of travel limit their participation, and that distance is an almost insurmountable barrier for those who do not drive and depend on family members or neighbors to leave their immediate environment. Similarly, they state that in rural areas it is "less socially acceptable" to adopt participatory behaviors beyond family and neighbors.

"I live in a village and many people criticized me and told me I was a bit over the top" [Woman, 59 years old, rural area].

### 3.2.3. Advantages of staying active

Active seniors value, above all, the opportunity to meet and stay in contact with other people, conversation, and affection.

"You spend one year in activities and you meet more people than by living your whole life in Padrón." [Woman, 60 years old, town]

"I think the most important thing is to talk face to face, one-on-one, or three at a time... it's very important. Communication between people is key, very much so. There is a lot of loneliness among older people." [Woman, 69 years old, city]

"The experience is very satisfying because people are very pleasant, generally very open, and you make new friends who make your life much more enjoyable" [Woman, 78 years old, city]

To a lesser extent, they say that continuing to learn also motivates them and is a source of satisfaction.

“But I learned many things, you know– when I came here, I didn’t know anything about computers, and now I do PowerPoint presentations and things like that. I manage pretty well. I learned a lot here. Of course, you learn in a different way now... you learn as a hobby.” [Woman, 77 years old, city].

They are very aware that staying active is highly beneficial for themselves, their families, and society as a whole.

"Here, by getting to know certain people a bit, someone may join because of loneliness or problems in life, and you can try to help. There are very well-prepared people here who connect with them right away, support them, and try to lift their spirits– and they do lift them!" [Man, 74 years old, city]

"I can assure you that there are people who came here depressed and who are now doing very well, which means we are saving the social security system money on medication." [Woman, 69 years old, city]

#### 3.2.4. Ageing in employment

The most active seniors agree that 65 is, in general, a good age to retire and thus be able to "enjoy life a bit." However, they would make exceptions for occupations that require greater physical effort, for which they would set the retirement age below 65, as well as for professions in which experience is particularly important, such as medicine or teaching. In the latter cases, they consider it appropriate to remain in the labour market until at least age 70.

"For general jobs that do not involve much physical, 65 is a fairly acceptable age. Because at 65, if you are in good health, you can still enjoy life a bit. But at 70 it may already be too late to really live it" [Man, 74 years old, city].

"I think it depends on health and on the job: a miner has to stop earlier, a doctor can go on longer. You can't generalize" [Woman, 78 years old, city].

“I worked until I was 70, and I enjoyed it. I don’t regret working until that age at all. But well... I might be an exception.” [Woman, 77 years old, city]

They would view very positively the promotion of older people as mentors or tutors for younger workers, as well as the introduction of gradual process of partial retirement processes. They argue that this would benefit both young people's learning and their own well-being. They insist that they would love to have opportunities to transfer skills and to maintain the social relationships associated with work.

"I think that if you have a job and you enjoy it, you're better off. First, because you earn more (...), and life feels fuller, fuller..." [Man, 70 years old, town]

“Even after I retired, they would call me to ask how to do this or that, because of the experience of many years in an occupation (...) so, how did we do this...? I would be willing to keep helping out, but well... now there’s a law that forces you to retire. That’s

why now I'm not a worker, I'm 'joyfully retired.'" [Man, 77 years old, city]

### 3.2.5. Participation in society

Active older people in Galicia see helping their children or other relatives, both inside and outside the home, as something natural. They attach little importance to this availability.

They also acknowledge that they enjoy their grandchildren, especially when they can be involved in their learning processes.

Likewise, many of these people engage in volunteer work. They state that what led them to take this step was, first and foremost, the desire to help someone in need, as well as the wish to meet people, continue learning, and stay more occupied.

"There are many older people who, like her, take part in volunteering. In Santiago, there are a great many of them, helping families with food and clothing, families in crisis—ordinary middle-class families. Their numbers are growing families with two or three children who lose their jobs and have to turn to these volunteers for help. And most of those who help are older people, an admirable task." [Woman, 78 years old, city]

Those who do not participate in volunteer activities say that they lack the time to do so. They also point out that more information about the available options would be needed. People living in rural areas perceive greater difficulties in becoming volunteers.

Some active older people who do not volunteer emphasize that one can help informally in many ways and argue that, in a society where many people feel lonely, a very valuable contribution is to devote time to listening to others.

"That function of stopping, listening, and talking is something we now practice with new practices through new technologies. Email was a revolution for the world, and a few years ago there was a *Telefónica* advertisement— which I don't like, nor am I customer—but when they advertised phones, the message was: 'what matters is being able to talk.' I think that's the key, not only for those of us who are a bit older, but for people in general." [Man, 70 years old, city]

### 3.2.6. Assessment of ageing policies and future expectations

The most active older people view the existence of active ageing policies positively. They even express great concern about the possibility that financial difficulties could lead to cuts in the promotion of personal autonomy and in the range of activities offered. They warn that if the price of these activities increases for them, many active seniors, especially those who use their pensions to help their children and grandchildren, would stop participating. They insist that, when assessing their ability to pay, not only their pension income but also their family obligations should be taken into account.

These seniors believe it is important to continue making an effort to maintain and

expand nursing homes, day centers, and, in general, all public facilities where older people spend time together. Of these centers, and even of telecare services, they value not only the professional care provided but especially the fact that they allow them to stay in contact with other people.

"It's not the same to have a home-care worker come to help you shower, get cleaned up, and make the bed, as it is to be able to be with other people who are in the same situation as you and with whom you can share a while, sometime..." [Woman, 60 years old, town]

Nevertheless, they express disillusionment and have low expectations of public administrations. By contrast, they agree in emphasizing the value of associations of older people and other third-sector organizations, with which they feel more closely identified.

"(...) groups where one can turn and find an environment that helps with whatever one needs, that listens... I expect nothing from the Administration (...) if the Administration were truly interested, it should create a pool of people with expertise (...) to turn to them." [Man, 70 years old, city].

Still in relation to the public sector's financial difficulties, seniors hint at their fear of a reduction in retirement pensions and, more broadly, of a deterioration of the welfare state.

"The future looks a bit bleak" [Woman, 60 years old, town].

"The traffic light is yellow" [Man, 82 years old, rural area].

#### 4. Conclusions

This article has analysed the meso-level (policy-area) and micro-level (active older people) frameworks on active ageing in Galicia. These discourses contain elements present in the macro-level framework defined by the European Commission, but also other features that contradict it. In this way, discursive barriers have been identified that active older people encounter, as well as obstacles to the effective transfer of the European active ageing strategy in this region.

Finally, based on empirical evidence from focus groups with active older people and in-depth interviews with members of the Galician epistemic community in this field, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the design and implementation of ageing policies.

*It is suggested that the term "ageing" be avoided* since older people themselves do not identify with these policies because they do not consider themselves old.

The key to seniors' well-being may lie in the creation and activation of social networks aimed at preventing loneliness. Institutional communication and administrative discourse could therefore revolve around the idea of *combating loneliness*.

It is a priority to make greater efforts to *eliminate age-based discrimination in all areas*, particularly in the labour market.

It is expected that new generations of retirees will demand better responses from

public authorities include more active men (women currently lead in this area), and be more motivated to continue contributing to society. Older people should be involved more from an early stage in policy formulation, with a stronger emphasis on *participatory approaches*.

It is advisable *to tailor the level of participation to each person* and to expand the range or intensity of involvement to meet the expectations of the most demanding participants.

The first step is to remain active. Then, some seniors will become volunteers. Professionals working in associations of older people are well positioned to play a key role as gatekeepers and facilitators in the transition from less demanding activities to volunteering, by providing information, technical assistance, and motivation.

Even in long-term care policies, *older people should always be the protagonists*. All other actors should be considered secondary, and their role should be to enable and empower, not to direct or replace.

*It is essential to foster participatory behavior and civic engagement from childhood*. Activating or reactivating older people offers few guarantees of success without prior and early training.

Measures aimed at older people *should be adjusted to the specific characteristics of each generation and stage of ageing* (ages 46-55, 56-65, 66-75, and over 75). In general, measures should be tailored to *specific target groups*, in consultation with the beneficiaries of each program.

It is recommended to rely on *interdepartmental and multidisciplinary teams*. Even if the sole objective were the prevention of dependency, a multidimensional approach would be required, including R&D&I (research, development and innovation) in the field of gerontology and geriatrics, the promotion of older people as mentors or tutors for younger workers, the maintenance of the purchasing power of retirees, support for the professionalization of senior associations, and the organization of cultural activities with reduced public charges.

Finally, *greater coordination between levels of government* is required, as well as the development of an *evaluation culture*, by establishing interdepartmental teams for monitoring and continuous improvement.

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## 6. Methodological Appendices

### Methodological Appendix I: Profile of interviewees, and interview guide for in-depth interviews with members of the regional epistemic community on active ageing

*This interview is part of a study that seeks to analyse the evolution over the last decade of active ageing policies in Galicia at both the regional (autonomous) and local levels. Over the last decade. It also examines the participatory processes of each ageing generation and each stage of the ageing process. The main objective is to identify future areas of intervention to inform public policy in this field.*

*It is considered that your participation as an expert interviewee is important due to your in- depth knowledge of this policy area and the relevance of your perceptions and expectations. The following list of questions is merely a guide to the topics we would like to discuss with you.*

- Q1. Since when have you been familiar with the concept of active ageing?*
- Q2. Where does your interest in active ageing come from?*
- Q3. Which aspects of active ageing policies work best in Galicia, and why?*
- Q4. Which elements should be removed, and why?*
- Q5. Which aspects of these policies should be improved, and why?*
- Q6. Which programs or activities could be added, and why do you consider them important?*
- Q7. How do you think active ageing policies in Galicia will evolve, and how would these changes affect your organization?*
- Q8. According to your experience, for what purposes are new information and communication technologies (Internet, computers, next-generation phones, etc.) most useful for older people?*
- Q9. Based on your experience, what have proven to truly work in encouraging the participation of older people in society?*
- Q10. Do you think that society valuation of older people is satisfactory? If not, what measures would you recommend to reduce age-related stereotypes?*

The profiles of the interviewees are as follows:

- A political official from regional (autonomous) responsible for social policy (Interview conducted on Thursday, November 14, 2013, at 10:00 a.m., at the San Caetano Administrative Building, s/n, Santiago de Compostela)
- A technical officer from same area (Monday, November 11, 1:30 p.m., San Caetano Administrative Building, s/n, Santiago de Compostela)
- Two professionals from the private sector:
  - Tuesday, November 5, 7:00 p.m., Vigo
  - Friday, November 15, 10:00 a.m., A Coruña
- Four professionals from the nonprofit sector:
  - Tuesday, November 5, 10:30 a.m., Santiago de Compostela
  - Friday, November 8, 11:00 a.m., A Coruña
  - Friday, November 22, 12:00 p.m., Santiago de Compostela
  - Tuesday, November 26, 10:00 a.m., A Coruña

## **Methodological Appendix II: Discussion groups guide with active seniors**

*Introduction of the group and participants (Estimated time: 5 minutes)*

Good morning. My name is ... Today my colleague ... is also with us. First of all, I would like to thank each and every one of you, both on our behalf and on behalf of USC, for participating in this discussion group.

As you have already been informed, USC is conducting a study within the framework of European project "Active+ Ageing," funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the Spain-Portugal Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programmed. The project was structured in two phases, one quantitative and one qualitative, in which this discussion group is integrated. The part of the study in which you are participating aims to capture the opinions and public debates in regarding the well-being of people over the age of 55. The aim is to gather elements of the discourse that shape public debates around the daily lives of seniors, the influence of public administrations on their life satisfaction, and their expectations for the future.

Discussion groups bring together a small number of people to debate informally and openly, without structured questionnaires or questions, except for the thematic blocks that I will introduce. Therefore, my participation will be minimal. The idea is for you to express your opinions freely, without rules or speaking turns, other than basic standards of courtesy. I would also like to clarify that this conversation is not intended to determine who knows more about the topics discussed. There are no right or wrong answers, good or bad ones. We are interested in your impressions, expressed freely. In this regard, although the group will be recorded to facilitate data

processing, under no circumstances will the person expressing an opinion be identified. We are interested in the group's overall discourse, and the information will be treated in an aggregated and anonymous manner, in accordance with data protection legislation.

For this reason, and so that your experiences may improve the study, we kindly ask you to speak honestly and, in the language (Galician or Spanish) in which you feel most comfortable.

To begin with, we would like each of you to briefly introduce yourselves (name, what you do or what you have worked in, etc.). As I have already mentioned, there are no speaking turns or any other special rules.

*Thematic block 1. Perceptions of the concept and image of older people (Estimated time: 30 minutes)*

- To get started, I would like you to tell me: what does it mean to be an older person? In other words, what do we mean when we talk about older people?
- (Only if this information has not come up before) At what age do you consider someone to be older?
- More specifically, there has been a lot of discussion lately about retirement age. From what age do you think a person should stop working?
- Speaking more generally, do you think that the image of older people in society reflects reality? In other words, are there differences between how older people see themselves and how society sees them? (If so) What are those differences?
- And, taking into account what we have just discussed, could you tell me whether you consider yourself to be older?

*Thematic block 2. Daily life (Estimated time: 60 minutes)*

- Speaking a bit more about yourselves and what you do every day, do you think that in your daily lives do you have enough opportunities to develop your abilities and make use of your knowledge? Why?
- And in your daily routine, do you encounter any limitations? (If so) Which ones concern you the most?
- In general, do you think that what you do on a daily basis is useful or beneficial to other people?
- Do any of you take care of your grandchildren or other relatives every day or on certain days of the week? (If so) Do you enjoy doing it?
- Do you know anyone aged 55 or over who is worried about making ends meet? (If so) What would you say are the reasons for this (low salary or pension, providing a lot of support to their children and grandchildren, the economic crisis itself, etc.)?
- Are you currently satisfied with your life? Very satisfied?
- What expectations do you have in the medium and long term? Do you think

things will improve or get worse for older people? Why?

*Thematic block 3. Social and political participation (Estimated time: 25 minutes)*

- Do any of you collaborate with volunteer organizations or organizations that help people in need? (If so) What led you to do so?
- Would you like to participate more in politics? (If so) How: by being active in a political party, collaborating in a social movement, serving as a local councilor, etc.?
- On another note, which aspects would you improve in the programs and measures you are familiar with from your City Council, the Provincial Council, or the Xunta of Galicia aimed at people aged 55 and over?
- Conversely, which of these activities interest you the most and provide you with the greatest benefit?