

The Belgian Ageing Studies: a participatory research project to develop evidence-based age-friendly policies

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Belgium as other European countries is facing population ageing. In order to support municipalities in developing an evidence-based age-friendly policy, the Belgian Ageing Studies were developed. Since 2004, more than 165 municipalities in Belgium, the Netherlands (N=11) and Italy (N=2) engaged in this research project. This project monitors the needs and issues of quality of life among home-dwelling older people. Those issues are not solely care related but also include housing, neighbourhood, social participation, ... The research program was developed in co-creation with older people, senior associations, senior advisory boards, local authorities and other stakeholders. Older people are involved in this research as experts and actors by playing a role as voluntary poll-takers (peer-research). Each sample is representative for the respective municipality, offering local governments tools for the development of evidenced-based policies. The BAS-method provides tools for creating community networks and empowerment of older people. The development of a community network between local authorities, members of local senior associations, third sector agencies, and other community stakeholders is crucial for developing broadly based support around evidence-based policies. Empowerment is promoted through a cycle of research, participation, education, community action, and policy-making. As a consequence, older people who are actively engaged as participants develop a sense of co-ownership, pointing to the fact that participatory research can play a role in developing evidence-based senior policies. Moreover, it increases the opportunities for older people to participate in policymaking-processes.

More information can be found at <http://www.belgianageingstudies.be/>