

Press Release

New Policy Brief on engagement of older people in urban design showcases need for more open, flexible and collaborative consultation

Monday 7th February 2022

Brussels, Belgium. *URBANAGE today issues a new policy briefing critically reviewing the need for the public sector to better engage older adults in the design of more inclusive, accessible, age-friendly cities.*



The Brief titled '**Older Adult Engagement Guidelines for More Inclusive Cities**' authored by [URBANAGE](#) finds that aging is one of the greatest societal challenges of our time. Europeans are living longer than ever, and older people are rapidly becoming the largest population in many cities and regions. This demographic shift presents public sector everywhere with new multi-dimensional challenges around health, mobility, economics, and the physical environment. How we create age friendly cities becomes an urgent policy challenge.

As older people have seen vast changes within their environments during their lifetimes, and experience various obstacle to city life on a daily basis, it makes sense that they can bring a unique perspective and experience to the urban planning process. Yet many older people feel disengaged from policy purposes and undervalued as contributing members of society.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004590

URBANAGE is a H2020 European project on a mission to change the status quo and help create age-friendly cities by using new technologies to put older people's voices at the heart of urban planning. Consisting of a mix of researchers, cities, regions and technologists, the team are engaging with older adults in Helsinki, Santander, and Flanders to co-create enhanced urban planning processes which result in more inclusive policies and services that help all citizens enjoy a good quality of life into old age. A first output from working with older people are a set of guidelines for how public sector can better secure the engagement of older people in their co-design activities.

The proposed guidelines

1. Create an offer of engagement activities to which older citizens with different levels of commitment and engagement can contribute. The older adult needs to be free to choose whether they want to engage in inbound or outbound activities, or non-institutional or institutional activities.
2. When older adults engage in long-term commitments, offer enough consistency and structure in terms of structural support and financial resources.
3. Promote self-efficacy. Show older citizens that their efforts to improve the neighborhood have a clear and tangible impact.
4. When applying new technologies in citizen engagement activities, clearly state the added value of these new technologies.
5. When applying new technologies to engagement activities for older adults, communicate transparently about why local policy makers want to apply this technology.
6. Apply dual-track policies. When applying new technologies for neighborhood-improving activities, also offer non-digital alternatives for older citizens who will not, or cannot, use these new technologies.
7. Social influence & relatedness should be at the center of the engagement strategy for older adults, as they are the strongest motivator. In contrast, ownership & possession can be disregarded as a core motivational driver.
8. In developing an engagement strategy, collaboration towards a shared goal is preferred as a driver over strong competition
9. In setting goals, it is necessary to find the right balance between attainability and challenge difficulty.
10. To keep older adults engaged, it is necessary to highlight the greater cause and to communicate the impact of their input.

Roberto di Bernardo, Coordinator for URBANAGE says “we urge all public sector policy makers to implement the guidelines we have laid out. Every day, despite living in crowded cities, many older people are feeling lonely and isolated from crucial services. We can help adapt technology to be more inclusive and create service insights and tools that assist people in their daily lives, but this task can only be done with the crucial input of the people who will benefit the most. Strategic, sensitive and flexible engagement is key”.

The policy brief can be accessed at urbanage.eu/engagement

Notes to editor:

- URBANAGE has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004590.