



# Growing older in cities and communities

Projects and initiatives  
for a more sustainable world

Special issue



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# Foreword

Dear reader,

We older people feel jointly responsible for the future of our planet. The survey on Old Age in Germany (D80+) clearly reveals that the majority of people aged over 80 think it is important to take care of nature and the environment. If we intend to leave behind a thriving, peaceful and biologically diverse world for future generations, we must take urgent action. We can all make a difference. We must not make excuses or let our actions depend on how others behave. It is evident that politics and the industry are called upon to act. But we can make a big difference in small ways too.

In our immediate neighbourhood, our municipality or city, we can clearly see the connection between ecological stability, economic success and social justice. This is where we as old and ageing people can contribute by creating conditions that enable all of us to grow old in a healthy and active way.

With this special issue, BAGSO would like to draw attention to the importance of ecologically, socially and economically sustainable action for healthy ageing at the local level.



A selection of projects and initiatives from Germany and abroad demonstrates how local engagement and international networking can lead to concrete results for residents.

BAGSO would like to thank the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth for the long-standing support of our international work. Wishing you an exciting read, I hope you will find some inspiration for your move towards a more sustainable world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Regina Görner". The signature is fluid and includes a decorative flourish at the end.

Dr Regina Görner  
Chair of BAGSO

# Introduction

## Sustainability for all through to old age

Implementing sustainability in its many facets is one of the greatest challenges of this decade. Since the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 at the latest, sustainability is no longer seen solely from an environmental perspective. The comprehensive consideration of ecological, social and economic factors was declared the guiding principle for our actions in the coming years. The goals include the global fight against poverty and hunger, better access to education, greater equality and fewer inequalities. They also include sustainable consumption and climate protection. The central call of the 2030 Agenda is “to leave no one behind”, i.e. to place the weakest and most vulnerable at the heart of sustainable development.

This also concerns demographic change. A growing and ageing population also affects the resources available to us. At the same time, a growing number of persons are living in urban areas. By 2030, one in six people worldwide will live in urban regions.

In Germany, already today eight out of ten people live in cities. This development poses major challenges, not only for cities, but also for rural areas where populations are ageing and declining.

Sustainable Development Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda addresses the inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable design of cities and communities – from accessible and sustainable transportation systems for all, to access to safe and inclusive green spaces and public spaces, especially for women and children, older persons and people with disabilities.



*"The common, intergenerational dialogue and mutual learning are more important today than ever before. After all, securing the future foundations of life is at stake."*

BAGSO position paper “Protecting the climate – an intergenerational task for tomorrow's world”,  
June 2021



In 2016, the UN adopted its New Urban Agenda, which draws special attention to the various forms of discrimination faced by many people, including on the grounds of their age. In addition, the signatory states undertake to promote the participation of older people in planning and decision-making at the municipal level. In the field of digital solutions for urban planning, the focus is also placed on access for older people.

The work of the World Health Organization (WHO) plays an important role in ageing policy. To connect committed municipalities, WHO launched the Age-Friendly Cities project as early as 2007. Due to the great involvement of cities and municipalities from all over the world, WHO founded a worldwide network in 2010, the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC).

Today, around 1,300 cities worldwide are part of this network. The alliance puts the participation of older people at the heart of urban design, as they know best what needs to be changed in their environment to promote healthy and active ageing.

WHO has identified eight aspects that are decisive in making cities age-friendly:

1. Outdoor spaces and public buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social participation
5. Respect and social inclusion
6. Civic participation and employment
7. Communication and information
8. Community support and health services



*"Countries with ageing populations should take steps to adapt public programmes to the growing proportion of older persons."*

**UN report "World Population Prospects 2022"**

The way we shape our environment has a direct impact on how we grow older. According to WHO, this interaction between the environment and individuals holds "incredible potential for enabling or constraining Healthy Ageing" ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int)).

This is one of the key aspects of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing for the years up to 2030. A better understanding of the life-course perspective would greatly contribute to a more sustainable world. Despite changing images of ageing, a growing heterogeneity of older people and an increasing health awareness in the population, it is often underestimated that the environment in which we grow up and live determines how we experience ageing.

BAGSO considers the creation of a future-proof – sustainable – world to be an intergenerational task. It calls for a consistent implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda in the context of intergenerational cooperation.

This special issue focuses on initiatives and good examples that are intended to inspire and encourage others to take responsibility and shape the world in a sustainable way for the generations of today and tomorrow. Special attention is given to the rights and concerns of older people. Bernard Isaacs, Professor of Geriatric Medicine, described the key principle as follows: "Design for the young and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young".

## Milestones in international policy

**1982** The Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing is adopted.

**1990** The United Nations designated October 1 the “International Day of Older Persons”.

**1991** The United Nations adopted the UN Principles for Older Persons.

**2002** The World Health Organization (WHO) presents a policy framework to promote “active ageing”.

**2002** MIPAA, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, is adopted. It includes the creation of an enabling and supportive environment for ageing.

**2015** Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 11 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals calls for “sustainable cities and communities”.

**2016** Adoption of the United Nations New Urban Agenda, which includes a call for the participation of older people in urban planning.

**2020** The UN declares 2021–2030 the Decade of Healthy Ageing. Creating an age-friendly environment is one of the four action areas of the Decade.

**2021** An analysis by the UN Human Rights Council on the impact of climate change on older people warns of excessive implications of global warming for this group.

**2021** Publication of “Our Common Agenda” by the UN Secretary-General. The report deals with strengthening solidarity between nations and generations.

**2022** Adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 76/75, which recognises the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right.

*The share of the global population aged 65 years or above is projected to rise from **10 per cent** in 2022 to 16 per cent in 2050.*

# Sustainable communities in Germany

## The age-friendly city grows bottom-up

**The University City of Münster is setting out to join the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities of the World Health Organization (WHO). Christine Menke, Senior Citizen Policy Planner, explains how this works and the role sustainability plays in the process.**

Münster has around 316,000 inhabitants, 73,800 of which are over 60 – around one quarter of the population. By the end of the decade, the share of people aged 60+ will increase to around 88,800. In 2022, the city decided to join the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC). Christine Menke accompanied the joining process on behalf of the city administration.

*Ms Menke, Münster is the youngest urban municipality in North Rhine-Westphalia with an average age of 41.4 years. What is driving the city to join the WHO network?*

Demographic change has inevitably brought ageing policy to the centre of attention and the COVID-19 pandemic has made this particularly clear once again. Münster is already a member of the Healthy Cities Network Germany



Christine Menke, Senior Citizen Policy Planner at the City of Münster, prepared the application.

*(Gesunde Städte-Netzwerk Deutschland).*

However, policy on ageing encompasses more than just healthcare policy: It is a cross-sectional task. So it made sense to constitute an age-friendly city, to exchange ideas with other municipalities, to benefit from the worldwide network of WHO and to get involved with one's own activities and services.

*What are Münster's key political plans as an age-friendly city?*

It's all about participation and involvement. We have started with the following topics: Housing, security of supply and care in the neighbourhood, mobility in older age, empowerment of people with disabilities and promotion of digitalisation. You need to know this: In Münster, there are already 13 district working groups, also in the outer districts of the city. This is where everybody gets together: older people, volunteers, service providers and the local authority. For example, the district of Mecklenbeck, which is located somewhat on the outskirts of the city, expressed the wish for a sports park for older people. Together with sponsors, we were able to make this happen. And that's how it works in many areas. The important thing is to listen. The age-friendly city grows bottom-up.

*What role does sustainability play in the considerations?*

Münster is a very green city. The old town is to be made car-free, but this also requires sustainable mobility to ensure accessibility for the older generations and people with disabilities. The 2025 Münster Cycling Concept also emphasises the importance of age-appropriate bicycle traffic. For example, there are pedelec trainings for older people and there is the MünsterApp, which contains accessible offerings. What is more, the senior citizens' and health app "Well cared for in ..." (*Gut versorgt in...*) provides an overview of local services for older people – for instance in the areas of healthcare, leisure or senior-centred housing.

**The Global Network**

The Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) of the World Health Organization (WHO) was founded in 2010 after 33 cities had already joined forces in 2005/06. By mid-2022, 1,300 cities and municipalities from 47 countries had joined the initiative. In some countries, such as Canada and Ireland, there are also nationwide initiatives that support municipalities in becoming age-friendly.

In Germany, the first city to join the network was the North Rhine-Westphalian municipality of Radevormwald in 2016. Münster and Stuttgart have also been part of the network since September 2022. Hamburg intends to become a member as well.

**18.3 million** *people aged 65+ lived in Germany in 2020; in 1991 their number amounted to only 12 million.*

Federal Statistical Office, 2021

*Münster is a university city. To what extent can the municipality also benefit from its role as a centre of higher education in its policy on ageing?*

The fact that Münster is a city of science offers opportunities, for example, to integrate services for and with students – such as intergenerational housing or homesharing (a room in exchange for help). The university location keeps you young, and that is true not only for students.

*What advice can you give other municipalities that seek to become an age-friendly city within the WHO network?*

First, take stock of the current situation. The WHO questionnaire provides a good framework. Second, consider the task as a cross-sectional one. I, for example, include the concerns of older people in the discussions about new building projects and areas. Third: Involve the people – especially in the wake of the pandemic. We need far more meeting places for older people.

Here in Münster, we have also realised that it makes sense to distinguish between, or expand, the city's planning for support services for older people and its planning for long-term care. Both areas are crucial, which is why they should be given their own status. In general, it can be said that many cities and municipalities are further along the road to becoming an age-friendly city than they think. The journey is worth it.

*"Making cities age-friendly is one of the most effective policy approaches for responding to demographic ageing."*

Vancouver Protocol of the World Health Organization (WHO), 2007

# Sustainability works – a look at successful projects, initiatives and programmes

From intergenerational housing projects, community use of green spaces, sustainable ideas for maintaining public services or the collaborative development of age-friendly cities, examples from around the world inspire us to think about sustainability and ageing alongside each other and to develop local initiatives.

# Mobility and the public space

## Close cooperation between all stakeholders is required

**GreenSAM – Green Silver Age Mobility – is an EU funded project on sustainable modes of transport for the 60+ generation. Eight cities developed age-friendly mobility concepts.**

*Ms Edelhoff, what is the GreenSAM project about?*

It's about the demand of the 60+ generation for green mobility. The point of departure goes two ways: towards addressing the challenges of demographic change and the need for a shift in mobility.

Jointly with other European cities, we looked into how mobility can be designed to be not only sustainable, but also inclusive.

*You involved older people in the project right from the start. What was your approach?*

There are various options. In Hamburg, we decided to go out on the streets with a mobile information centre and talk to people on the spot: at underground stations, in community centres, in senior citizens' centres. Direct contact on the ground. That was important to us.



Urban planner Silke Edelhoff from the Hamburg district of Eimsbüttel on European learning processes and the importance of older people's participation

*Which route have the European partner cities taken?*

Latvia's capital Riga has started so-called Mobility Labs, i.e., workshops on various topics. During the pandemic, they switched to a hybrid model: exchange in small groups on site, further participation via digital formats with older people, but also other stakeholders such as the administration and transport companies. Together, solutions were developed for various topics such as transfer possibilities or transparency of the fare offers.



Urban mobility with bike rental stations

*Are there other examples of inclusion and participation from the project cities that could be adopted?*

My advice is to offer coaching and to try out things together. Gdansk, for example, has offered courses and joint tours on age-friendly tricycles. The city of Turku in Finland opted for a mentoring scheme where older people were trained and then showed other peers how to use local public transport and digital fare offers. They also had Youth Coaches, students who trained older people in the digital use of the city's rental bike system.

*Where exactly is the success of GreenSAM Hamburg visible?*

There is no such thing as a flagship project. Mobility is like a long stretch of the road, where you make up the journey step by step.

The overall concept must be right. We developed the "Guidelines for senior-friendly transfer points" for planners and redesigned Eidelstedter Square as our demonstration object. This used to be a rather unwelcoming bus interchange in Hamburg. Now we have neat seating, a clear routing of the cycle paths, more greenery and better lighting. A team of artists is now redesigning the grey façades with the help of school classes. All these single parts are forming a whole.

*What can other municipalities learn from GreenSAM?*

You have to keep the diversity of the users in mind. Older people are a very heterogeneous group, not only in terms of age brackets. We are also dealing with different facets of physical capacity and mental flexibility. People come from different backgrounds and there is no such thing as THE older person. Therefore, a triad applies: creating accessible offers, establishing clear communication and encouraging people to participate.

*What is your conclusion about the project?*

Mobility is an integrated topic. This includes more than just the civil engineering department and the transport provider. A good mobility concept requires intensive cooperation – with older people and all other stakeholders. It needs an integrated approach and structures that promote this.

## Good practice examples: Things are moving

The city of **Akita** in Japan introduced a **100-yen ticket**. To promote social participation, older people can use local public transport for 100 yen per journey – the equivalent of around 70 cents.

During the pandemic, **Santiago de Chile** organised a **voluntary delivery service** for older people with courier services provided by the city's driving schools. In addition, the city expanded telemedicine to avoid unnecessary journeys, while ensuring medical care.

In **New York**, the **Market Ride** is rolling: The city's yellow school buses take people aged 60 and over to the supermarket for free during school hours.

In Malta's capital **Valetta**, older people can use the free **Silver Taxi** to go to the shops, the bank or to visit friends; bookings are made by phone.

The Slovenian capital **Ljubljana** launched the **Kavalier** project: This small electric vehicle not only offers older people a ride into the car-free city centre, it also promotes their social participation.

The city is increasingly focusing on an age-friendly local transport concept, including low-floor buses and a barrier-free funicular railway to the city castle. Ljubljana has twice been awarded the Mobility Prize by the EU Commission for its innovative transport policy.

**Quito** in Ecuador and **Bogotá** in Colombia make use of the **Ciclovia** programme, where certain streets are temporarily closed to car traffic to become lively meeting venues for everyone, ranging from playing children to older people meeting for a chat. This promotes social participation.



*"Access to public transport and mobility services must not pose insurmountable hurdles for anyone."*

BAGSO position paper "Protecting the climate – an intergenerational task for tomorrow's world", June 2021

In Sangam Vihar in South **Delhi** in India, a programme to promote contact between older people and the street patrol police officers was implemented to strengthen the **personal safety** of the district residents. As part of the programme, police officers identified older people living alone and visited them regularly.

# Climate and health

## How plants in the city improve not just the microclimate

**Climate change is hitting cities too – and their older population in particular. Green spaces in the residential surroundings not only lower the temperature, but also promote biodiversity and strengthen social cohesion.**

Several raised beds welcome you to the green space behind the housing estate on Dresdner Strasse in the centre of Berlin. Nasturtium and poppies are in blossom there, rocket and lettuce are sprouting in the next bed, and a tenant is plucking

weeds. Friendly glances accompany her from the balconies of the surrounding apartment buildings.

“Greening creates spaces for encounters,” explains Ina Säumel. The environmental scientist works at the Integrative Research Institute on Transformations of Human-Environment Systems (IRI THESys) at Berlin’s Humboldt University. What sounds unwieldy has very practical uses: Ms Säumel examines the positive aspects of urban greenery on microclimate and health.



Protesters on the streets calling for political action

Climate change is causing temperatures to rise. Cities are heating up in particular, and ozone and nitrogen oxides from traffic are putting additional strain on the respiratory tract.

An analysis by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights warns of the particular impacts of climate change on older people. According to a study by the Robert Koch Institute, the Federal Environment Agency and the German Weather Service, around 19,300 people died as a result of the heat in the particularly hot years from 2018 to 2020. This proves that heat events “are a serious threat to the health of people in Germany”, according to the study. Studies on the 2003 heat wave in Europe reveal that older people account for a large proportion of the victims.

### **Greenery provides cooling**

Green oases with trees and other plants reduce the temperature by two to eight degrees compared to unshaded surroundings. The EU Commission therefore wants cities to increase their green spaces by five percent by 2050.

■ **Façade greening:** “The most important message is: establish green façades – and do it where people spend time – in the courtyard, around rubbish bins, along paths,” says Ms Säumel. The



Ina Säumel contributed to a guide for housing associations. It contains tips on how to improve the microclimate.

researcher adds further advantages of façade greening, such as the reduction of fine dust pollution.

■ **Sponge City:** Warm air can absorb more water. Therefore, heavy rainfall events will occur more frequently in the future, as was the case in 2021 along the Erft and Ahr rivers in Germany. That is why Berlin, among others, has opted for the Sponge City concept, which was developed in Asia. Green infiltration areas absorb the water like a sponge when it rains and release it again when it is dry. “So-called tree trenches, which combine street trees with infiltration swales, work particularly well,” says Säumel.

■ **Green roofs:** Green spaces make a difference – even on roofs. “Especially on low-rise constructions,” explains Säumel. Because with higher buildings, the cooling air is drawn off too far up. “With low-rise constructions

such as garages or rubbish shelters, the cooling effect is also of direct benefit to the residents. It is even better if the greenery is linked to other green spaces in the neighbourhood – such as gardens and parks.

The Berlin Foundation for Nature Conservation (*Stiftung Naturschutz Berlin*) has published a guide on how green spaces can also serve biodiversity. After all, it doesn't always have to be lawns. The Berlin housing cooperative "Märkische Scholle", for example, uses yarrow, larkspur and toadflax for the greening of courtyards in Tempelhof – which promotes biodiversity and also benefits the bees.

"It is often the little things that make a difference, like a bench in the shade, which already improves everyday

life," says Ms Säumel in summary. The researcher knows that green spaces in the city also affect the social climate. During the pandemic, Säumel conducted a study on the influence of the view from an apartment on the well-being of older people. The conclusion: "Our data show that a green living environment has a strong impact on the social fabric. Green has a positive effect – even when looking out of the window," says the researcher.

Urban gardening projects like the one in Dresdner Strasse provide more than just fresh vegetables. They also bring people together. "People stroll through a park, or cultivate a garden," says Säumel and has an important piece of advice: "Even though landscape planners don't like to hear it: The secret is for people to develop their gardens by themselves and collectively."

## Climate lawsuit

### In Switzerland, the Senior Women for Climate Protection

(*KlimaSeniorinnen*) filed a complaint against the government in Bern before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg in May 2022.

"With our proven special vulnerability as older women, we do not feel sufficiently protected from the climate catastrophe by the Swiss Federal Council," says Rosmarie Wydler-Wälti, Co-President of the KlimaSeniorinnen association.

The movement has about 1,900 members, the average age is 73. After courts in Switzerland initially rejected the complaint, the ECHR gave the case priority.

## Good practice examples: Let's make it green and cool



**Oslo** has committed to **green budgeting**, with the city's budget being reviewed for its climate impact since 2017. The most recent goal is to reduce emissions in the building sector. The **OECD**, together with the **EU Commission**, has meanwhile taken over the initiative and set general standards, for example, to define municipal climate targets and set budgetary resources for climate protection.

**Yanji** in China is pushing the **Sponge City** concept. Around 8,000 square metres are designated as rainwater retention basins to prevent flooding. The green spaces also serve as recreational areas with age-friendly footpaths without tripping hazards for the population.

In the run-up to the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, **Manchester** organised **climate workshops** with older people, who were given the opportunity to voice their climate concerns on the online platform "In our Nature".

In the wake of Typhoon Yolanda (2013) in the **Philippines**, the local relief agency COSE and the global organisation HelpAge International developed a joint concept for **disaster relief for older people**. Among other things, an accessible hotline was set up and age-appropriate transitional housing was built.

**Erfurt** is participating in the German government's "Heat Resilient City" concept. Among other things, a **heat action plan** has been in place since 2020. At [www.erfurt.de/hitze](http://www.erfurt.de/hitze), everyone can see online how the city is responding to heat warnings from the German Weather Service (*Deutscher Wetterdienst*, DWD). The solution is sometimes surprisingly simple: Housing associations open their chilly communal spaces on hot summer days. But what can smaller communities do when it's hot? Guido Spohr from the city of Erfurt takes a very practical approach, saying: "Open the cool spaces you have to the public. The easiest way is usually to start with the churches."

The **Workers' Welfare Association** (*Arbeiterwohlfahrt*, AWO) is launching the project "**Climate-friendly care – everywhere**". The aim is to achieve climate neutrality in the care sector by 2040. In a first step, the climate impact is assessed and then concrete steps towards sustainability are introduced. For example, a flock of sheep keeps the grass short at the AWO retirement home Süssendell in Stolberg, North Rhine-Westphalia, and the retirement home Karl Mödersheim in Leuna uses vegetables from its own garden.



Cooking lunch together creates greater cohesion in the neighbourhood

## Sustainable housing and social participation

### Green concepts to counter rising energy prices

**The UN Social Covenant affirms the right to adequate housing – including for older people. An energy self-sufficient housing estate in the Netherlands demonstrates how it can be done in a sustainable way.**

“I am incredibly proud,” said Mark Roëll, mayor of the Dutch municipality of Baarn, at the inauguration of the Schoonoord housing estate. For the new buildings offer something entirely sustainable: an

energy self-sufficient housing project for older people.

Schoonoord loosely translates as “clean north”. The three houses in the village near Utrecht offer spacious apartments, a training café and a restaurant. Solar panels on the roof generate green electricity and the rest of the required energy is provided by heat pumps that extract warm air from the environment and use the recovered energy to heat the homes.

Adequate living environments are key for people to be “able to age independently and actively in their community”, emphasises WHO. In Baarn, this is being implemented in a sustainable way. “People want to live in their own home even in older age,” says Ton de Rond about the concept of Ageing in Place – growing older in familiar surroundings. Mr De Rond is head of the housing association Habion, which maintains around 12,000 housing units in the Netherlands, including the sustainable estate in Schoonoord. All apartments are exclusively intended for older people. The special feature: Habion has anchored sustainability in its corporate goals, which includes the following:

- **Deconstruction instead of demolition:** Habion insists on minimal waste of resources. When renovating or constructing new buildings, care is taken to reuse the materials.
- **Sun on the roof:** The Habion housing estates are equipped with solar panels – “Zon op zorg”, is the name of the concept, meaning sun on the roof. The mini solar farms are financed through a crowdfunding website, turning environmentally friendly electricity into a green investment for everyone.

- **Saving energy:** Competitions to save energy are held among the older tenants – this allows electricity and gas costs to be reduced by up to twenty per cent. It also cuts emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, and in addition lowers utility costs in times of rising energy prices.

In terms of implementation, Habion relies on a pragmatic approach. “We focus on ‘no-regret’ measures,” Habion says about its sustainability efforts. This refers to measures and procedures that have already proven their worth in other construction projects.



*“Older people are more likely to live in homes with insufficient heating and cooling systems that do not adapt to new temperature extremes or that are less energy-efficient.”*

Report of the UN High  
Commissioner for Human Rights,  
2021

## Good practice examples: sustainable and neighbourly

The **Homes4Life** initiative sets sustainable standards for housing in older age. The Italian city of **Treviso**, for instance, is focusing on **innovative forms of housing** for older people and is revitalizing the city centre with its Borgo Mazzini Smart Cohousing project. Vacant buildings downtown are being converted into age-friendly apartments. There is also cooperation with a nearby nursing home. Environmentally friendly building materials were used to a large extent and attention was paid to low energy consumption.

The civil society co-operative **Cohousing Australia** advises interested parties on how to implement cohousing initiatives. The focus is on social interaction, environmental sustainability and accessible design to create attractive housing alternatives.

The **Lugaritz** housing project in **San Sebastian**, Spain, focuses on the integration of young and old. The centre of the housing complex includes a kindergarten, cafés, neighbourhood meeting points and apartments for older people. A common plaza creates meeting spaces.

The EU initiative for Sustainable Housing and Building without Borders (GReNEFF) promotes climate-friendly living – including in old age.

The project is being implemented in the border region of Belgium, Germany, France and Luxembourg. In the **Belgian town of Aubel**, for example, intergenerational low-energy and community housing estates were built with 13 apartments and community spaces in a former school building.

Ageing in Place – growing older in familiar surroundings – is at the heart of the **Wilmankoti** housing project in **Finland** as well. The housing estate offers care at home. In line with the Finnish concept of “*Toimiva asunto*” (*a functional dwelling*), the apartments are designed to be functional and accessible.

In the German municipality of **Burgrieden** in Baden-Württemberg, a project for **age-friendly housing in rural areas** was implemented. Based on a citizen survey, the Forum for Community Living (*Forum Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen*) supported an age-appropriate housing project in the middle of the village.

The federal model programme “**Life as usual**” (*Leben wie gewohnt*) promotes model projects in rural and urban areas. They demonstrate how older people can stay in a familiar environment and grow older in a self-determined way.

In **Rottweil** in Baden-Württemberg, a citizens' initiative saved an old Capuchin monastery. Instead of demolition, civic engagement led to the conversion of the building into a **multigenerational house**. The location, with its attached café and rentable event space, has long since become a meeting point for the neighbourhood as well.

The city of **Arnsberg** established a **dedicated department** to shape the future of **older persons** (*Fachstelle Zukunft*

*Alter*) to coordinate and promote policies for older people in the municipality.

The focus is on the cooperation of different stakeholders from civil society and the administration. The common goal is to create a city where people can live long and well. For example, in the Arnsberg Dementia Learning Workshop, many different partners are committed to improving life for people with dementia. Structures have been created over the years to shape demographic change in a sustainable way.



Ground-breaking ceremony for community living in Burgrieden



Repairing together

## Civic engagement and the circular economy

### How the repair club in Radevormwald works

**Turning old into (almost) new: A repair club is about more than just circular economy. The example from Germany's first age-friendly city, Radevormwald, is proof of this.**

"We'll fix it!". That was immediately clear to the team from the repair club in Radevormwald in North Rhine-Westphalia. The electronics were acting up on an old slide projector and the picture frames were no longer moving mechanically either.

But no is not an option. "With a lot of effort, the volunteers managed to make the device fit for use again," says Kyra Springer and immediately adds: "The owner was incredibly happy to be able to look at the old pictures from the past again."

Kyra Springer is coordinator at the aktiv55plus association in Radevormwald, the first age-friendly city in Germany. The association also runs the repair club.

The idea is to make old (almost) new again. Or in the words of Ms Springer: "We fix what's broken." So many things are simply too good to be thrown away, and not only because of the associated memories. "Some people simply don't have enough money to afford something new," says Ms Springer. "On top of that, many people have great manual skills. And ecology of course also plays a role." Repairing is sustainable.

Waste avoidance and the circular economy save resources and reduce the burden on the environment. It's about recycling raw materials, increasing the longevity of products and repairing what is broken.

The EU Commission is striving for a right to repair. The circular economy, too, is to be promoted. The EU Commission warns that up to 750 million tonnes of electronic waste per year could be produced worldwide by 2030 if the recycling rate is not increased. At the same time, the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights states: "Older people have enormous knowledge, experience, skills and resilience that help them to be key contributors in global efforts to adapt to and reduce the negative effects of climate change."

The repair club team in Radevormwald brings together environmental commitment and expertise. "It gives you a great feeling when devices can be repaired and the owners leave in

gratitude," says Guido Kienast. He has been part of the repair team for three years now. His motivation: "Spending free time in a meaningful way, making other people happy and doing it all as part of a great team. It can't get any better than that," says Mr Kienast and adds another benefit: "On top of that, you can really learn a lot from the others."

Twice a month, Kienast and his team open the repair club, which is located right next to the community café at the "House of Encounter" in the centre of Radevormwald. Sometimes a slide projector is brought back to life, sometimes a defective vacuum cleaner needs repairing, at other times, a dress is mended. And, of course, people use the occasion to have a chat. The repair club brings people together – and into contact with each other. Springer calls it a "win-win-win situation" and adds: "Repairing makes the owners happy, benefits the environment and the successful work gives the repairers a positive feeling."

**12.8 per cent** *is the recycling rate in the EU. The aim is to increase this figure to 100 per cent by 2050.*

European Commission, 2021

## Good practice examples: full of energy

The Dutch city of **Rotterdam** sends out its **energy coaches** to residential areas with predominantly old buildings, where many older tenants with low pensions live. The idea behind the concept is simple: To identify energy wasters such as old shower heads or leaky windows and, if necessary, replace or seal them. For this purpose, the city's Pauw Foundation trains young migrants to look for energy leaks in the homes. This pays off in several ways: Young immigrants learn the language, tenants save money and the climate benefits too.

The Mexican city of **Guadalajara** has trained young nutrition advisors. Through the programme "**Taking Control of your Health**", they teach older people about healthy food and the benefits of a sustainable diet.

The town of **Andernach** in Rhineland-Palatinate has adopted the concept of the **Edible Town**. The urban green spaces are turned into vegetable gardens, where rare tomato and onion varieties were planted, among other things. The programme not only promotes biodiversity, but also a sense of community as older people pass on their gardening experience.



A healthy diet is also good for the climate

# People want to see real progress

*Mr van Hoof, what is your advice regarding an age-friendly agenda?*

My motto is to lead by example and show the benefits of investing in age-friendly and sustainable practices. Being age-friendly is more than just a label. A sustainable, age-friendly agenda brings concrete benefits: for older persons, for younger people and for the budget – for example through savings on energy costs. The money saved can be used to provide other services for older people, such as high-quality home care and social services.

*On behalf of the city of The Hague, you conducted research on how residents rate the age-friendliness of their municipality. What is your conclusion?*

Generally speaking, age-friendliness in The Hague is sound. However, some social groups are more reserved in their assessment of the situation, for instance, people with motor impairments. This is understandable because limited mobility undermines social participation. That's why many municipalities in the Netherlands offer free local public transport for older people.



Joost van Hoof teaches Urban Ageing at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. He has examined the age-friendliness of The Hague.

*Your study is now considered to be the standard. You conducted similar surveys in Romania, Poland and Turkey. How did you approach these?*

In the Netherlands we say "Meten is weten" – measurement is knowledge. We wanted to measure more than just qualitative factors. That's why we supplemented the WHO's established thematic areas such as social participation and housing for an age-friendly city with other factors such as technology affinity, family-based values and financial situation. The assessment of one's own financial situation is the crucial factor in evaluating the age-friendliness of a city. This is also shown by a similar study in Istanbul. Without money, adequate social participation is difficult to achieve.



Taking stock of the age-friendly city

*The follow-up study in autumn 2022 will address the topic of sustainability. What sustainable factors are important to older people?*

In addition to mobility, energy poverty is one of the most urgent problems of policy on ageing. That is why the issue of sustainability is so crucial. My advice to municipalities and housing associations is: tackle the issue of sustainability in housing construction. It pays off directly as the money will flow back directly.

*What can cities and municipalities learn from your work if they want to evaluate progress towards an age-friendly city?*

A survey is always just the starting point for further political work. It is about the stories behind the figures. Why do some districts perform better than others? The key success factor is to involve older people and to listen to what they are saying.

*Visibility is an important factor. How can success and progress be communicated?*

The Age-Friendly City programme is about more than just joining the Global Network of the World Health Organization (WHO). It requires real support and engagement – from local politics and from the administration. The population will quickly see through if there is no major change after joining the WHO network.

People want to see real progress. That is why The Hague published a brochure detailing what the municipality is doing in the eight WHO thematic areas and what this means for the population. A great report full of good examples. This has contributed a lot to the visibility and success of the programme.

## Recommendations

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) prepared an initial checklist for processes towards becoming an age-friendly city. A WHO Europe guidebook recommends the following four steps for the implementation:

- 1. Engage and understand:** Set up a steering or working group, involve older people, assess the initial situation and secure the support of the city
- 2. Plan strategically:** Unite partners behind a common vision; analyse strengths and weaknesses and develop a strategy
- 3. Act and implement:** Design an action plan, involve older people, secure support and resources, scale-up successful action
- 4. Evaluate and monitor progress:** Create partnerships, for instance with universities, evaluate progress and exchange with others (both nationally and internationally)

# What we need



*"The right to a healthy and sustainable environment is as important for the older ones among us as it is for future generations. The exchange with other countries is an opportunity to learn from each other. It is crucial to develop sustainable solutions together and across borders."*

**Ina Voelcker,**  
Head of the Secretariat for International Policy on Ageing at BAGSO



*"On the path towards sustainable age-friendly cities, we need civil society because it can act free from the constraints of the public sector."*

**Dr Alexandre Kalache,  
President of the International Longevity Centre Brazil  
(ILC-BR)**



*"Designing and building should be empathetic and multi-faceted in its considerations – inclusivity being the standard, not a deviation."*

**Dominique Hauderowicz,**  
architectural studio dominique + serena,  
Co-author of the book "Age-Inclusive Public Space"



*"Sustainable development is only achieved through concerted, collective efforts, from local to global, and with people at the centre of action and decision-making."*

**Thiago Herick de Sá,**  
World Health Organization (WHO)



*"BAGSO calls for all older persons to have a guaranteed right to social participation in the digital world. In the future too, though, it must still be possible to participate in community life without digital media and services."*

**Dr Heidrun Mollenkopf,  
BAGSO board member**

# Contacts, links and further reading

## Project contacts

### ■ Age-friendly City of Münster

Christine Menke, Senior Citizen Policy Planner at the City of Münster  
menkechristine@stadt-muenster.de  
Guidebook (in German): [https://www.stadt-muenster.de/session-net/sessionnetbi/v00050.php?\\_\\_kvonr=2004050228](https://www.stadt-muenster.de/session-net/sessionnetbi/v00050.php?__kvonr=2004050228)

### ■ Age-friendly mobility, GreenSAM Hamburg

Silke Edelhoff, Mobility Manager, district office Eimsbüttel  
silke.edelhoff@eimsbuettel.hamburg.de  
Guideline for senior-friendly transfer hubs (in German): <https://www.hamburg.de/content-blob/15239874/7e2444dfb7196ef3d-oda6653f228639b/data/d-leitfaden.pdf>

### ■ Climate-friendly greenery in the city

Dr Ina Säumel, HU Berlin  
ina.saeumel@hu-berlin.de  
Guide to green living environments for housing cooperatives (in German): <https://www.iri-thesys.org/media/Leitfaden.pdf>

### ■ Habion housing association

info@habion.nl  
Project site: <https://www.habion.nl/onze-woningen/onze-woningen/provincie-utrecht/schoonoord/>

### ■ Repair club Radevormwald

Kyra Springer, Supporting association aktiv55plus  
info@aktiv55plus.de  
Flyer "Gut beraten" (well-advised) (in German): [http://www.aktiv55plus.de/files/aktiv55plus/documents/downloads/Flyer\\_GutBeraten\\_final.pdf](http://www.aktiv55plus.de/files/aktiv55plus/documents/downloads/Flyer_GutBeraten_final.pdf)

### ■ Conclusion: All beginnings are easy

Joost van Hoof, Professor of Urban Ageing, University of Applied Sciences The Hague;  
j.vanhoof@hhs.nl  
How older people experience the age-friendliness of The Hague: A quantitative study. In: Cities: 124 (2022), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275122000075>

### ■ Guide on creating age-friendly environments

WHO Europe: Creating age-friendly environments in Europe. A tool for local policymakers and planners. 2020. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/334252>

## Further reading

- Berlin–Institute for Population and Development: Smart Ageing. Technologien für die altersfreundliche Stadt. Praxis, Hintergrund und Empfehlungen (*Technologies for the age-friendly city. Practice, background and recommendations*). Spotlight Demografie 6 (in German). [Berlin 2021]. <https://www.berlin-institut.org/studien-analysen/detail/smart-ageing>
- Hoof, Joost van/Marston, Hannah R. (eds.): Age-Friendly Cities – State of the Art and Future Perspectives. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-0365-1226-6>
- Säumel, Ina/Sanft, Simone Jessica: Crisis mediated new discoveries, claims and encounters: Changing use and perception of residential greenery in multihousing in Berlin, Germany: In: Urban Forestry & Urban Greening. Vol. 74/August 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2022.127622>
- Senate Department for the Environment, Mobility, Consumer and Climate Protection Berlin: Biodiverses Wohnumfeld (*Biologically diverse housing environments*) (in German). <https://www.berlin.de/sen/uvk/natur-und-gruen/biologische-vielfalt/berliner-beispiele/gesellschaft/biodiverses-wohnumfeld/>
- Berlin Foundation for Nature Conservation (publisher): Stiftung Naturschutz Berlin: Mehrwert durch mehr Lebensraum. Machen Sie den Unterschied. Eine Handreichung für die naturnahe Gestaltung von Wohnanlagen für ein urbanes Netz der Lebensräume (*Added value thanks to more living space. Make the difference. A handout for the nature-friendly design of housing estates for an urban network of habitats*) (in German). [Berlin 2021]. [https://www.stiftung-naturschutz.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/Florenschutz/VL\\_M-Scholle\\_Handreichung\\_web.pdf](https://www.stiftung-naturschutz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Florenschutz/VL_M-Scholle_Handreichung_web.pdf)
- UNECE: Ageing in sustainable and smart cities. (Policy Brief on Ageing, 2020). <https://unece.org/policy-briefs>
- WHO Europe: Age-friendly environments in Europe. A handbook of domains for policy action. 2020. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/334251>
- WHO Europe: Age-friendly environments in Europe. Indicators, monitoring and assessments. 2020. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/334284>
- HelpAge International, AARP und PAHO: Let's go! Steps for engaging older persons and improving communities for all ages. 2022. <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/so-%20ociety-for-all-ages/let-s-go-guide/>

## Links

- Website on "Climate–People–Health" by the Federal Centre for Health Education (in German) <https://www.klima-mensch-gesundheit.de/>
- Support and information on the realisation of community housing projects by Forum gemeinschaftliches Wohnen e.V. (in German) <https://win.fgw-ev.de/>
- Service portal "Ageing at home" by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (in German) <https://www.serviceportal-zuhause-im-alter.de>
- Funding for age-appropriate modernisation of living space by the German promotional bank KfW (in German) [https://www.kfw.de/inlandsfoerderung/Privatpersonen/Bestehende-Immobilie/Foerderprodukte/Altersgerecht-Umbauen-\(159\)/](https://www.kfw.de/inlandsfoerderung/Privatpersonen/Bestehende-Immobilie/Foerderprodukte/Altersgerecht-Umbauen-(159)/)
- Expedition Age & City by Körber Foundation (in German) <https://koerber-stiftung.de/projekte/expedition-age-city/>
- Series of seminars on the "City Lab" by Körber Foundation (in German) <https://koerber-stiftung.de/projekte/stadtlabor-demografische-zukunftschancen/>
- Urban Development Support programme for sustainable projects (in German) [https://www.staedtebaufoerderung.info/DE/Programme/programme\\_node.html](https://www.staedtebaufoerderung.info/DE/Programme/programme_node.html)
- Sustainable housing projects by Forum gemeinschaftliches Wohnen (in German) <https://verein.fgw-ev.de/projektboerse/>
- Swiss network of age-friendly cities (in German) <https://altersfreundlich.net/>
- Network of inclusive communities in Canada/North America <https://www.88ocities.org/>
- New European Bauhaus: Sustainable design initiative of the EU [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_4626](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4626)
- Platform of the UN Decade of healthy ageing <https://www.decadeofhealthyageing.org/>
- Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/>

# BAGSO – The voice of older people

BAGSO, the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations, represents the interests of older generations in Germany. It stands up for active, healthy and self-determined ageing in social security. BAGSO is an umbrella organisation of more than 120 civil society organisations that are run by or work for older people.

In a colourful and diverse society, BAGSO promotes a differentiated image of old age. This includes both the various opportunities arising from longer lives as well as times of vulnerability and the need for care. BAGSO calls on politicians, society and businesses to offer conditions

that allow for a good and dignified life in older age – in Germany, Europe and worldwide.

At the United Nations, BAGSO is actively involved in the development of a UN Convention for Older People. BAGSO is also a member of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP), an international alliance of over 200 civil society organisations that advocates for the rights of older people. BAGSO's Secretariat for International Policy on Ageing provides information on current international developments in ageing policy and contributes the interests of civil society to international processes.

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German National Association of  
Senior Citizens' Organisations  
Noeggerathstr. 49  
53111 Bonn  
Germany  
Tel.: +49 (0)228 / 24 99 93 0  
E-Mail: kontakt@bagso.de  
www.bagso.de  
facebook.com/bagso  
twitter.com/bagso\_de

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### Written/edited by

Ina Voelcker  
Ahnen&Enkel, Kai Weller

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Mia Rimac

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Komla Digoh  
Mia Rimac

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