

NEWS

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A better future for ageing

ERA AGE

European
Research
Area in
Ageing



The Future of
Ageing Research
In Europe

02 | 02 | 2009
10.00 | 17.00 • Room VMA3 • 2nd floor

Organized by ERA-AGE in Partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee
At the EESC Van Maelant Building • 3 Rue Van Maelant • B-1040 Brussels

Welcome

This is the final newsletter of the first phase of the Consortium's work. To mark the end of this phase and to launch the next one, ERA-AGE organised, in partnership with the EESC, a major conference in Brussels, on 2nd February 2009, devoted to the Future of Ageing Research in Europe. This newsletter provides an overview of the conference proceedings and full details can be found on the ERA-AGE website (www.era-age.group.shef.ac.uk).

Introduction

This major conference was a joint venture with the European Economic and Social Committee, which hosted it in Brussels. The lead role for the EESC was taken by Renate Heinisch. The conference brought together 115 delegates from 20 European countries, plus representatives from Canada and the USA. Its main objectives were to:

- Take stock of the current state-of-the-art in European ageing research.
- Share information about the work of ERA-AGE, including the FLARE Programme, and other major European initiatives in this field.
- Kick-off the process which will produce the definitive road map for the future of ageing research in Europe and invite broad participation in it.
- Focus attention on the essential aspects of the new science of ageing, including multi-disciplinarity and engagement with older people.
- Hear about the long US experience in the coordination of ageing research.

As you can see from the summaries there were contributions from European scientists, policy makers and end users of research. In fact all of the key stakeholders were represented and older people had an especially important role.

The conference was opened by the Deputy Director General of DG Research in the European Commission and his important statement on the priority for ageing research is reproduced here. It also contains the highly unusual announcement that the Commission will support a further phase of ERA-AGE which, not surprisingly, brought spontaneous applause from the audience.

As the conference chair, Vappu Taipale, noted in her closing remarks, it was a remarkable meeting in terms of the quality and range of contributions, the new scientific questions raised, the commitment and passion that all speakers brought to their topics and the excellent participation from the audience.

I hope that the following pages manage to convey to readers a real sense of the landmark nature of this major European event, as it was experienced by participants. ERA-AGE lives on, as ERA-AGE 2, so watch this space for more!

Alan Walker
Director, ERA-AGE



Welcome speech by Mr Daniel Jacob, Deputy Director General, European Commission

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here today on behalf of the European Commission for this conference on the future of ageing research.

Along with the climate change and energy issues, population ageing is indeed one of the greatest challenges we face in Europe. Preparing for an ageing society is now a vital part of the European research policy agenda and I am pleased to be present at the final meeting of the ERA-AGE Project.

I do hope that this meeting will present a good opportunity to share information on existing national, EU and international activities in the field of population ageing and contribute to the implementation of a European Research Area in this field.

Key elements of the science of ageing will be presented today. As you know better than I do, ageing is a complex phenomenon crossing not only national borders but also the borders of scientific disciplines. This meeting offers a welcome opportunity to discuss the future of ageing research in Europe from an interdisciplinary perspective. The meeting is indeed intended to launch a roadmap and new strategy for ageing research.

With old-age dependency ratios becoming higher than ever before, there will be major effects on labour and capital markets, on products and services, and of course there will be major implications for pension systems, housing and health care.

Future social and economic policies have to prepare for a demographic situation very different from the past and the present. There is no doubt that research is a vital part of that preparation. Medical research, ICT research and social and economic research all have important roles to play in helping us prepare for and adapt to this new situation.

In the context of today's meeting a number of questions will be addressed: What have we learned so far from the EU research activities in the field of population ageing? Can we optimise the co-ordination of national and transnational research programmes? What can we learn from the experience of our American friends? How can we improve international collaboration and enable high quality European and international research?

Through successive Framework Programmes, the EU has supported a large number of projects of ageing research as ranging from molecular biology to social, demographic and economic research. Several of you present here today have been actively involved in these activities.

The 7th Framework Programme 2007 – 2013 with a total budget of €54 billion is now in full swing. The improvement of the health of the European population is given a high priority. The Health theme is a major part of the cooperation programme and the EU has earmarked a total of €6.1 billion for funding collaborative biological, medical and public health research.

But, besides the health research programme, other parts of FP7 such as the programme for research in social sciences, the Research Infrastructures action and the activities for the coordination of the national and regional programmes under

FP7 will also invest in many aspects of collaborative research related to population ageing.

This morning, we will take stock and review achievements of two important initiatives supported by the European Commission in the field of ageing research, namely, ERA-AGE and SHARE. First, on the agenda figures the ERA-AGE project. This ERA-NET was established in 2004 under FP6, and is in fact ending in March this year. The ERA-AGE partners come from 10 EU countries, coordinated by the UK partner, and also include partners from Norway and Israel whom I particularly welcome. They are all public authorities responsible for the funding and coordination of national research programmes.

The ambition of ERA-AGE has been to promote a European strategy for research on ageing. I am pleased to announce that the Commission has decided to fund a next generation of ERA-AGE in FP7.

One of the results from ERA-AGE is the development of a database on European ageing research. This database is available on the ERA-AGE website. It contains a wealth of information about European research on ageing; including information on the research funding agencies, research programmes and research centres and institutes. This information is essential for a broad range of users, like scientists, journalists, funders and policy makers.

ERA AGE has also implemented a joint ageing research programme, called the FLARE Programme. Nine of the twelve partner organisations have been involved in the programme, which resulted in the decision to award 18 post doctoral grants.

The new ERA-AGE project will be launched during 2009. It will aim to improve further the collaboration between existing national programmes and the setting up of entirely new ones. As such it can be considered to be a kind of Joint Programming. Joint Programming is about addressing common challenges and setting a common Strategic Research Agenda in order to generate a critical mass of efforts and could be used to join forces on ageing research.

Let me also say some words on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), which will also be discussed this morning. The SHARE database was set up in 2002 in the 5th Framework Programme, within the key action on population ageing. Over the years and in close cooperation with our American friends, it has started to build a systematic European data infrastructure for cross-national research into the implications of an ageing population.

The results of the second wave data from SHARE, which have been released recently, confirm things we know (or think we know) already – women tend to live longer than men although they tend to have more health problems (“women are sicker but men die quicker”). Both sexes in the South tend to live longer than people in the North. People who have good conditions at work are more likely to work until later in their lives. The extended family is still an important unit in society. Much childcare is taken on by grandparents, meaning that inter-generation solidarity is not an empty word. Finally there are some findings that we

Welcome speech by Mr Daniel Jacob, Deputy Director General, European Commission

might not expect at all – such as people in the most Northern countries eat less than the rest of us!

With two waves of data collection now completed and a third already underway, SHARE is building an unprecedented pan-European data set that can measure comparable data at regular time intervals and that can identify and measure trends and assess the effects of policy changes.

This resource, and the research that will be done using it, will help the work of policy makers at all levels across the EU, including of course the various Commission services who deal directly with health, social and economic policy matters.

The importance of this area explains why a major upgrade of the SHARE project has been included in the prestigious roadmap of European research infrastructures published by the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) in 2006.

By formalising SHARE as a research infrastructure it will be put on a more permanent footing. Funding should come from a wider variety of sources. Longer term planning will be possible and proper legal and financial frameworks should be put in place.

Developing world class Research Infrastructures is one of the five major priorities of the Commission's renewed strategy for the European Research Area. Under a recent Commission proposal, these infrastructures can have their own legal personality. The structure and governance are flexible – to be decided by the participants, so as to ensure that the most appropriate form is available. European infrastructures will help to provide a framework for important European research to be done in a co-ordinated way with funding and resources from a variety of sources.

I do hope you will have an interesting and productive workshop. I look forward to receiving a report from this event, and especially to see your suggestions for a new roadmap for ageing research.



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KEYNOTE SPEAKER: THE NEW SCIENCE OF AGEING

Kaare Christensen, Danish Ageing Research Centre, Denmark

In the last century, most Western countries have experienced large increases in mean life expectancy, from around 50 years to around 80 years. This has been due to a marked reduction in early life mortality during the first half of the 20th century, followed by a less recognised almost two-fold reduction in mortality at ages above 70 in the last fifty years. The remarkably plasticity of ageing has been demonstrated through demographic research while the merging of demography, epidemiology, genetics, geriatrics and many other disciplines can shed light on key questions such as: Will the increase in mean life expectancy continue? Does exceptional longevity lead to exceptional levels of disability? Are we living both longer and better? Why do women, who on average are more disabled than men, live longer? How important are genes, environment and chance for ageing and age-related diseases. The coordinated efforts of the many excellent ageing research groups in the EU can help more older people to live longer in good health.

MAJOR EUROPEAN INITIATIVES

THE FUTURE OF AGEING RESEARCH: THE ROLE OF THE SURVEY OF HEALTH, AGING, AND RETIREMENT IN EUROPE (SHARE)

Axel Börsch-Supan, SHARE, Germany

The future of ageing research in the social sciences lies first in what has become “the science approach” established by the natural sciences. It encompasses three crucial steps:

1) To formulate falsifiable hypotheses, 2) to collect suitable data and exploit (in our case historical) experiments to see whether these hypotheses hold or fail, and finally, 3) to build (often mathematical) models to formulate clearly defined mechanisms that link policy variables to socially desired outcomes.

Second, ageing research needs to ascertain that neither biology nor social behaviour can be understood in isolation. The ageing process is essentially an interplay between biological and social processes over the life course.

Hence, ageing research requires data fulfilling two principles:

- Principle 1 is breadth rather than narrowness. We need to understand the interactions between health, economic status, and social/family networks. We need to appreciate the institutional and cultural environment in which individual's age.
- Principle 2 is to exploit the European variation in policies, histories, cultures to understand causes and effects of welfare state interventions which may or may not change individuals' life courses, say, by preventing poverty, by

enforcing prevention, or by shaping the transition between work and retirement.

SHARE, the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, strives to head these principles. It provides longitudinal interdisciplinary data to understand the ageing process in Europe on the individual and the societal level. It encompasses data from about 45,000 individuals aged 50+ in 16 countries. It has collected three waves of data so far, including retrospect life histories in order to shed light on which welfare state interventions have shaped their life courses. The data is freely available to all scientists through www.share-project.org.

As an example of its power, SHARE finds strong and robust evidence for significant health differences between socio-economic groups. This “socio-economic gradient” holds for various definitions of socio-economic status (income, education, wealth, etc.) and various objective and subjective measures of physical and mental health. We find that:

- Northern Europeans are healthier and wealthier but people in the South live longer. This is particularly true for Northern men and Southern women. Moreover, the socio-economic gradient tends to be stronger in the South as compared to the North.
- Education, income, and wealth have separate and independent effects on health. That is, health differences by income do not vanish even after differences in education are accounted for; wealth has an additional effect even after accounting for income and education.
- Within all countries, there is a strong link between health behaviour and socio-economic status. In contrast to individuals with more years of education, individuals with lower levels of education are 70 percent more likely to be physically inactive and 50 percent more likely to be obese.

The strong relation between health and socio-economic status also holds for mental health. Cross-national differences in depression rates resemble patterns of cross-country differences in education. Within countries, persons with low income or low wealth suffer more frequently from depression, particularly in Europe's North.

AMBIENT ASSISTED LIVING (AAL) JOINT PROGRAMME - AN OVERVIEW

Silas Olsson, AAL, Joint Programme, Brussels

The demographic shift in industrialised countries, not the least in Europe, has evidenced the need for measures in different sectors regarding the elderly population. Although the longevity should be seen as a very positive factor with opportunities for the citizens, the shift will put stress to the society regarding e.g. health, healthcare, social care, long term care, and requires measures to keep elderly people healthy and e.g. being able to stay at home, independently, as long as he or she like to.

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This is the main reason for the new European R&D programme “Ambient Assisted Living” (AAL) which puts the support for “the well being elderly person” in the centre of its actions. The main aim of the AAL R&D programme is to address the demographic shift and support elderly persons for ageing well at home, in the community, and at work, by funding R&D projects based on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and, at the same time, support the European industry to develop competitive products and services for the European market and beyond.

The AAL programme is based on the article 169 of the EU treaty which allow Member States to work together in an R&D area with a budget support from the European Commission (EC). The AAL programme started in 2008 and will run for six years, i.e. until 2013. The EC is contributing €25 m per year to the budget and the current 23 AAL Partner Countries put in, together, about the same amount on an annual basis.

The first call for proposals was a big success in terms of number proposals submitted – 117. About 20% of those are currently (March 2009) in a negotiation phase for funding contracts. The theme for this first call was the “Prevention and management of chronic conditions”.

The objective of the second call for proposals, now open with a closing date of May 5, 2009, is to develop “ICT based solutions for advancement of social interactions of elderly people”. An AAL project consortium must include, as minimum, three partners from three different partner countries.

The AAL programme, after its first year of operation, will organise the first AAL Forum Conference in Vienna, 29 September – 1 October 2009. This Forum will serve as a broad communication arena with stakeholders of the AAL programme and as a discussion forum for associated subjects – to support the advancements of the AAL programme, to make visible achievements, and to facilitate interactions between involved and interested parties.

DESIGNING THE ROAD MAP FOR FUTURE AGEING RESEARCH

MOLECULAR GERONTOLOGY

Olivier Toussaint, University of Namur, Belgium

A historical view point was taken to present how the field of the biology of ageing has been supported by the EC over the last 15 years. As an example we cited the Molgeron Coordination Action (1994-98) which included laboratories that have now all been established in the field of research on biological ageing, more specifically molecular gerontology.

This Coordination Action opened the way for a series of Shared-Cost Actions under FP5 such as Genage, Protage

and Functionage that allowed to finance salaries and bench fees of researchers. FP5 also financed Accompanying Measures which allowed, together with the European Science Foundation, the funding of two Euroconferences / European Research Conferences which help the acknowledgement of the research made in Europe in that field. The European Molecular Biology Organisation also accepted to organise a workshop on the molecular and cellular biology of ageing.

FP6 allowed the start of bigger projects such as “Genetics of ageing”, looking for genetic polymorphisms associated with longevity, Proteomage, using modern tools of proteomics to find conserved mechanisms of ageing or Mimage, interested in the role of mitochondria (the energy generating cell organelles) in ageing of various organisms. FP6 also funded the Coordination Action Link-Age, running until May 2010. Link-Age (<http://www.link-age.eu/>) organises summer schools, topic research group meetings, annual meetings, exchanges of students, dissemination, and so on.

The roadmapping of this sub-field is being organised by the FP7 Support Action WhyWeAge, which started in January 2009. FP7 went on supporting research on biological ageing namely through the Markage and the MyoAge projects, respectively aimed at determining biological markers of normal ageing and studying the ageing of human muscles. Of course these are only examples of FP7 projects on the biology of ageing. The future of the field will depend on new multidisciplinary initiatives not only with demographers, economists but also new investigation possibilities given by new biotechnological developments and research strategies.

HEALTHY AGEING

Carol Jagger, University of Leicester & Stuart Parker, University of Sheffield

Monitoring, maintaining and promoting health and well-being with age is critical for older people, their families, communities and for wider economic and social planning. Definitions of healthy ageing differ but the predominant desire is to aim to survive to advanced age with vigour and functional independence and to compress ill-health and disability to as short a period as possible.

The importance of this within Europe is well illustrated by the addition in 2004 of the first European population health indicator, Healthy Life Years, to the list of EU structural indicators. First results of this indicator suggest two important facts: that countries with the longest life expectancies at age 50 are not necessarily the ones with the greatest number of healthy life years, and that there are 10 countries whose remaining healthy life years at age 50 are less than the remaining fifteen years to the standard retirement age of 65.

There are a number of current initiatives within the European Commission that will radically alter the comparability of data

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on ageing across Europe, and therefore future ageing research, and this theme will need to pay attention to these as work programmes develop. We first plan to agree a working definition of healthy ageing which takes into account the views of older people themselves and to agree with the other theme groups a delineation, since health may be a key factor in all themes. This will enable us to define a coherent framework within which to place existing research and new research topics that are likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. Possible key research priorities for the next 10-15 years may include: determinants of health and well being, preventive and anticipatory health care, preventing/postponing disability, frailty, the development of appropriate services, and health and work in later life.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Giovanni Lamura, INRCA, Italy

This presentation focused on the role played by key socio-economic issues in designing a roadmap for future ageing research, such as the relationship between economic resources, health and well-being; the support needs of working family carers; the interconnections existing between ageing and migration; the quality of residential care; the phenomenon of elder abuse; and intergenerational solidarity.

On the first topic cross-national findings from the European Study on Adult Well-being (ESAW) and from SHARE were presented, showing the association between economic distress, health status and quality of life. The challenge of how to reconcile family and professional responsibilities in the employed population was illustrated on the background of EUROFAMCARE data, indicating that a relevant number of carers, especially women, experience a series of restrictions on the labour market due to their care giving commitment, also because the use of appropriate support and relief services is almost inexistent in Southern and Eastern Europe, and represents a limited reality even in other countries.

The relationship between ageing and migration was analysed by pointing out two different facets. The first concerns the needs of older migrants who, compared to older nationals, show in general worse health conditions and socio-economic status and a lower service use due to language and cultural barriers. The second aspect regards the role played by migrant workers in the elder care sector, reflected by the growing number of households who, especially in Southern Europe, privately employ migrant carers to provide home assistance to their frail elderly members, thus raising however a series of challenges in terms of care quality, possible exploitation and care drain phenomena in sending countries.

Elder abuse and neglect represented a further, mostly hidden and family-related phenomenon, with high direct and indirect costs for both individuals and society, on whose dynamics very little is still known, thus requiring more in-

depth studies. A similar request can be expressed also with regard to the issue of residential care quality, whose staff, according to recent Eurobarometer data, is believed to be the most likely perpetrators of mistreatment towards older people across Europe, thus suggesting that the aim of ensuring decent living conditions to older people in residential settings must remain high on the scientific and political agenda.

The presentation was concluded by suggesting that intergenerational solidarity could be an overarching concept able to embed all the above mentioned aspects into a systematic approach highlighting – as recent SHARE data also confirm – the relevant contribution provided by older people to other generations and society as a whole.

ENVIRONMENTS OF AGEING

Hans-Werner Wahl, University of Heidelberg, Germany

Environmental gerontology places special emphasis on deriving an in-depth understanding of the interrelations between ageing persons and their physical-social environments and how these relationships shape ageing outcomes. The overarching aim of environmental gerontology is thus to describe, explain, and modify/optimize the relationship between the ageing person and his/her physical-social environment. Environmental gerontology has been identified by Wahl and Iwarsson as (a) a field of particular importance for European ageing, (b) a successful area of European ageing research, (c) a platform coming with particularly fruitful potential to foster interdisciplinarity, as well as (d) an arena of findings in strong and urgent need of translation of knowledge and practice implementation. Application issues span a full range from stimulating the very competent to supporting those older people with dementia-related disorders and those being in a situation of frailty, severe functional loss, and multi-morbidity. Such efforts involve older people themselves, their relatives, social and health care staff as well as different stakeholders in society at large. Not the least, older people's organisations are important target groups for the dissemination of research findings.

Though there is a huge potential, the (European) field of environmental gerontology is scattered and in need of critical review and optimisation on different levels:

- 1) research on home environments, out-of-home environments and technology / products deserves better integration. There is a need of theory development (e.g., regarding micro-macro contextual relations) as well as of synthesising available findings (e.g., those from out-of-home research and urban ageing with those from the housing area),
- 2) linkages with other major areas of gerontology as well as geriatric medicine and geropsychiatry need to be spelled out better in order to fully develop the potential of the environmental perspective,
- 3) methodology issues, both on the data collection (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-

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methods approaches) as well as data-analytic level, are in strong need of improvement in order to increase the robustness of evidence and the international comparability of findings, 4) translation research and scientific implementation has only begun and the evaluation of different strategies how to implement environmental gerontology into the public health business is still waiting for conduction.

The evidence-based development of research priorities in the area of environmental gerontology with a particular emphasis on the European sphere will become the major target of this research stream within FUTURAGE. This will be done by a multi-level strategy, in which empirical research findings integration, consultation of experts, and high calibre workshops will converge.

INVOLVING OLDER PEOPLE IN RESEARCH

THE IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVEMENT

Isabel Borges, AGE, Belgium

Isabel Borges, Policy Officer from AGE, The European Older People's Platform gave an overview of the importance of user involvement in research to improve the quality of life of citizens, individually and collectively. Older people see their involvement in research as a catalyst to improve the quality of services in health and social care, improve accessibility of public transport, buildings and outdoor environment to develop information and communication technology products and services. Involvement in research is also seen as a way to improve national and European policy development as a part of active citizenship. Advantages of user involvement include among others, identification of research relevant to users, definition and prioritisation of users needs. It was stressed that user involvement from the very beginning of the research process to get things right and to provide effective services. This is essential to ensure the outcome meets the identified needs. The OASIS project (<http://www.oasis-project.eu/>) was the example given of current older people's involvement in research where a User Centred Design (UCD) approach is currently being used. It deals mainly with the "participatory analysis" i.e. with the requirements analysis stage aiming at placing the user at the forefront of the design effort. The challenges for future research in the area of ageing were highlighted as requiring not only an interdisciplinary approach but comprehensive communication between older people and researchers and among researchers themselves especially in an era where the current level of new technologies innovation has such a high impact on people's lives.

THE NDA OLDER PEOPLE'S REFERENCE GROUP

Elizabeth Sclater, New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, UK

We are 20 members in all, 12 women, 8 men. All the members of the group have varied backgrounds and experience. Quite a number of us have been involved in research projects.

What unites us is our interest in issues of concern to older people – we are all active for change. In a very real way we are living the issues that the Programme is considering. This gives the capability – and the right - to offer a user perspective on the application of the various projects making up the programme. We give life to the slogan coined by the great British pensioners' leader, Jack Jones, 'Nothing about us without us.'

An additional input to our discussions is our own knowledge, skills and experience from our own working lives.

The aim of the reference group is to ensure that older people's perspectives are represented in the operation of the Programme. Our tasks are to provide independent advice to the director and to the funded projects.

Thus we seek to monitor the outputs from the Programme and consider their implications for older people as well as giving advice to individual projects.

Finally, I would like to reiterate how important it is that older people are part of this Programme and other such programmes, including the new ERA programme.

INVOLVING OLDER PEOPLE IN AGEING RESEARCH IN WALES

Judith Phillips and Beryl Riley, Swansea University

The Older People and Ageing Research and Development Network in Wales (OPAN Cymru) includes work on developing participatory approaches with older people. Placing older people at the heart of the research process is critical if services are to be tailored to the needs of communities and individuals and delivered by research-aware practitioners.

The presentation reported on the need for a research network in Wales; the aims of the network and the importance of participatory approaches. The network supports a research development group on participatory research; hosts a policy research forum; has access through 'Involving People' to a database of researchers and has strong links with groups such as U3A and Network 50 plus members, who regularly engage in research with the network as participants or advisers. Examples of the advantages from such engagement were demonstrated through a number of projects in the network. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge, increased self esteem and confidence amongst older people and researchers and the

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significant contribution to the interpretation of results and policy formation were evident. The RuralWIDe study of older people in Gwynedd also highlighted the difficulties in doing research – with inaccurate information and transportation being issues faced by the older volunteer researchers in undertaking the research. Future plans for the network include expanding its research development groups, encouraging older people to join such groups and engaging older people in the policy research forum with key policy makers. OPAN Website: www.opanwales.org.uk

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Richard Suzman, Behavioral and Social Research, National Institute on Aging, USA

The global challenge of population ageing far exceeds the research capacity of any single country or continent; indeed the research challenge demands a series of international collaborations. How best can research be organised at the level of a country and multinational organisation? The National Institute on Aging (NIA) evolved with the United States National Institutes of Health (NIH), where it is now one of 27 Institutes and Centres.

The presentation presented the NIA mission, history, organisational structure, budget, peer review, strategic planning and oversight. Established in 1974 to improve the health and wellbeing of older Americans through the support and conduct of high-quality research, the NIA has an intramural and four extramural divisions (Aging Biology, Geriatrics and Gerontology, Neuroscience, and Behavioural and Social Research), with the broad range of disciplines represented permitting significant multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. The same holds true for the Behavioural and Social Science Division (BSR) that includes disciplines ranging from economics and demography to psychology, neuroeconomics, social neuroscience, and behavioural economics. About 66% of NIA's budget goes to extramural research grants, 10% to intramural, and 8% to extramural centres.

While NIA develops strategic plans, the pace and direction of research is so fluid that annual re-evaluations are needed to stay current, while some infrastructures and initiatives may require 10-15 years of development in order to come to fruition. The BSR Division makes use of both commissioned reports from the National Academy of Sciences and our own workshops to develop new initiatives, and we issue announcements of both broad solicitations that allow investigator initiated applications, as well as more directed and focused announcements. BSR has provided significant central direction to the development of networks, of centres and of longitudinal studies such as the Health and Retirement Study that now has analogues throughout the world.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

AN OLDER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONFERENCE

Jim Harding, New Dynamics of Ageing Programme Older People's Reference Group, UK

WOW - what a wonderful conference!

Many Congratulations to Professor Alan Walker and his brilliant supporting team in promoting and arranging "The Future of Ageing Research in Europe" Conference.

In my humble opinion this European Conference was truly a very important milestone event in the history of ageing research. All of the speakers were excellent. Special thanks go to Michael Lake, Director General of Help the Aged, for standing in at the last minute as temporary Chair, until Vappu Taipale arrived a short while later. Professor Vappu Taipale from Finland, who obviously commanded great respect from everyone at the conference, gave a welcome address and carried out her duties as Chairperson in an exemplary manner and the whole programme was completed on schedule. Renate Heinisch also gave a welcome address on behalf of the European Economic and Social Committee.

An interesting keynote address was presented by European Commissioner Daniel Jacob, Deputy Director General, DG Research, with encouraging support for future funding into Ageing Research. Professor Alan Walker, Director of ERA-AGE and the UK New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, gave an excellent overall view on the research work both past and present. Professor Kaare Christensen from Denmark presented an interesting and humorous paper on The New Science of Ageing. Axel Börsch-Supan from Germany, Director of SHARE, gave a great presentation covering Major European Initiatives. Silas Olsson, from Sweden, AAL (Ambient Assisted Living) R&D Programme Manager, also gave an interesting paper in support of Major European Initiatives.

Oliver Toussaint, from the University of Namur, Belgium, presented a paper on Cell Biology. His specialist research work is light years ahead of anything I have ever been involved with. In my business life I visited some 50 countries, tendering and winning multi-million pound contracts and consider that I am a reasonably experienced person, but in comparison to the work that Oliver Toussaint is doing I feel like a stone-age man. I was so impressed and engrossed with his presentation. I spoke to him at the interval, he understood and appreciated my interest in his work and said that he even has great difficulty in explaining to his own father about the research he does. Professor Carol Jagger from the University of Leicester gave an interesting presentation and her current project is the MAP2030 (Modelling Ageing Population to 2030) funded by NDA

Programme. Professor Giovanni Lamura from Ancona University in Italy and INRCA (Italian Research Centre on Ageing) gave an interesting talk. Professor Hans-Werner Wahl from the University of Heidelberg, Germany is a well respected author and is co-editor of the European Journal of Ageing.

Isabel Borges is the Policy Officer at AGE-European Older People's Platform, responsible for writing policy statements, and emphasised to everyone that this is done in a simple language for everyone to understand. Elizabeth Sclater is an active member of the NDA Older People's Reference Group and gave an excellent presentation with the emphasis on the importance of all researchers consulting with older people's reference groups. Professor Judith Phillips from Swansea University was very impressive. She stated that Wales had the highest number of people over the age of 65 in the UK, explaining that older people like to be involved and this adds to her research work. The conference then enjoyed the experiences of carrying out practical research by Beryl Riley from Wales, whose presentation was interesting and amusing.

The last programme speaker was Richard Suzman, Director of Behavioural and Social Research from the National Institute of Aging from the USA. To me he was the jewel in the crown at the conference, with seemingly endless knowledge on all manner of subject matter relating to ageing research and I am sure he could have used up the entire programme himself.

Whilst I am not qualified to comment on the technical presentation or any content of the specialist subjects provided by the speakers, never the less I did think that this was a fantastic conference to attend. When you consider all the enthusiasm, energies, and wealth of factual knowledge and information that was present, if it was possible to gather all the energy and wisdom from this conference, bottle and save it, then periodically inject a dose into Europe's policy makers, politicians and bankers, what a different world this would be. It was a real privilege and wonderful experience for me to attend this conference.

A FLARE FELLOW'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONFERENCE

**Yvonne Brehmer,
Karolinska Institute,
Aging Research Centre,
Stockholm, Sweden**



I was very pleased when Professor Alan Walker invited some of the FLARE fellows to attend the "Future of Ageing Research in Europe Conference" in Brussels. It was the first time I had attended a conference of this kind.

I am a cognitive lifespan psychologist interested in memory plasticity and its underlying neural mechanisms across the lifespan. The conferences I normally attend are quite specialised on my research area and are attended by a relatively uniform audience and include very focused discussions. Although I am working in an interdisciplinary work environment together with sociologists, epidemiologists and neuroscientists, the conference allowed me to gain insight into a new perspective on ageing research in a European, multidisciplinary and multicultural context.

I experienced the importance of interdisciplinary work, not only on a project level, but also on a higher level of research funding and networking across boundaries of disciplines, research traditions and nationalities. I was familiar with the ERA-AGE programme but was very pleased to hear more about other major European Initiatives on ageing research like the Ambient Assisted Living program (AAL) and the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE).

Most interesting for me was the plan to design a road map for ageing research with very interesting presentations of the research areas biology/biomedicine, health, socio-economics and environment. Especially the discussions after the presentations were very stimulating. I experienced a very open and productive atmosphere to think about the challenges of ageing research from different scientific perspectives, European standpoints and needs.

In addition to the inspiring and informative content, the conference provided me with the great opportunity to meet many of my FLARE colleagues who I have not met since our summer school in June last year. We enjoyed spending time together, updating each other on our current work and the progress we made since summer last year. These informal interdisciplinary discussions were very fruitful for my current projects and I very much appreciated this renewed contact. Of course, we appreciated the announcement of Mr Daniel Jacob, Deputy Director of DG Research, that ERA-AGE will be extended and are all looking forward to meeting each other again.

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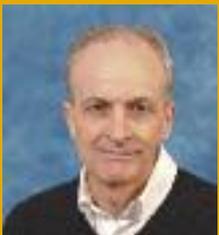
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ERA AGE

**European
Research
Area in
Ageing**

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