

A participatory methodology to  
involve older people and other  
stakeholders in local projects

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**(Belgian Ageing Studies)**

# Overview

1. Background information on BAS
2. A participatory approach: involving older volunteers in decision making
3. Lessons learned



# 1. Background information

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# 1. Background information

## Belgian Ageing Studies (BAS)

- Started in 2004
- Survey in municipalities: monitor local challenges and opportunities
- In cooperation with
  - Provincial governments
  - Local authorities
  - Local senior organizations
  - Older people
  - Stakeholders



# 1. Background information

## Aim

- Provide an instrument to measure the living conditions and quality of life of older people
- Promote evidence-based policy on the local level
- Support the process of creating age-friendly communities
- Examine trends by conducting follow-up BAS studies



# 1. Background information

## Current status

- 150 Flemish municipalities (including Brussels)
- pilot studies Walloon region, Italy, Netherlands
- N=65,000 older people
- Peer research: research by and for older people
  - 6,500 volunteers



## 2. A participatory approach

### What?

- Active involvement in the project
  - (versus) passive involvement
  - Creating ownership
- Involving different stakeholders and different partners (policy, care, social and health services, older people, ...)



## 2. A participatory approach

### Why a participatory approach?

- Less bureaucratic
  - Bottom up process
  - Create a civil dialogue and co-ownership
- Comprehensive
  - Gather expectations, input and expertise from different target groups
- Long-term
  - Better sustainability





## 2. A participatory approach

### Why involving older persons?

- Why not?
- Giving the opportunity to older persons to contribute to and participate in society
  - With the words of Marjan “Focus on what older people can do, rather than on what older people cannot do”
- European frameworks
  - 2012: European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations
  - European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing



## 2. A participatory approach

### How?

- Form a steering group
- Develop organisation and target
- Contact key-persons, collect data and information
- Get to work
- Task groups



# 3. Lessons learned

## 1. Focus on locality

- Do not start with a project to change the whole world
- Rather start with a concrete project in a little domain, in a specific area (e.g. neighbourhood). Use a first project to generate succes. Than build on that with a second project, afterwards a third project, ...
- Make a local biography: actors, strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and challenges



# 3. Lessons learned

## 2. Set clear goals

- Choose your goals in function of the neighbourhood
  - Of weaknesses and challenges
  - Of its strenghts and opportunities
- Take into account existing initiatives
- Stipulate a global target
  - clear formulation
  - realistic
  - Specific subtargets can be formulated later with the action group (creates a sense of ownership)



# 3. Lessons learned

## 3. Creating networks

- **Steering** group
  - +- 6 persons
  - Form the basis of the project
  - Co-develop and co-design the project
  - Coordinate the project
- Involving different stakeholders: **mix** of people
- Continuous cooperation



# 3. Lessons learned

## 4. Engage the desired expertise

- Selection of volunteers:
  - Which tasks need to be done?
  - What expertise do you need?
  - Make a competence **profile**
- Recruitment
  - NOT: sending a letter, announcement in the newspaper
  - YES: **Personal contact**, word-of-mouth (stress the benefit of their specific participation)
- Training of partners



# 3. Lessons learned

## 5. Valorising of partners

- Media contact
- Valorising by important person (director, major, ...)
- Coffee and cake
- Have a big starting event
- Have a big closing event



*Thank you for  
your attention*



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