

Introduction to the Special Issue ‘Ageing and Well-being’

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We conceive this special issue as part of a broad research interest to address what ‘well-being’ means with respect to ageing. The cultural and social contexts of ageing have changed largely over the last two decades. There is now more fluidity and complexity in the way people understand and interpret ageing processes, and ageing experiences appear to have become more differentiated. Ageing is no longer defined only by normative and standardized life course trajectories (Kohli, 2007). Ageing is caught up in various forms of social practices by which meaningful identities and lifestyles are realized (Gilleard & Higgs, 2013; Isopahkala-Bouret 2015). Notwithstanding these positive developments, ageing-related bodily and cognitive changes (Kukull et al., 2002) and social inequalities in aging (Arber, Fenn & Meadows, 2014; Jagger et al. 2011) still remain a challenge. In order to understand better the different factors that contribute to ageing well and to improve well-being of older people, we need to better understand the determinants and obstacles to well-being from different perspectives and in different contexts.

We are interested in well-being in the widest possible sense, considering the diversity in which well-being is defined (Ryff, 1989) and particularly is achieved in the context of ageing. Life course research shows that already in childhood some foundations are laid for later-life well-being, cognitive function (Leist & Mackenbach, 2014), and health (Ben-Shlomo & Kuh, 2002). Moreover, ageing, employability (Siivonen & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016) and prolonging careers (Guillemard, 2013) are especially relevant and highly debated issues. There are growing aspirations to implement new age policies (Walker & Maltby, 2012) and practice at workplaces (Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, well-being after retirement has to be investigated through the life course lens as well (Kim & Moen, 2002), and work practices and overall career trajectories still matter after working age, as research has found important relationships between work-related determinants and post-retirement health and functioning (Elovainio et al., 2009). Importantly, well-being at older ages needs to be achieved in the face of possible disabilities, limitations in activities of daily living, and even frailty, and psychological factors such as absence of depression and resilience can promote well-being at higher ages (Jeste et al., 2013). The articles of this Special Issue target health and health-related outcomes, social interactions, learning, work satisfaction, transitioning to retirement, and migration experiences. The studies use both review and qualitative and quantitative analyses to identify contributing factors to well-being in these different fields. This Special Issue highlights some of the contexts most relevant to the aim of ageing well.

This special issue seeks to provide complementary approaches to investigate well-being and related questions across disciplines and across different methodological traditions. It consists of a broad spectrum of studies to define well-being and to identify contributing factors to ageing well, over the life course and in current life situations, in environments like work place, education, retirement, and leisure. Both every-day situations and interactions and macro-conditions such as ageing policies are considered. As a result, the six articles selected to this special issue will offer together a rich contribution to the current thinking about ageing well and active ageing policy developments.

In this special issue on ageing and well-being, the former fellows of the Future Leaders of Ageing Research in Europe (FLARE) postdoctoral programme, most of them well-established in their field, were invited to contribute. Five of the six selected articles come from former full or associate FLARE fellows. The multidisciplinary FLARE programme was launched in 2007 and a second call followed in 2010, coordinated by Prof. Alan Walker (University of Sheffield, UK). Altogether 33 three-year post-doctoral fellowships were funded jointly by nine different countries. The FLARE programme was unique in its approach: it stipulated that there must be geographical mobility as part of each fellowship but also disciplinary mobility. The FLARE was a starting point for many, innovative research endeavours such as a large multidisciplinary volume on health and cognition in old age (Leist, Kulmala, & Nyqvist, 2014), and, having been funded by this research scheme as well, the editors are grateful for financial support and the wonderful possibilities for collaboration with ageing researchers across Europe and beyond. Against this background, this Special Issue is showcasing an emerging, multidisciplinary approaches of successful European ageing research.

The Special Issue begins with a review on how to maintain cognitive capacity and decrease the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. The article by Jenni Kulmala focuses on the importance of physically active lifestyle. According to the review, recent research findings show that not only physical activity earlier in life, but also increasing activity from mid- to late life is beneficial for brain health, later life cognition and active old age. Focusing on senior knowledge workers, the article by Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret and Hannele Niemi addresses the significance of continuing learning. The techniques of qualitative research synthesis are applied in order to make sense of the typical features of learning for senior knowledge workers and the kind of organisational conditions that encourage seniors to continue learning and contributing to their work community. The findings indicate that self-regulation, continuity, sharing and networking are typical for learning at age 50+. The organisational conditions that support senior workers' active involvement, participation, and influencing will enable such learning to occur.

The following two articles of the Special Issue deal with the thematic of interaction and communication. The article by Mirka Rauniomaa and Heikki Summala offers an analysis of how well-being may be accomplished in an interaction by participants. By employing the methods of ethnomethodological conversation analysis, the article draws on video recordings from on-road post-licencing training for older car drivers, and explores the evolvment of a mutual understanding of the unfolding situation by the instructor and the older trainee. The article by Antje Heinrich, Jean-Pierre Gagne, Anne Viljanen, Daniel Levy, Boaz Ben-David and Bruce Schneider is based on the findings resulting from an interdisciplinary and international project related to hearing difficulties and communication. The article reviews the biomedical and social aspects of functioning and disability related to hearing difficulties and challenges of effective communication in noisy environments. The article provides also practical, research-based guidance on how to improve environments, communication strategies, and individual behaviour in order to arrive in a more successful communication and satisfying social life at older age.

The last two articles deal with future intentions of people approaching the retirement age from two distinctive standpoints. In the article by Sirpa Koponen, Monika von Bonsdorff and Hely Innanen, the challenges of ageing, well-being and retirement are addressed from the perspective of health care professionals. The article identifies factors that influence nurses' occupational well-being and intentions of early retirement in a hospital setting. The results indicate that age, work ability, job control and reward satisfaction are directly associated with early retirement intentions. In addition to work ability, organisational leadership and justice related to perceived job satisfaction mediate the intentions of early retirement. Further, the article by Isabelle Albert, Stephanie Barros Coimbra and Dieter Ferring focuses on a very topical issue, namely ageing and immigration. The article investigates the future plans of first generation Portuguese immigrants in Luxemburg: What are their intentions for returning to their country of origin, for staying in the new host country, or alternatively, to commute in between? The results are considered in the wider context of integration and migration over the life span.

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