

Guest Editorial

Ageing well in an ageing society: Sustainability and digital solutions

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Population ageing is one of the most significant demographic phenomena of the 21st century in Europe and around the world. Growing life expectancy, declining fertility rates and changing family structures are transforming societies, economies, welfare systems and urban areas. The ageing process creates great challenges for healthcare systems, labour markets, housing policies, mobility infrastructures and social inclusion frameworks. At the same time, it also provides new opportunities for innovation, intergenerational cooperation, and the development of more inclusive and sustainable societies. Digitalisation and technological change are increasingly important dimensions of ageing policy and research. In particular, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, e-health systems, and smart urban infrastructures are increasingly shaping how older adults access healthcare services, mobility solutions, housing solutions, and social participation. However, technological progress alone cannot guarantee inclusion and well-being. The benefits of digital transformation will only be realised if societies can close gaps in access, digital skills, affordability, legal protection and social support.

The aim of this special issue, 'Ageing well in an ageing society: Sustainability and digital solutions', is to contribute to this expanding interdisciplinary discussion by bringing together research from different academic traditions and methodological perspectives. The articles in this issue collectively discuss ageing through the lenses of digital inclusion, quality of life, legal governance, mobility systems, social participation, and intergenerational technological adaptation. Together, they highlight the complexity of ageing societies and show that sustainable ageing policies need to be integrated and multidimensional. This special issue includes four research papers and one conceptual paper, addressing different dimensions of ageing, sustainability and digital transformation.

The first article, authored by Erika Kovács and entitled 'Digital integration of older adults in Europe: Linking skills, e-health use and growth patterns', examines digital health participation among adults aged 65–74 across European Union member states. This paper explores the relationship between digital skills and multidimensional e-health use using harmonised Eurostat data and a combination of longitudinal trend analysis, composite indicators, correlation analysis, and cluster analysis. The paper shows that participation of older adults in digital health has increased considerably in Europe, especially since 2019, but also reveals persistent cross-national differences. The results indicate the relevance of digital competences for higher levels of e-health engagement, while similar skills may have different effects on e-health engagement depending on institutional and structural settings. The study offers important insights into digital inclusion and ageing. In particular, this paper underlines how participation in digital health should be understood as a multidimensional and context-dependent process, rather than a binary distinction between users and non-users. The article also offers useful policy implications related to the need for user-centred digital health systems and inclusive digital skills development.

The second contribution, entitled 'The ageing process and the Quality-of-Life Perception Index: A new urban perspective' by Letizia Carrera, presents an innovative multidimensional framework for assessing quality of life among older adults. The paper develops the Quality-of-Life Perception Index (QLPI) by drawing on the findings of the AGE-IT study conducted in Italy. The QLPI integrates objective and subjective dimensions of well-being with particular emphasis on territorial and urban variables. The study uses data collected from more than 1,600 participants from various Italian regions and highlights how perceived

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quality of life in later life is shaped by mobility systems, transport autonomy, regional differences, and urban environments. By integrating the capability approach with empirical quality-of-life measurement, the paper advances current debates on ageing and urban sustainability. It also demonstrates the importance of moving beyond purely economic or health-related indicators towards more comprehensive approaches capable of capturing lived experiences, social participation and territorial inequalities. It also highlights the need to move beyond purely economic or health-related indicators to more comprehensive approaches that can capture lived experiences, social participation and territorial inequalities.

The third contribution, authored by Elisabetta Venezia and entitled 'Active ageing, social inclusion, and public transportation: A policy analysis and narrative review', focuses on the relationship between mobility systems and active ageing within a sustainable mobility framework. Combining recent international research with Italian and European policy developments, the paper explores the effects of transport systems on autonomy, health, and social participation of older adults. Common barriers such as digital exclusion, affordability, accessibility, reliability of service, and conditions of micro-access are identified in the review. It also emphasises the increasing importance of hybrid digital and non-digital information systems, companionship-oriented mobility services and age-friendly transport infrastructures. The study underscores that mobility is not merely physical movement but a form of social infrastructure essential to inclusive and sustainable ageing. The paper complements the previous contribution by examining the relationship between urban systems, accessibility, autonomy, and well-being in later life. By combining behavioural, infrastructural and governance perspectives, the article contributes to current discussions on transport equity, accessibility and urban sustainability in ageing societies.

The fourth article, 'The interplay between private autonomy and social solidarity as the legal dilemma of senior cohousing' by Paola Francesca Rizzi, investigates the legal dimensions of senior cohousing as an emerging form of solidarity-based living arrangement. This paper examines how contemporary legal systems are responding to demographic ageing, new family configurations, and the growing demand for alternative housing models for older persons, based on a comparative legal analysis of Italy, Spain, France and Germany. The study suggests that senior cohousing should be distinguished as a separate legal entity based on voluntary and non-familial solidarity. This indicates a need for legal frameworks that can reconcile contractual autonomy with social protection and stability. Following the discussion on mobility and accessibility, the paper provides a more specialised reflection on community-based living arrangements and solidarity-oriented governance of ageing. The article contributes to the literature by bringing together housing law, ageing governance, and social solidarity within the broader context of active ageing and community-based resilience. It also provides important reflections for policymakers seeking to promote social inclusion and dignity in later life.

The final article, 'Generational perspectives in the digital era: Predecessor - successor attitudes towards digitalisation and AI in Hungarian family businesses' by Noémi Békésiné Kovács, explores intergenerational attitudes toward digitalisation and artificial intelligence within Hungarian family businesses undergoing succession. Using qualitative case studies, this paper investigates the influence of contrasting perspectives of predecessors and successors on digital transformation processes and organisational renewal. The results show considerable differences between generations in terms of openness towards technological innovation, with younger generations generally being the drivers of digital transformation, while older generations tend to be more cautious because of concerns about organisational continuity and risk. In particular, the study points to mechanisms of reconciliation and shared learning that foster successful intergenerational cooperation. The paper contributes to the literature on family business succession and digital transformation by stressing that technological adaptation is not only an organisational issue but also a social and intergenerational process.

The articles in this special issue are based on diverse research questions and employ assorted methodological approaches, but a number of common themes emerge across the contributions. First, all papers converge on the multidimensionality of ageing and well-being. Ageing is not only a demographic and medical issue, but also a social, legal, economic, spatial and technological one. Quality of life in later life is not only about the provision of healthcare but also access to mobility systems, digital technologies, housing security, social participation, and supportive community structures. Secondly, the articles together show the increasing

importance of digitalisation in structuring ageing societies. Digital transformation impacts healthcare access, mobility systems, organisational processes, and social inclusion opportunities. At the same time, the contributions highlight that digitalisation can also create new forms of exclusion and inequality if structural barriers, digital skills gaps and accessibility challenges are not properly addressed. Thirdly, the issue puts a strong emphasis on the role of sustainability and inclusion. Sustainable ageing is more than technological innovation; it is the creation of inclusive environments which foster autonomy, participation, dignity and social cohesion. Studies show that integrated, user-centred policy approaches are more successful than fragmented or sectoral interventions. Finally, the papers emphasise the importance of interdisciplinarity for ageing research. The challenges of ageing societies call for dialogue between economics, sociology, law, urban studies, mobility research, digital studies, public policy, and organisational research. The diversity of approaches in this issue reflects the complexity of the subject and the utility of cross-disciplinary perspectives.

The contributions in this special issue also point to several important directions for future research. The rapid development of artificial intelligence, digital healthcare systems and smart urban technologies presents new questions of accessibility, ethics, governance and inequality in ageing societies. Future studies should investigate how older adults experience digital transformation in diverse socio-economic, cultural and institutional contexts. The growing importance of alternative housing models, community-based care and solidarity-based governance structures also requires more in-depth legal and comparative study. As families continue to change and welfare systems come under growing pressure, how societies can support autonomy and social participation in later life will remain a key research priority. Mobility and transport systems also constitute an important field for future investigation. The transition towards sustainable and inclusive mobility systems must address the specific needs of ageing populations, taking on board the trade-off between environmental objectives, accessibility and social equity. Furthermore, as digitalisation advances through economic and social life, intergenerational dynamics and organisational adaptation to technological change will become increasingly relevant. Understanding how different generations negotiate innovation, continuity and technological transformation may offer valuable insights not only for family businesses, but also for wider social and institutional contexts.

In conclusion, the selected papers of this special issue show that ageing well in today's societies depends on being able to integrate technological innovation with social inclusion, sustainability, and human-centred governance. The studies collectively shed light on how ageing societies can meet present challenges and generate opportunities for participation, resilience and well-being.

I would like to sincerely thank all the authors for their valuable contribution to this special issue and their commitment to advancing interdisciplinary research on ageing, sustainability and digital transformation. I would also like to thank the reviewers and the editorial team of *Prosperitas* for their professional support during the publication process. I hope that the papers presented in this issue will make a meaningful contribution to current academic and policy debates and stimulate further research on the complex challenges and opportunities associated with ageing societies.

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