

FUTURAGE

National Consultations on Ageing Research Priorities - Summary of results from Swedish national consultations

As part of the national consultation process of FUTURAGE, the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS) sent out the brief questionnaire on ageing research priorities in late autumn of 2009 to 23 research groups/researchers and to 14 stakeholders. Twenty one research groups responded (91% response rate) and nine stakeholders (64% response rate). A list of the research groups and stakeholders contacted can be found in the appendix.

The research groups consisted mainly of those who had received grants in the area of ageing research from FAS during the past five years. FAS main areas of responsibility are in the area of working life, public health and social research. A few research groups/-researchers from recent conferences in the area of ageing were added to supplement the group of FAS researchers. The stakeholders invited were those who have been invited to the national forums held by FAS during ERA-AGE 1, and consisted of other funding agencies, government organizations with responsibility for ageing issues as well as a few others (senior citizen organizations, Parliament members etc).

Consultation question 1: Main research priorities for the next 10 years

Theme A. Biogerontology

Dementia is mentioned by both researchers and stakeholders as a research area of utmost importance within biogerontology. Special areas of interest are the role of restitution and sleep for dementia patients; understanding the neurobiological mechanisms of dementia; improving care of dementia patients in retirement homes; and the further development of diagnostic criteria and medicine/therapies for dementia patients.

Immunology, biological mechanisms of ageing and cognitive change are other prominent areas, with research interests such as the role of the nervous and immune system in adapting and coping with stressors and infections; early detection of cognitive signs and biological markers for neurodegenerative diseases; the association between oxidative stress and intellectual ability; and evaluation of new biological markers for daily clinical practice.

A third area of common interest to researchers as well as stakeholders is the design and support of **longitudinal cohort studies** in terms of a European geriatric epidemiological research tool for studying the prevalence of common chronic conditions related to age, coping with multi-morbidity, and the major determinants for the evolution from healthy ageing to illness and disability.

With reference to **medical care**: scientific and clinical evidence-based knowledge on therapeutical effects, strategies for treatment, follow-up and care of frail elderly (often with multimorbidity and multiple organ failure) is needed as well as better knowledge on pharmacological treatment and related problems (such as polypharmacy) in the elderly population in general.

Theme B. Social and Economic Resources

An overarching theme of common interest is **how to cope with an ageing population** in terms of socio-political, financial and cultural consequences. Examples of questions raised within this theme are: the creation of sustainable retirement systems; tackling increased costs for health care; the reorganization of national resources into health care; the impact of changing welfare politics vs. private funding; how to improve the working conditions for

health care workers; globalisation of health care and how to attract migrant health care workers; extension of working life.

Social sustainability is another theme of interest to both researchers and stakeholders, with issues ranging from developing social activity programs for the elderly to prevent loneliness and depression, to coping with dementia from both a client-centred and a socio-political perspective. How older people can become better integrated in (working) life and become regarded as (cultural) contributors to society seems to be a question of interest for stakeholders in particular.

Further, **a life-course perspective on ageing and social inequalities in health** is promoted. How do social differences in resources and risk factors accumulate over the life course, and how do they affect living conditions and quality of life at an old age?

More research is needed in the area of **social care**: for example on the necessary conditions for good quality care/good working conditions, analysing the shifting boundaries of care (services/-cash; care provided by family/state/market; publicly/privately paid) and the consequences for persons in need of care, their families and paid care workers. Also, various models of interplay between formal/informal care need to be studied.

Theme C. Environments of Ageing

The unifying theme seems to be **planning local physical environments for an ageing population** with keywords such as accessibility, inclusive and supportive environments; sustainable development of environmental and social living conditions (“staying put”); development of transportation systems and user-friendly IT solutions; sustainable work environments and health care settings; and the facilitation of residential care and promotion of independent living.

Theme D. Healthy Ageing

Of the four themes, question 1D generated the most diverse answer pattern. Perhaps the major theme could be said to be **prevention of disability, health promotion and healthy ageing**, but also aspects of **mental health and well-being and psychosocial aspects of ageing** are promoted by both researchers and stakeholders.

Several themes that were already mentioned under paragraph A-C reappeared, such as a life-course perspective on ageing, social sustainability, dementia, residential care, designing for physical accessibility, cognitive performance, and coping with an ageing population. Above this, multi-morbidity, drugs and medicine, cost-efficiency of treatment, and inter-/intragenerational attitudes towards ageing were suggested.

The development of ***treatment strategies and diagnostics for the elderly through use of broader outcome measures of health and social participation*** was further emphasized, mainly by stakeholders, as was cost-efficiency of treatment strategies.

Consultation question 2: Major research priorities outside of these themes

Suggested themes were diverse and multi-faceted, covering aspects of ageing from a variety of angles. Examples of areas of research were studies of whether years added to life are healthy years or years of disease, disability and dependence, and how residential care is affected by new family constellations.

Multi-disciplinary research on environmental aspects of ageing and behavioral genetics were other researcher-initiated areas. Among the stakeholders, ***the growing group of disabled, people from different ethnic groups and immigrants was recognized as an important area of attention***. Healthy ageing, capacity building and national and local stakeholders in a partnership approach was promoted, as was the development of evidence-based methods for people older than 75 years and the role of informal caregivers.

Consultation question 3: Priorities which require European collaboration

In general, Europe is promoted as an example of new and emerging ageing patterns – the wide diversity in culture, ethnicity, and social policy can be studied from a cross-cultural perspective with focus on the relation to the ageing process and its outcome.

International comparisons of different care systems for the elderly and cross-disciplinary comparisons of health trends and care methods were mainly promoted by researchers, while stakeholders focused on policies with a prevention focus, beside questions on ***migration, ethnicity and ageing***.

A common theme of interest between researchers and stakeholders is longitudinal **studies with a multi-professional and multi-disciplinary approach**. Labor law, productivity and ageing, pension policies and comparative studies of social care were other areas of interest.

Consultation question 4: Infrastructures necessary to deliver these priorities at a European level

Researchers would like to see more **international collaborative projects, collaboration around longitudinal studies offering comparable data, and support of cross-disciplinary networks**. The SHARE project was mentioned by several researchers as a good example of longitudinal data available to European nations. One suggestion was to expand SHARE to also include younger people, in order to enable studies from a life-course perspective. Euromod was mentioned as an example of a microsimulation model. Researchers also expressed a wish for collaboration between clinical practitioners, researchers and patient organizations, as well as multi-disciplinary research teams including disciplines such as sociology, neuroscience, economics, social geography, technology, and other areas. Some researchers also expressed a wish to see a funding system that promote bottom-up research initiatives from the researchers themselves. Stakeholders mainly emphasized the need for **a national funding resource to support researchers applying for funding within the EU** (co-financing of research between national and European stakeholders) and the need for improved conditions for employment and voluntary work.

Appendix

Researchers and stakeholders contacted in FUTURAGE Swedish National Consultations

Research Groups / Researchers

Name	Department and University
Peter Öberg, PhD	Dept. of Caring Sciences and Sociology, Gavle University College
Marta Szebehely, Professor	Dept. of Social Work, Stockholm University
Eskil Wadensjö, Professor	Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University
Björn Halleröd, Professor	Dept. of Sociology, Gothenburg University
Lars-Göran Nilsson, Professor	Dept. of Psychology, Stockholm University
Ingeborg Nilsson, PhD	Dept. of Community Medicine and Rehabilitation, Umeå University
Lena Borell, Professor	Dept. of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society, Karolinska Institute
Ingmar Skoog, Professor	Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology, Gothenburg University
Boo Johansson, Professor	Dept. of Psychology, Gothenburg University
Laura Fratiglioni, Professor	Aging Research Center (ARC) , Karolinska Institute
Ulf Gerdtham, Professor	Dept. of Economics, Lund University
Anders Klevmarken, Professor	Dept. of Economics, Uppsala University
Ingrid Johansson, PhD	School of Education, Culture and Communication, Mälardalen University College
Torbjörn Åkerstedt, Professor	Stress Research Institute, Stockholm University
Töres Theorell, Professor	
Lars-Christer Hydén, Professor	Dept. of Medical and Health Sciences, Linköping University
Gerd Ahlström, Professor and Dean	School of Health Sciences, Jonkoping University College
Tommy Bengtsson, Professor	Centre for Economic Demography, Lund University
Ulla Melin Emilsson, Professor	Dept. of Social Work, Lund University
Per-Gunnar Edebalk, Professor	
Ingalill Rahm Hallberg, Professor	The Swedish Institute for Health Sciences, Lund University
Inga Malmqvist, Assoc. Professor	Dept. of Architecture, Chalmers University of Technology
Lars Andersson, Professor	NISAL – National Institute for the Study of Ageing

	and Later Life
No response from:	
Joakim Palme, Professor	Institute for Futures Studies
Anna Stigsdotter Neely, docent	Dept. of Psychology, Umeå University

Stakeholders

Name of organization
Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare
Swedish National Institute of Public Health
Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
Region Skåne
Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Fund
Swedish Foundation for Health Care Sciences and Allergy Research (Vårdal Foundation)
Swedish National Centre for Research in Sports
Swedish Research Council
Swedish Parliament member
No response from:
Swedish National Social Insurance Board
Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems
Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning
The Knowledge Foundation
National Pensioners' Organisation