

ACTIVE AGEING IN SPAIN: THE SPANISH WHITE BOOK OF THE ACTIVE AGEING

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Europe is experiencing a social and demographic change progressively and quickly. Its society is not only ageing rapidly, but also it is varying its social and personal characteristics. Compared with the elderly who lived just few decades ago, current elderly have new ways of living and thinking, different life aims and more variability between them.

Spain, which is following the same demographic development and structure as the rest of Europe, has written the “White Book of Active Ageing” in order to tackle this issue. More than thirty experienced professionals in Active Ageing have worked in the creation of the book, based on reflections and debates.

The aim of this book was diagnose the real situation of old people in this country. From then on, it proposes ways to organize political, social, economical and cultural areas to encourage and support active ageing. These proposals promote the independence and autonomy of the elderly and respond to the new characteristics of this sector of the population, avoiding stereotypes and negative image of the elderly as weak and ill.

As a result, the “White Book of the Active Ageing” is divided into four parts. The first one describes the current and future situation of the elderly in Spain. The second part regards to the main subjects in Active Ageing. Thirdly, the book explains the most important challenges of the Active Ageing. Finally, the book summarizes the main topics of the manuscript.

In order to know which topics are particularly relevant in the current debates about “Active Ageing” in Spain, we have to deepen the description of the “White Book of the Active Ageing”.

The description of the current and future situation of elderly in Spain highlights three main issues. Firstly, three political lines are considered to be revised: ageing, in migration and family support politics. These political challenges in Spain are similar to the ones that have been emphasized in the rest of the European Union. Secondly, the book underlines the necessity to develop a new concept of the elderly which is more adjusted to the current situation and taking into account their variability and contribution to society. This new profile should also be built using the active contribution of such elderly. Finally, it finds it essential to encourage individual and social development throughout the life cycle, promoting the individual as the main character of its own ageing and avoiding the stereotypes coming from health and social services and media and advertising.

The second part of the manuscript lists nine aspects as the most important factors in Active Ageing: Economy, Health, Physical activity, Education, Diversity and participation, Image and media, Rights of old people, Resources of social programs and services and housing. The length of this article does not allow us to describe all the important matters, but the main idea of each point is listed here:

- Economic policy that consider the whole life cycle in equality and encourage the elderly as active contributors and promotes intergenerational solidarity.
- Multidisciplinary health systems (including geriatric attention) that promote healthy lifestyles, prevention and early detection to maximize independence.
- Develop programs to improve professional practice, close-open spaces and social nets to support healthy life styles: physical, cognitive and social activities, good nutrition, low alcohol and no drugs or tobacco.
- Education throughout the life cycle: more and better offer, professionals adequate to new characteristics and introduce the use of the ICT.
- Encourage the active participation in different activities of the country, city, town, or family... and let it know to society.
- Give out an adjusted image of today's elderly by the media and professionals.
- Improve juridical policies: more rights regarding the power of decision and more information about their rights.
- Bring social services and attention to where older people live and encourage the coordination between the different services, including private, public and NGOs.
- Housing policies that integrate the needs of the elderly: potential adaptations, support of the modification of the house and incorporation of the ICT to support autonomy.

The aim of the third part of the "White book of Active Ageing" is pointing out the current weak points in active ageing, where Spain should pay special attention. The challenges for Spain are to develop resources to improve the situation of people living in rural areas or living alone, particularly women, intergenerational relationships, caregivers and those who need care.

During the last twenty years, our research group on ageing (lead by Prof. Fernández-Ballesteros) in the Autonomous University of Madrid, has been working in the promotion of active ageing developing and evaluating a promotion program "*Vital Ageing*" with very good results. In this program one of the most important aspects is making people conscious that they are responsible for their process of ageing: healthy life styles, active cognitive functioning, positive thinking, coping with stress and high participation are personal resources that must be promoted across throughout the life cycle; but, also, it must be spread out that always we are on time to start making these choices and get positive results of our positive behaviour for ageing well. Finally, we have also significant results about the importance of negative stereotypes on ageing and age on the process of actively ageing. Fight against those stereotypes at population level is also an essential condition in the promotion of active ageing.

With regard to the promotion of "Active Ageing", Spain still has many goals to achieve and has to be considered in the "White Book of Active Ageing". Some others will appear as

long as researchers find new solutions for those problems and challenges. Researchers and policy makers on ageing must work together.