

Active Ageing conclusions and recommendations

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Conclusions desk study: Elderly in small villages and in bigger communities

Social cohesion is greater in small villages than in bigger communities. The biggest differences are between the areas with pre-war housing outside the town centre and the first post-war generation of housing estates in towns.

Relatively fewer elderly in the category aged 75 and older live in smaller villages than in larger communities. This phenomenon is an important indicator for the migration of the aged 75 and over group from smaller villages to larger communities.

In general, older people are happy with their current housing. There is no distinction here between older people still in good health and those suffering from disability. There is also no distinction in terms of differences in residential areas.

Older people living in small villages are more likely to be satisfied with their surroundings, parking facilities and 'green' areas up but less with shopping amenities and transport than those living in larger communities.

Health and health care needs are the reasons older people mention most often for needing to move house. Other reasons are the accommodation itself, decreased mobility and loss of social contacts in the village. In small villages, the large garden requiring maintenance is often more of a reason than the house itself.

Older people with disabilities living in small villages receive as much help as those living in larger communities. Those in small villages more often receive that help from home carers than from professional institutions.

Conclusions case study in Midden-Drenthe: Wishes and needs of the elderly in small villages

The objective of the case study in Middle Drenthe was to gain insight into the needs and wishes of the elderly in small villages with respect to, on the one hand, their phase of life and living situation, and, on the other, the infrastructure in place for housing, wellbeing, care and transport. In-depth interviews were carried out in 15 households per village. That resulted in the conclusions outlined below.

Body and mind

National research showed that the majority of older people living in smaller villages have no disabilities. In the group over-75s, just under half are still completely free from disability.

Many older people require help as a result of their disabilities. A small number receive weekly help with personal care and household chores. A much larger number receive help from family, neighbours and friends. When help with personal care is necessary, professional help is preferable.

Disabilities often affect the ability to maintain gardens or grounds around a house. Asking for help is often difficult. Many older people have never learned to ask for help because they didn't need to, thanks to the Noaberhulp (old non-formal social structure of neighbours or family helping out).

Mobility also falls into the category body and mind. Many older people still have (the use of) a car. Those who do not own a car do not see this as an obstacle to their mobility. They have found a balance in other forms of transport and mobility: on foot, by bicycle, local taxi, or public transport. They can also call on family or neighbours when necessary.

Older people are often unaware of the many forms of support available to them. This is partly because they don't ask for information until the need arises. The lack of clarity about what help is on offer also plays a role. Although the village GP is easy to reach, if they need a doctor outside office hours, residents must go to the Night Doctor in Assen, which is much further away.

Financial security

The case study shows that the financial situation in terms of disposable monthly income forces many older people to live a frugal existence. However, very few of the elderly admit to having trouble making ends meet. They are used to the situation and often have some savings to fall back on. Home owners often have low housing costs as the mortgage has been paid off. Nevertheless, the financial position of the elderly deserves attention. For example, are older people aware of the possibilities in terms of income support? Also keeping in mind the cost of membership of clubs in the village. This allows them to contribute to community life.

In terms of housing, we can conclude that most older people are happy with this. In addition, most of them judge their housing to be suitable for the elderly. However, in both villages, there is a strong desire for more modern housing for the elderly which also offers care facilities.

Work and performance

What is important for the elderly in terms of work and performance, is having a valuable way to spend their time, hobbies, helping neighbours and club activities. Clubs are particularly important because of the opportunities they offer the elderly to be of use to the community. Other older people are only active as participants in activities. The younger group among the elderly prefer to remain members of 'ordinary' clubs (not those specifically for the elderly).

Social relations

Older people need plenty of social contact in their community. Amongst those with plenty of social contact, we see that their requirements in terms of contact can differ.

Social contacts and help from family and neighbours go without saying. This is based on the traditional 'noaberschap'. However, the fact that this help is so 'natural' also has a downside; namely that many older people have never learned to ask for help or to make new social contacts. This means they can fall victim to loneliness and isolation. Older people with sensory disabilities, such as deafness, are particularly vulnerable.

Values and meaning

The village – the surroundings, people, village culture, and the norms and values they include - is of great importance to older people. This is evident in their involvement with and commitment to the community. Being part of a specific community forms an important basis for identity and meaning. The balance in this area does not stand alone; it is mediated by the balance in the areas mentioned above, and the extent to which it is supported by the community. From this, we can conclude that the village as a source of existence comes under pressure when the support on offer is not tailored to the individual needs, or is even absent altogether.

We can conclude that the following are important for housing within a village setting suitable for all phases of life:

- sufficient suitable housing
- inviting and stimulating opportunities to meet people and have social contact
- (social) club activities which meet the needs and means of older people
- basic facilities in terms of day-to-day shopping and transport within the village itself;
- access – at village level – to a total package of care services and other services.

Towards an infrastructure suitable for all phases of life

The interviews conducted show that, in various aspects, the infrastructure meets the conditions necessary for housing and living conditions suitable for all phases of life. There are ideas on how to strengthen this. There is also interest in new opportunities to organize desirable facilities for housing, care and service facilities at village level.

Recommendations

From the conclusions of the desk study and the case study in Midden-Drenthe the following recommendations can be made according to the research question “What do elderly people need, to be able to stay and live in a rural village as long as they would like to?”.

1. Research into concrete need for housing for the elderly in small villages
2. Research into interest in and opportunities for acquisition of existing housing for the elderly
3. Involve villages from the beginning in the planning stage of provision of housing and public spaces.
4. During the planning stage of public spaces, consider spaces which provide opportunities for meeting and contact for the elderly too.
5. Arrange opportunities to meet which dovetail with existing community centre activities
6. Strengthen what is on offer at the local learning centre
7. Develop a plan of action to tackle loneliness and isolation with support from the Foundation for the Wellbeing of the Elderly and the Foundation for Wellbeing Middle Drente
8. Existing clubs examine the activities on offer to test their suitability for different phases of life and ensuring older people remain involved in club life
9. Strengthen club activities by making sure older people are involved, both on committees and in the organisation of activities
10. Ensure older people are actively made aware of the opportunities, despite minimum income, for participating in club life and other forms of social participation
11. Ensure improvement in transport facilities and, in particular, awareness among the elderly of these facilities
12. Research the possibilities for strengthening the role of the community centre and other local facilities
13. Strengthen the opportunities for referral for care at village level
14. Make optimal use of local facilities, such as the local newspaper or community website to keep older people and others who may need care informed of the facilities available which are of importance to them
15. Organise themed meetings around facilities and activities for older people at village level.
16. Look into the opportunities for additional forms of care and help besides those offered by home carers and professional carers.
17. Research the need for handyman services from *Icare*, *Woonservice* and *Welzijn Ouderen* and the extent to which these services are used.