

# The place to be

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# Chapter 8

# Impact



## Impact

If we look at the perspective of ageing in the Netherlands, we notice the following trends and developments. It is expected that in 2040 about 4.8 million people aged 65 and over will live in the Netherlands. We are the European leader in terms of total health-care costs in general per capita. There is a shortage of around 80,000 qualified health-care professionals, and the demand for nursing-home units in the Netherlands will explode to 240,000 by 2040. In addition, most older people want to live independently for as long as possible (Van Bloois, 2022). The Dutch government is committed to an integrated care agreement with programmes such as the programme for housing and support and the programme for elderly care (Kiers & Ahli, 2023). The three principles of these programmes are ‘yourself if possible’, ‘at home if possible’, and ‘with digital support if possible’. The results of this dissertation and the developed Community Activation Compass meet these three principles by providing a method to activate communities that enables independent living for older people. A reflection of the impact and relevance of the results of this dissertation is given in this paragraph. This reflection focuses on the main goals of the research, its relevance to science, society, and education, to which target group the results are relevant, and what activities are planned for sharing the gained knowledge.

### *Scientific impact*

The focus of this research was how can we maintain or create the ‘place to be’ for older people who want to remain living at home and age in place. To establish this connection, cooperation between community members, entrepreneurs, the municipality, and institutions is very important. As a researcher, I started a project in the city centre of Geleen. Together with older community members, entrepreneurs, the municipality, and institutions, we developed a solution to support seniors living at home, with the aim that seniors, as full members of our society, can continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible. Using co-creation, we will work together on this great challenge to create a vital community. Therefore, we created the Community Activation Compass as guidance, supporting initiators of a vital community in drawing up and implementing an activation plan in order to create the place to be.

### *Relevance*

#### Contribution to science

The main results of this research are threefold. First, insight is provided into the concept of ageing in place and the main factors that make independent living possible. In a scoping review (Chapter 2) we showed that a lot of research is already being done on ageing in place. However, an overview of this concept was still lacking. The need for

this scientific knowledge is apparent from the Cambridge University Press report that the scoping review was the most popular and most downloaded article in 2022 in the journal *Ageing and Society*. In addition, several (poster) presentations are provided for other researchers at the National Gerontology Congress and Care4 Congress (International Scientific Nursing and Midwifery Congress) in Leuven (Belgium). Second, insight is given into the concept of vital communities using the three dimensions: why, how, and what (Chapter 3). Little scientific knowledge is available about the concept of vital communities. It is a popular term used in various applications. The added value of this research to science is the description of the three dimensions and the drawing up of a broad definition of vital communities. Third, as the final contribution of this research to science, a Community Activation Compass has been developed, using a research method in which all key stakeholders, including older people, are involved. Not only are the results of this research relevant for researchers, but also the design-oriented method that was used. After all, actively involving all stakeholders in the development of new knowledge provides added value for science and practice. The fact that this design-oriented research design is appreciated by other researchers in the field is evident from the awarding of the Janneke Witsenburg award during the National Gerontology Congress in 2022.

#### Contribution to society

This research on vital communities had already impacted society before it was completed. The living lab in the centre of Geleen was specially initiated for this research and facilitated by Stadslabs Sittard-Geleen. This organisation supports social initiatives and connects residents, entrepreneurs, government, and institutions in the municipality to work together. As City Makers, they form various ‘City Experiments’, such as this design-oriented research. During the meetings in the living lab, contact arose between older people, volunteers, and professionals. For example, two participants started ‘Club Silver’ with the support and facilitation of Stadslabs Sittard-Geleen. This club provides older people with the opportunity to meet in an accessible way. In addition, informal meetings are currently taking place between the participating older people and professionals to explore which other small initiatives can be started.

**Figure 1.**  
*Announcement in the newsletter of senior citizens association ‘Bie os in the klous’*

**THE‘SILVER CLUB’ THE PLACE TO BE**

For some people, Sundays are quiet and boring days. But, what if you can play cards or craft together with other people? Or just have a cup of coffee and a chat with your neighbours? We make this possible at the ‘Stadskamer M35’ in Geleen. With a nice cup of coffee and delicious pie, donated by the local bakery.

The ‘Stadskamer M35” is a place to be and to meet your neighbours.

Opening hours: every Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Location: Markt 35 in Geleen

See you, next Sunday!!!

The potential contribution to society mainly concerns the social sectors: housing, health-care, welfare, and municipalities. Together they face the social challenges of the increasing ageing of the population and promoting the place to be for older people. Using the Community Activation Compass developed in this study to support initiators, they can take multidisciplinary initiatives to activate communities. The expected impact consists of supporting older people to live independently for as long as possible. Community support may also reduce the pressure on informal care partners. This solution is also an answer to the shortage in the labour market in terms of healthcare professionals and the increasing costs of healthcare. After all, through the cooperation between formal and informal parties, the support of elderly people living independently becomes a shared responsibility. In addition to this expected social impact in the longer term, the development of the Community Activation Compass has already had an impact. On June 22, 2023, the Compass was presented at the conference ‘Spil in de Wijk’ in Kerkrade. At least three municipalities volunteered to create a living lab to implement and apply the compass under the umbrella of the postdoc research that will be executed from September 2023 until September 2025.

Contribution to education

The contribution of this research to education consists of a number of initiatives. With the knowledge about vital communities, a Zuyd University minor has been developed for three years of study in collaboration with the faculties of facility management, social

work, nursing, and occupational therapy. During this study module, students learn to work together across the domains to vitalise communities in practical situations. Vital communities has also been the main theme for the international study weeks of the faculty of facility management for several years. During these international weeks, students from Heerlen (Netherlands) worked together with students from Kufstein (Austria), Zurich (Switzerland) and Frankfurt (Germany) to activate communities in the centre of Heerlen. In addition, the results of this research offer challenging opportunities to connect students, lecturers, researchers, and practitioners in the future. This is in the form of internships and project assignments in living labs to be determined later, in which communities are formed around concrete activation activities and students can work together (in the field) on ‘lifelike assignments’ in a multidisciplinary setting. With this, interprofessional collaboration and learning in communities can be stimulated. The knowledge and tools developed find their way to education and research centres, with regard to the transition theme of smart living for hotel and facility management, healthcare, social work, and built environment, among others. Precisely because communities must be supported and activated from the various domains (economy, housing, care, welfare), the results of this research offer good opportunities for developing interdisciplinary education, which is an important ambition for the near future. The postdoc research (See contribution to society) will focus on the development of a module in which professionals from municipalities, healthcare, welfare, and social housing associations learn how to apply the compass in a way it will positively impact the quality of life of people ageing in place.

Target groups

The research results are interesting and/or relevant to several target groups, in particular for the initiators of vital communities. These initiators may include professionals from the social sectors of housing, (health)care, and welfare. However, the results are also relevant for policy officers of municipalities who develop policies with regard to ageing in place and the quality of life of older people. In addition to the formal organisations, the research results are also interesting for associations that are committed to the quality of life of older people, such as neighbourhood associations and other elderly associations. With the help of the Community Activation Compass, the target group described above can draw up and implement their own activation plan in order to raise the community to a higher level and create the place to be for older people living independently at home.

Activities

The above target groups are involved in various ways and informed about the research results, so that the knowledge gained can be used in the future. For example, in June

2023, a workshop was held during the congress ‘Spil in de Wijk’ for professionals from housing, care, welfare, municipalities, and volunteers. The workshop included a presentation of the research results followed by a discussion on their application in various contexts. In addition, postdoc research is planned for the short term. This postdoc research completes the circle of conducting design-oriented research. Develop, implement, evaluate, and adjust in order to achieve meaningful impact for practice, education, and research. This postdoc research aims to implement and evaluate the Community Activation Compass for feasibility, usability, and added value. The central question is: To what extent does the application of the Community Activation Compass contribute to the increased vitality of the community, and which adjustments to the approach are desirable based on the experiences with those applications?

The final improved version of the Community Activation Compass will be made digitally available for practice. In addition, future dissemination activities (e.g. workshops) are being developed and given to the target group regarding the application of the Community Activation Compass.

