



# **AGE-FRIENDLY AND MEMORY-FRIENDLY LIVING ENVIRONMENTS**

**Older people in North Karelia  
want to have a voice**

*Tuula Kukkonen (ed.)*

**Karelia University of Applied Sciences**



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**Age-friendliness  
and memory-  
friendliness:  
something new,  
something old**



**A**ge-friendliness is a contemporary world-wide phenomenon, which affects everybody. This comes of-ten up when pondering the questions of ageing and seeking new points of view. There are few societal functions and areas of life where no ageing-related phenomena can be seen. Older people want to be active actors and participate in the same way they did in their youth. Older people must be seen as active actors of life and society as anyone else.

Age-friendliness has been a part of the strategy of Karelia University of Applied Sciences for over a decade. Promoting age-friendly society is one of the development targets of the strategy. We are promoting age-friendly society by establishing a community of practice Karelia Centre for Age-friendly Society (KAFS). The objective of KAFS is to help reinforce the preconditions for a meaningful life of older people and to make the related resources and competences visible. When developing age-friendliness, we focus on age-friendly living environments, a memory-friendly society, an age-friendly working life and customer-centred services and solution.

This publication focuses on age-friendly living environments and a memory-friendly society. These themes affect the whole society, and we can see

them in the environment close to us and in our everyday activities. The development needs for age-friendly living environments have been assessed particularly from the perspective of people living on the countryside: in this publication, Terhi Myller reports on the experiences and thoughts that have surfaced during interviews. People participating in the North Karelia Memory Association's (Pohjois-Karjalan Muistiry) activities have listed the keys for developing a memory-friendly society. Arja Jämsén, who facilitated and organised the peer interviews, tells us about living with a memory-related disease in everyday life and sends regards to both decision-makers and developers. These empiric articles are a very important starting point for the development of age-friendly societies. Hopefully, older people and those living with a memory-related disease will bring up their everyday experiences and development ideas in the future as well.

In addition to these research articles, the publication includes columns from the newspaper Karjalainen's series of columns titled Old age on the countryside (Vanhuus maalla). Arja Jämsén has been the leading spirit of the column series by inviting experts to write and by editing the texts. The columns open fresh aspects on what old age actually means on the countryside and what kinds of phe-

nomena can be linked to ageing on the countryside. In between these texts, you can find reflections of life by people in North Karelia Memory Association's group for people with early onset dementia.

In North Karelia, age-friendliness has been developed and studied for a long time, even before the emergence of age-friendliness as a term and a way of thinking. The importance of the living environments and locations for older people, as well as their home care services were a research focus at University of Joensuu (the current University of Eastern Finland) in the 1980s and 1990s.

Jukka Pekka Sarola studied the importance of living environment, location and social networks for older people (Sarola 1996, 1994, 1987). Sarola has also written about the pressures to change in the out-patient services for older people (Sarola 1989). Silva Tedre focused on home care services for older people from the viewpoint of the workers (1999). In the 2020s, the questions of rural studies (see e.g., Lehtola & Tedre 2014, Tedre & Voutilainen 2016) have surfaced in the examination of living environments for older people. They are also visible in the book "Eläkeläisenä maaseudulla" (A pensioner on the countryside, Tedre & Voutilainen (eds.) 2013). A collection of texts edited by Tedre "Maalla! Koetut paikat" (On the countryside! Experienced places, Tedre (ed.) 2020) includes themes of retirement and the relationship of ageing and environment.

Arja Jämsén's study on the living conditions of war invalids and Tuula Kukkonen's study on the way of life of older people that have moved to cities from the countryside join this series of research conducted in North Karelia. Both studies are over 30 years old. If you examine the issues and conclusions, you might notice that they are not very different now in the 2020s. This should be a sign of the importance of these questions but also that everyday lives and living environments of older people still don't correspond to our standards. In fact, there is still work to be done and a need for professionals of different fields gathering around these phenomena.

This publication is meant for anyone interested in developing age-friendliness: older people, professionals and students of different fields, developers

and teachers. We hope that our publication is useful to actors in age-friendly societies. It would also be great if this publication could spark discussion around age-friendly and memory-friendly living environments in the society at large.

Tämän julkaisun tekemisen ja vuonna 2021 toteutetut tutkimukset on mahdollistanut Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön rahoittama ja Karelia-ammattikorkeakoulun toteuttama hanke EAFS (RDI Excellence in Creating an Age-friendly Society in Remote Areas).

Joensuu, 3 January 2022  
TUULA KUKKONEN

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# Daydreaming in a countryside scenery

SARAH LAUKKANEN

A magnificent spring morning in a house among the fields. I'm too excited to drink my morning coffee indoors. Instead, I grab my mug and rush outside. I stand by the daffodils in my rubber boots and let the sun warm my cheeks.

It's lucky for a retired lady like me to have the opportunity to start the morning like this! Some of us drink their morning coffee on small apartment balconies. I need space and landscapes, crying cranes and the smell of soil.

Back then, during the years of coronavirus, many set their sights away from city centres. It felt safer to work remotely in a really remote area, with more space, and less people and coronavirus spreaders. Suddenly, grandmas' cottages were selling. Long-abandoned shacks were renovated in between spurts of remote work. Overgrown yards were cleared, and new flowerbeds were installed. Then people got used to it all and did no longer want to return to their hectic city lives as retirement crept closer.

There was no need either, since buses started visiting remote areas more often once again. You can visit the city centre whenever you want. The bus runs through the village every hour the whole day. Just go to the movies or the library or visit someone. The small village store was born again too when remote work was trendy. It even had to be expanded. A pharmacy was established next to the store, along with a physiotherapist. Even a health care bus stops at the store two times a week. Now what else would an older person even need? A physician comes on the bus, takes all the tests, and renews prescriptions. Sometimes a memory nurse comes with the bus as well.

A robotic lawnmower cuts the grass in the summer and several entrepreneurs keep themselves busy by ploughing the villagers' yards in the winter.

Nobody with back problems needs to work unless they want to take care of their physique. Oh, right. There is a gym in the store square as well!

Young families keep moving to the village. They like having an amazing, renovated village school, ice-skating rinks and sports fields for their children. And if something cannot be done in the village, it's always convenient to catch a bus to the city centre. The children are lovely and often visit old people like me to ask for small tasks. They help watering

**Well, I should get moving from by the daffodils.**

the flowers and keep company when baking tasty treats. Even though they aren't my grandchildren, they are a bit concerned about how the lady from next door is doing.

Well, I should get moving from by the daffodils. The beauty salon on the store square will open soon. The girls will need to tame this old lady's hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows as well.

My ringing phone wakes me up. What, was I only daydreaming? Is it not 2041 but 2021 instead? My re-retirement is still far away, but are the things I saw in my dreams even further away?

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 28 March 2021*

# Granny from countryside, false and true

ARJA JÄMSÉN

Journalists should be able to write in a way that even a granny from a remote municipality can understand them. I heard this is how journalists used to be advised to write. This granny went on to become a living legend.

What do we know about this stereotypical granny from countryside? She is old, not very educated, and lives a modest life on the countryside. The opposite of the granny would be her urban cousin from Helsinki. An independent, active, and slightly wild lady, who is getting old but is interested in younger men.

Of course, grannies and wild old ladies are merely stereotypical representations of older women. A grandma living on the countryside still lives on as the prototype of an old person, decade after decade. These images do have a real basis in middle-aged people's childhoods. My own grandma was a round matron with a thin ponytail. Dressed in a blue chequered apron, she would bake milky desserts in the oven, and she smelled slightly of barn. The world of marketing uses our nostalgic memories for competitive advantage. You can buy grandma's mashed potatoes, meatballs and cottages.

The memories of a world long gone linger in our minds. Still, we should update our attitudes towards age to match the 2020s. Different elderly people live both on the countryside and in the city. The "granny on the countryside" model tricks us into thinking of a lonely old person with modest income, with a terrible fate looming over them. Their options are either to stay in the middle of nowhere or move into a nursing home in a municipal centre.

Instead, there are many options and different ways of ageing. Even on the countryside, old people come in all shapes. We have ageing artisans,



researchers and entrepreneurs, artists, and farmers. We have active pensioners who are the mainstays of communality in their villages in their own ways. This creative variety of old people is easy to miss even though the diversity and growing vigour of the countryside could be partly built on it.

To not lose the power, potential and creativity of older people, living on the countryside calls for the prerequisites of everyday life. We need broadbands, optical fibres and digital skills, transport without a car of one's own, social, health care and culture services on wheels, cottage janitors and communality, the feeling of being a part of a group. One



## I think the Finnish countryside runs largely by granny power.

of my acquaintances who lives on the countryside told me once about her everyday life and said that everyone should have a Jimmy or Sally to call when they need help or someone to chat with.

I think the Finnish countryside runs largely by granny power. Let me remind you about village associations, feasts after moose hunting and summer theatres. They are somewhat akin to Russian grandmas, babushkas. Without them, families would not survive, and the society would stop working.

It's high time to make sure that all kinds of grannies will keep living on the countryside in the future as well. It will be all over for us if we face the risk of granny shortage. And yes, we need all kinds of grandpas as well, but I'll tell you about them another time.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 7 April 2021*



# Old age power from the countryside

ARJA JÄMSÉN

Currently, there are almost a million people over the age of 70 in Finland, and it's not surprising that their number is growing. Almost half of them live on the countryside. It's the same in North Karelia. I'd also like to say that part of that other half dreams of living on the countryside, at least part-time.

During the corona pandemic, many elderly people in cities have spent their time leisurely on the countryside, at their second house or a grandma's cottage. Renting a cottage also became extremely popular. Countryside started to look like an alluring place.

But how is old age on the countryside when you live there permanently? Birds singing in the summer and freezing temperatures and snowstorms in the winter? Is life eternal happiness and help from neighbours? Or loneliness, marginalisation, and unsafeness?

Ten years ago, a Finnish study on well-being charted the satisfaction and happiness on the countryside and in the city. It found that loneliness was the rarest on the countryside and the most common in the city, when comparing a grandma in her rural cottage and a city grandma in her apartment.

What choices do the elderly have for their living arrangements? A multi-local migratory bird, who lives in the city or on the countryside, in their homeland or abroad, depending on the time of the year? Or a citydweller until the end? Is it a good solution to stay in one's own remote village? Or is a pensioner

living on the countryside considered a problem for the system, with no access to services?

Age-friendliness on the countryside remains largely an unmapped territory. Age-friendly thinking is primarily founded on developing urban environments, in Finland and abroad. In the city, the elderly and their needs are more visible than their country cousins in their villages.

Age-friendliness on the countryside does not mean just designing health care services and counting bed-places, although that is part of it. Age-friendliness means, among other things, trying to find solutions to help the elderly on the countryside function and cope in different ways. Everyday examples include diverse living arrangements and smooth public transport. The number of those living alone is on the rise, and at the same time, people are becoming more and more interested in communal living and age-friendly living environments.

The elections and political debate will draw attention to big questions and lead to far-shooting choices on values. The strategies and slogans of many municipalities highlight reinforcing vigour as their goal. The Cambridge Dictionary defines vigour as "strength, energy or enthusiasm." In other words, it is something that is needed to cope.

Vigour is a positively charged word that exudes strength and forward motion. It's a trendy word that is hard to understand in practice and in real life. Therefore, it would be important to ponder what constitutes vigour in practice and in everyday life. How could the elderly participate in creating and reinforcing vigour? Without confrontation, with an understanding between different generations.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen  
18 February 2021*

Age-friendliness on the countryside remains largely an unmapped territory.



**“Even if you have a memory-related disease, it’s not the end of your life. It’s only the beginning.”**

**“I still have a long time to live, I don't know who I might meet!”**

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE BY NORTH KARELIA MEMORY ASSOCIATION'S GROUP FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE A MEMORY-RELATED DISEASE AT WORKING-AGE (TSEMPPARIT).



# **Dimensions of age-friendliness in sparsely populated rural contexts**

TERHI MYLLER

Maintaining an aged person's physical, mental, and social well-being is essential to ageing well. An environment that promotes and supports ageing in a comprehensive manner is a key to successful ageing. Rural areas, that generally age faster than cities, are interesting study foci when it comes to ageing well. (Neville, Napier, Adams, Shannon & Wright-St Clair 2021, 2541–2542.) The above-mentioned also describes the different dimensions of ageing. From the point of view of an individual, ageing has a contextual link. In North Karelian rural areas, ageing is faster than in urban areas. The population forecast for the coming decades (Peruspalvelujen tila 2020) highlights the proportional increase in the number of older people and the decrease in the number of the working-age population. Generally, the North Karelian countryside could be described as an ageing and sparsely populated area.

I shall examine older North Karelian people's experiences of their everyday lives and their living environment. The article asks which kinds of dimensions support the everyday lives of older people and what kind of living environment feels meaningful to them. First, I will describe the background of earlier international and Finnish research related to the topic and then present the passage and results of research-based development coordinated by Karelia UAS's KAFS project (Karelian Center for Age-Friendly Society). Finally, I will discuss how the experiences of the older people and the dimensions they find meaningful could be better taken into consideration in the development of an age-friendly rural contexts.

### **DEFINING REMOTE RURAL CONTEXT FROM THE ASPECTS OF EARLIER RESEARCH**

"Are we expecting too much from the recommendations for age-friendliness", Stephen M. Golant (2014) asks and notes that the international age-friendliness (WHO 2007; 2018) is first and foremost a political strategy and implementing age-friendliness in practice requires action from governments and local actors. An important question is: how is age-friendliness realised? Basically, all age-friendliness indicators have been made to examine age-friendliness from the viewpoint of cities (WHO 2007). For rural contexts, age-friendliness research and discussion have sparked less interest. It is important

to examine the concept and the related meanings critically.

In Finland, the national quality recommendation to secure active ageing and to enhance services in 2020–2023 is aiming for an age-friendly Finland (STM 2020). The national quality recommendation includes many different aspects on enhancing the living environments, services and the quality of services aimed for the older people, as well as suggestion on cooperation between different actors. These aspects can be understood as dimensions of age-friendliness. However, the dimensions of age-friendliness cannot be directly applied to older people living on the sparsely populated rural contexts (e.g., Vidovičová 2018). Conceptualising age-friendliness, or a meaningful everyday life and living environment from the point of view of an individual, requires analysing the experiences of older people living on sparsely populated rural areas.

In the current international and Finnish discussion, we can see a welcome change from individual factors of aging towards a more extensive view on the contextual boundness of ageing and the social processes (e.g., Walker 2015; Neville et al. 2021; Jämsén & Kukkonen 2020). This is important in order to make different rural areas visible and take them into consideration when designing services and living arrangements for older people, for example. This is also important in order to contrast the older people with, for instance, the culture and opportunity structures of the surrounding context. A wide perspective also creates the foundation for a multiprofessional age-friendliness with a multi-agency approach.

It is also important to understand how an older person's everyday life is constructed. Traditionally, rural studies on ageing have focused on old people's lack of social relationships and networks. The studies show that these scarcities lead to a greater risk of isolation for older people. The studies have also described the minor numbers of services supporting the older people. On the other hand, describing rural areas as idyllic places where communality compensates the lack of services and resources is a typical point of view in research related to ageing. (Neville et al. 2021.) These kinds of romantic aspects are needed to analyse critically, as well.

When asking older people about their experiences and views on an age-friendly rural living environ-

ment, the following themes surface: it is important to have a plan on how to grow old in a place reminiscent of the countryside. This includes considering relationships that are significant to the older people and the experience of an aesthetically good living environment. Another point of view highlights the older people's views on whether they maintain their own agency. Related topics include social commitment in the rural community and transport opportunities. A third point of view introduces the importance of resilience, which means the ways challenges are processed and survival strategies that help older people to cope on the countryside. (Neville et al. 2021, 2545.) Finnish research has also focused on transport for older people. One way of dividing the basic positions of the rural older people is "the ones with a car and the ones without a car." Transport symbolises an important strength that allows an old person to influence their opportunities to participate in political, social, and economic functions. (Tedre & Pulkkinen 2011; Lehtola & Tedre 2014.) The studies also bring up how meanings of place and a place-related identity are linked with a rural living environment (Tedre & Pehkonen 2011).

The above-mentioned viewpoints show how place-related traditions and customs are significant in the everyday lives of the older people. Studies have found that functional services alone do not constitute an age-friendly environment; instead, such an environment includes relationships and links to the countryside. Familiarity with the area and knowing and experiencing the nature linked with their living environment is important to the older people. They reflect the construction of an old person's identity in relation with the rural place.

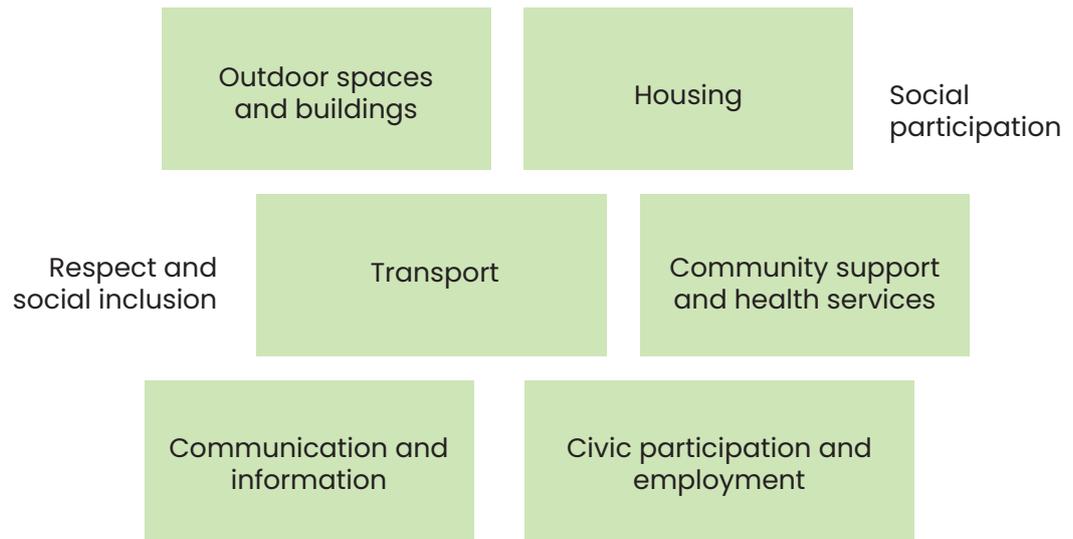
Studies also show that supporting and using local entrepreneurs and trade are important parts of the daily lives of the older people. Older people would rather go to a local store than visit a city. This also means maintaining familiar social relationships. (Harrison, Hall, Money, Mueller, Waterson & Verma 2021, 8.) On the other hand, both Finnish and international research show that the older people living in sparsely populated areas must move from their homes to reach services in the cities in order to secure the availability of services (e.g., Jaakkola 2015; Torres-Gil & Hofland 2012). Consequently, we face the questions of older people's autonomy and their

potentially decreased agency to act. Where do we expect older people to live if their physical capacity to act does not fully represent a mainstream model of active aged person, and where are the older people "allowed" to live when they are old?

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The informants (n=8) in this research-based development were older people over the age of 65 living on the sparsely populated rural areas. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were selected as informants through North Karelian pensioner networks and using the snowball method. The ethical review of the study was conducted in spring 2021. The permission for the study conducted in connection with the KAFS project was applied to the committee of research ethics of Karelia University of Applied Sciences. The permit was granted, and the interviews were conducted during summer of 2021. The interview material was recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically, applying the idea of critical incidents technique (Flanagan 1954), looking for critical incidents related to the construction of an age-friendly everyday life, "success dimensions" related to age-friendly living environments and/or other essential dimensions that enhance everyday life. The analysis was abductive. The material will be stored for the duration of the project according to Karelia UAS's data protection policy. The research strategy was qualitative, where informants' experiences and contextual perspectives were highlighted.

The material was analysed seeking supporting elements related to everyday life and concrete descriptions of a meaningful living environment. At first, factors reflecting an important and meaningful living environment were examined by sub-theme. Applying the idea of critical incidents, factors of everyday life and living environment that prevent "ageing in one's own way" were considered, and respectively, the factors describing a dream environment. The material also included spontaneous descriptions of fears of the future. These descriptions were included in the analysis. The analysis continued a dialogue with previous research. WHO's eight-domain (2007) age-friendliness model was used when examining the material (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Domains of age-friendliness as defined by WHO (2007).

The following table 1 contains the themes and their contents created during analysis.

**Table 1.** An example of the created themes and their contents.

What is important/ meaningful in the everyday life / living environment?	What about the every- day life / living envi- ronment prevents ageing in one's own way?	What would a dream living environment look like?	Any fears of the future in relation with ageing?
Social relationships and place-related meanings, familiarity with the area (friends, family)	Loss of services (stores, banks, hobbies) in one's living environment	To see the nature and flowers, make planting works, pick berries and mushrooms	To be bed-bound
Opportunity to move (vehicle or personally)	Everything costs, lack of money	To see and hear children, life	To be bound to a facility
Close relationship with nature in some way	Illness, impaired capacity to act	To have food and a dining room	To lose one's memory and mind
Children and grandchildren (bring meaning to everyday life)	The environment is not accessible (e.g., cannot leave home, no access to services, technologization)	To have services nearby (store, bank, hobbies)	
Hobbies	No social relationships, loneliness	To have freedom and right to decide on one's own affairs	
The environment looks like one's own, e.g., aesthetics; decorating the house, ability to decide on one's own affairs, access to sauna)			

## DIMENSIONS OF AN AGE-FRIENDLY EVERYDAY LIFE ON THE SPARSELY POPULATED RURAL CONTEXT

Important and meaningful matters in older people's everyday lives include **social relationships and consequently, being connected with other people**, and the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas with others. The following includes examples of maintaining friendships and the importance of relationships:

*Aged person C: I have a few female friends, three in total. I don't really need any more. Real, close friends, I mean. At least once a week, even though they live elsewhere, well, we speak on the telephone and unload all kinds of—*

*Aged person E: Maija (name changed) is really, really helpful and... Puts on hair rollers and all kinds of things and once there was-- were put and sheets were changed, so Maija took both of them, all mattresses. Everything like that with a vacuum cleaner, and then (the sheets) were put on again.*

The **possibility to move** either by foot or with different transport options is considered an important matter that supports the everyday life (see also Tedre & Pulkkinen 2011). **The nature and a green and close environment** environment often surface when discussing matters that maintain and improve well-being, joy, and activeness. For example, picking berries and mushrooms, spending time in the nature and jogging as well as garden maintenance and maintaining a small vegetable garden are portrayed as important contents of everyday life. The following quote describes spending time in nature and the comprehensive well-being it creates:

*Interviewer: How do you experience it as an environment?*

*Aged person A: Well, it is a fine place since there is nobody else at all. And there I have my pond and I'm in my own peace. - It is in the way this environment is, now that we have had this problem- we have these campfire spots and Bodies of water and there are places to go. We haven't had to be, to sit home.*

*Aged person B: There are lean-tos and there are even open wilderness huts out there. It has been really fun to visit these different places with this group of retirees. We don't al-ways have to go to*

*the same place. Always such a pain to wonder where we should go now. We always find a nice place. But really, there is a lot. The nature is here, it is, it couldn't be any better.*

*Aged person A: And there is the start point of a hiking trail that goes all the way to the City. --130 kilometres. It's good for padding along if nothing else comes to mind. It's called Trail. I even have detailed maps on it. -- And it goes there near the Eastern border.*

The previous quote shows that a peaceful environment is highlighted as a factor that describes the living environment in a positive manner. In the same way, the lack of nature and greenery is described as a matter that describes the living environment in a negative manner, as the following quote shows:

*Interviewer: Well, what else can you say about this place of residency?*

*Aged person D: This (living environment) is indeed a bit rough in my opinion, and like, many others have said it as well.*

*Interviewer: Well, how would you justify it or why do you feel that it's rough?*

*Aged person D: Well, for example, that yard area is very well there, they could add some planting works, flowers, bushes. It could like be made more pleasant looking somehow.*

The following example illustrates the pleasantness of the living environment and the importance of small everyday tasks and transport on the countryside:

*Aged person G: As a living environment this Finland on the Eastern border is..even now when I look out that window, the sun shines beautifully, and you cannot hear much noise at all. The climate is good -- pretty nice to live. For a pensioner, the day goes by very well, at least in the wintertime, there is heating up the fireplaces, there is wood heating and electric heating as well. And when jogging, when you jog for a couple hours during the day, that's a day's work already.*

Rural places are also linked with the meanings of **familiarity with the area**, social relationships and familiarity that create meaning in everyday life and make a place important via people and their stories. On the other hand, it shows that the number

of relationships is decreasing, which also impacts the experiences of familiarity. The following is an example of place-linked description of information, an exchange of news in the marketplace:

*Aged person F: During the summer holidays, I was there in the marketplace selling raffle tickets, associations' raffle tickets. In my opinion, it was an interesting and nice place in a way, selling raffle tickets there in the marketplace, when you could meet all old acquaintances that had moved to Sweden. They come here in the village and of course in the marketplace at first. And there, when they saw that a familiar man was buying raffle tickets, they came there to buy. There I would meet them.*

**Close ones and family** are also mentioned as support, but especially the impact of children and grandchildren on one's well-being is highlighted. Sending one's children out in the world and **following their life stories** are mentioned often. People say that they maintain connection with their close ones with visits and phone calls. Travelling to visit children and grandchildren who live far away also comes up sometimes. **One's own children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren** mean joy and elation. The following, for example, discusses the participation of children and their children in the everyday life:

*Interviewer: What supports a smooth everyday life for you?*

*Aged person C: Support.. Well, of course the most important things haven't been mentioned now, that of course these children of mine are the most absolute. I have two daughters and a son. And seven grandchildren. I have taken care of them all.*

**Different hobbies** are also described as meaningful, active affairs in the living environment, but hobbies are also linked with exercise and the natural environment, for example by picking berries and mushrooms and exercising in the nature. The importance of hobbies is related to things that bring joy. Art hobbies, participating in association functions and handicraft hobbies also surface sometimes. Hobbies are mainly described as something to do, the maintenance of mental well-being and physique. The following is a description of such:

*Aged person C: In the morning, when I wake up, well, often I go on a morning walk. I walk a couple kilometres. Or I go swimming. In a hole in the ice in*

*the winter. The summertime is freer then, but then immediately in the autumn, I start, I have many hobbies.*

*Interviewer: What kind of hobbies do you have?*

*Aged person C: I'm one of the founding members in association X, I was part of the summer theatre for 15 years. I also paint.*

*Interviewer: What else is there then in the every-*

**Arrangements for a life of one's own are highlighted as something important in the everyday life. This is described as, for example, decorating the house to be beautiful or pleasing to oneself or a suitable daily schedule or activities.**

*day? Do you have other hobbies?*

*Aged person B: Well, now in the summer I haven't since our pensioner group hasn't gathered either. Otherwise, I have participated in our pensioner group very actively.*

**Arrangements for a life of one's own** are highlighted as something important in the everyday life. This is described as, for example, decorating the house to be beautiful or pleasing to oneself or a suitable daily schedule or activities. For example, scheduled meals and snacking from time to time, managing one's own affairs and making suitable

choices in one's daily life. The following is an example of maintaining a pleasant home:

*Aged person D: Well, I'm like that, I keep the house tidy. And I don't like it when it's untidy, I clean often. And I like it when the house is clean and tidy.*

For example, access to sauna, meeting a friend and going out whenever are portrayed as important when it comes to a living environment of one's own. In these descriptions, a life of one's own extends to build and natural areas around the home, to one's everyday choices, and opportunities inherent to the environment. The following are examples of such descriptions:

*Aged person E: Since this house doesn't have (a private sauna), there is a (common) sau-na, but I don't think they bathe there --there isn't, there are two doors, one of them is put in a way it cannot even be opened. I wanted to go to sauna, and I booked it but since I fell, well, I couldn't go anymore. Yeah right, I told the janitor so that he knows what has happened. And another time, well, when I booked it, was it so freezing that I didn't go.*

*Aged person A: My greatest work project has been clearing the copse. My plot there is 6,000 square (metres). So many birches and aspens and rowans grow there, this size. Some of them have already grown so big that I cannot get them with scissors. -- But it's half an hour that I can continue and then I need to rest. It's so hard on the back.*

*Aged person B: That's for sure.*

Interviewer: Is it a nice pastime or how do you feel about it?

*Aged person A: I don't know, but it's nice to look at once it's all been cleared out. - There's just one corner there and other one there. -- It's nice to look at but a hell of a task [laughs].*

## **OBSTACLES FOR AGEING IN ONE'S OWN WAY**

Apparently, obstacles for ageing in one's own way include the **loss of nearby services**, such as stores, banks, and different hobbies. This development is also related to the fact that the younger generation is moving away, and the infrastructure is disappearing. People also discuss how the prerequisites for living on the countryside are dwindling. The following describes this:

*Aged person D: When you live on the countryside and are left alone, you must then leave, I'm not suited to living alone. The church is 26 kilometres away, so how would I live alone there. No. Then, you see people move away from the countryside when the young people leave.. away and old people must come for care here in the village. And then the houses are abandoned, there are many abandoned houses out there. That is how the fate is.*

*Aged person G: When you drive through some areas further away, it's 40-50 kilometres to get here in the village for school, that is when the days start getting long for a six-year-old who goes to school today. Then again, when you think about the future, the birth rate in this municipality, for example, is like ten children per year. Is it even worth it to have a school here in the coming years? Might be that in 2-3 years they say that well, the nearest school is in City.*

**Lack of money and financial support** are also portrayed as important obstacles for ageing in one's own way. When you have no money, you cannot participate or get the feeling of inclusiveness out of different factors that support well-being. Concerns arise about people with very meagre pensions who cannot even meet their basic needs adequately. Portrayals related to money are also somewhat tense. People do not want to discuss money and they do not want to ask for anything more, not aloud at least. Instead, the descriptions show that one must make do with what they have. Financial factors also prevent having hobbies and maintaining one's capacity to act. The following describes financial barriers to participating in, for example, culture and hobbies:

*Aged person G: There, at the adult education centre, they organise something, but when you look at those adult education centre's notifications, they have one-off payments or whatever they are. For many ageing people that is, at least here, how could I say it, a threshold, that you cannot participate in guided adult education centre activities. You live on a minimum pension, then if an evening costs like 20 euros, or was it 30 euros, or whatever euros, the participation cost, a person living on such a minimum pension can no longer put their money in such a thing.*

**Aged person A: The everyday is still (manageable) since I can drive a car and move around. Then it will become a problem if they revoke my driving licence someday. Well, there's no point worrying about it.**

**Severe illness or impaired capacity to act** to such an extent that one cannot manage their everyday life any longer is also a hurdle for a life of one's own. Falling ill and the impairment of one's capacity to act have a strong connection with environmental barriers. There are descriptions of physical barriers, for example heavy doors and difficult entries in different places that those with bad legs couldn't access. Services that have been moved on the internet are also portrayed as barriers to living a life of one's own. An impaired capacity to act is also linked with more difficulties with movement, as the following example illustrates:

*Aged person A: The everyday is still (manageable) since I can drive a car and move around. Then it will become a problem if they revoke my driving licence someday. Well, there's no point worrying about it.*

**Loneliness and lack of social contacts** were also portrayed as a hinderance in everyday life. Isolation and the following apathy were described as harmful. On the other hand, these things are mentioned occasionally in the passing, and the interviewees do not linger on the negative aspects of ageing.

## **A DREAM LIVING ENVIRONMENT**

A dream living environment is described as a place with **nature all around, where you could look at flowers, make planting works, go pick berries and mushrooms and chat with people and see different generations, children. Also, good food**

and a dining room for eating, if one's own agency has already been decreased, were mentioned.

*Interviewer: How would a dream living environment look like for the elderly?*

*Aged person E: It would be nice if there were children in the environment, but it's not everything but, there would be children around there so we would have.. That would be nice, you could watch children play, through a window or something. That would be lovely.*

*Aged person D: To sit outside in the swing and chat and walk in peace.*

*Aged person E: Right.*

*Aged person D: Yes, and maybe do some gymnastics outside and move your legs.*

*Aged person D: --that dream home where food could be served in a big dining room may-be or --*

*Aged person E: Of course that kind of assisted living would be good and..*

*Aged person D: Well, surely at the end it.. Unless there is something, laying in the bed or something. Yes, assisted living. There are other people too*

*Aged person E: And somewhat good food so that it wouldn't be something--*

**Also having services nearby, such as a store and a bank**, are mentioned as important aspects of the living environment. **The freedom to decide upon one's own affairs** is considered very important, as well as children not needing to take care of their parents when their capability to act has become somewhat impaired.

## FEARS FOR THE FUTURE

Spontaneous references to fears for the future also surface in our data. **Loss of freedom and total impairment of one's capability to act are among the fears that were mentioned. Also, the fear of facilities and losing one's memory and mind were portrayed as fears related to ageing.** The following quote describes such reflection:

*Aged person D: -- has been said that it's always good as long as the brain and the legs work.*

*Aged person E: That would be it, it would be the worst to not remember.*

*Aged person D: Yes, and in a hospital a little, in there (waiting)--.*

*Aged person E: Now that there is one, he was there many years, couldn't remember any-thing --his wife had died earlier and the husband couldn't remember anything for many years, he just died recently. That is not very fun.*

The meanings tied to these fears portray helplessness, having to be cared for by others and losing one's agency. It can also be observed that sensitivity, professional ethics, and respect are essential viewpoints when acting and working with the elderly.

## DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The results describe older people's experiences and thoughts on an age-friendly everyday life and living environment in a rural context where there is only meagre selection of different services, culture and hobbies and other choices. What is noteworthy about these results, is that the dimensions of a smooth everyday life for the older people are not big; instead, they are matters related to the basic needs of a human life. Descriptions of a rural environment are highlighted in the data as a meaningful factor of the everyday life.

Being able to leave the house, moving around, different small everyday tasks, meeting friends and other people, chatting and good food make an age-friendly everyday life. The portrayal of rural environments with services, the ability to move around and different aesthetic and accessibility factors that constitute an age-friendly living environment can be taken into consideration in the everyday life for the older people. On the one hand, there are barriers and hinderances to implement-

ing age-friendliness. They are related to economic and infrastructural factors, such as the diminishing range of ways to live, and individual factors related to the capacity to act.

Another interesting point about the result is the fact that the factors supporting the construction of an everyday life do not necessarily require great economic contributions or investments. The prerequisites of age-friendliness are all around us, in us, and in our thinking.

The results of this research-based development show how discussing the experiences of older people is a fundamental starting point for the design and development of age-friendly services, livelihoods, structures, and processes, among others. We cannot affect everything linked with rural living environments, such as the physical environment. A sparsely populated rural context is what it is, considering its geographical and physical features. It would still be justified to consider the factors of the countryside related to physical and spatial, i.e., social, relationships as well as cultural and contextual meanings as resources for the elderly and as the starting point of age-friendly action.

Some dimensions depicting the everyday life and living environment of older people would be easy to take into consideration in people's ways of acting, thinking and speaking. These include support for social relationships, making hobbies accessible, and fulfilling and realising basic needs, such as nutritional intake and the possibility to clean oneself. On the other hand, a practical and interactive review does not present ageing on the countryside from a social or even wider perspective. That is why individual factors of age-friendliness that surface in the practice, in consideration with meanings produced by the surrounding context, form a more complete picture of age-friendliness on the countryside. In summary, the dimensions of age-friendliness on the countryside consist of **social, cultural, and contextual dimensions of age-friendliness**. This classification is also supported by earlier studies on ageing and rural areas (e.g., Neville et al. 2021; Harrison et al. 2021; Lehtola & Tedre 2014).

It is therefore justified to examine the age-friendly countryside first and foremost from the point of view of those living there, considering their needs and wishes. Implementing age-friendliness pro-

grammes to rural contexts will not be permanent without considering the special features of the rural context and the involvement of citizens and different actors in the development of an age-friendly countryside. Political steering and the choices of organisations and actors in different fields play an important role in concretising the factors of age-friendliness in the everyday life. That is why open discussion and analysis of an age-friendly countryside from the point of view of different actors is integral. Reinforcing age-friendliness is user-driven and its starting point lies in the everyday lives and living environments of the older people. Promoting age-friendliness is a common cause for the society, not just individual actors.

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# Nobody wants to leave home actually

SUVI VEPSÄLÄINEN

Raise your hand if you have ever known what's good for someone else better than them. I admit to doing this myself. I haven't kept a count.

It came into my mind when I was thinking about older people living on the countryside. As a nurse, I always try to listen to the client and their wishes. The difficult question is if I really listen and hear what is being said when discussing coping at home, for example. In that moment, I'm usually very worried about how this grandma or grandpa copes alone and far away from the city centre. The older person swears they can survive, like: "Now what would be the issue here, in my own home."

We sometimes have intense discussions on how the everyday life is actually going on the countryside. The close ones of older people get involved as well because they often have valuable information and perspective on the older person's home life. I observe this difference of viewpoints, sometimes on stormy seas, sometimes in smooth mutual understanding.

If I had a magic wand, I would swing it to make the services supporting living on the countryside, especially the services supporting such life, available to every older person, easily and flexibly. The biggest issues with "living on the fringe" are usually problems with using services and getting a lift and an assistant when visiting the city centre, if necessary. The current ridesharing system is good, but additional rides and helping hands would offer more support. It may also be tricky to gain access to support services: where to get yourself warm meals, cleaning services and a gardener?

I wonder how we could ensure older people's right to live at home as long as they want. A prerequisite for this is of course a smooth and safe everyday life. We should boldly come up with new ways and methods for supporting a meaningful everyday life in a way that the older person can be

an active agent.

Could these services be offered from somewhere nearby, for example by a municipal association or another actor? It would be great if you could run an active business in rural villages and provide services to the older people from nearby, their own village.

Maybe we don't need a magic wand. Maybe we can do it without magic, using a more traditional approach. Who would coordinate different bodies to meet, plan and execute age-friendly life on the countryside for older people? I think we should start by asking, listening, and taking the opinions, thoughts and wishes of experts, or the older people living on the countryside, into consideration. These opinions would provide us with important information about what these older people living on the countryside need to be able to live on their own. Nobody knows it better than them.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 16 August 2021*

**Who would coordinate different bodies to meet, plan and execute age-friendly life on the countryside for older people?**

# What are the keys to ageing well?

TERHI MYLLER

In an international study, older people living on the countryside were asked what the keys to ageing well are in their opinion. Three themes come up in the answers. First, ageing well includes a suitable place and the right people. This means that the older person feels heard and that his/her living environment has a gentle and supportive outlook on ageing.

The right to decide on one's own affairs and social relationships is also considered important. Thirdly, when a person ages well, they accept the changes brought about by ageing. The same things arise in the Finnish discussion and in discussions with North Karelian people living on the countryside. The themes portray an age-friendly society to the fullest.

Coronavirus restrictions can be seen in the everyday of the older people living on the countryside in avoidance of social contacts and minimisation of mobility. At the same time, the basic features of rural environments remain the same and present

## How can we make ageing well possible on the countryside?

in the everyday lives of the older people. Long distances, planning every move and transport, getting out of the house and back in, everyday schedules with trips to the store and the pharmacy and other routines constitute the framework for everyday life.

The older people's resources and opportunities to experience ageing well are highlighted in concrete everyday situations. On the other hand, the diminishing opportunities and resources for ageing well can be seen in the very same situations. We need a wider perspective for ageing well to not depend on the resources and opportunities of individual older people. How can we make ageing well possible on the countryside? How would it come up concretely in the older people's everyday lives? What could each of us do to develop an age-friendly society?

Studies have shown that people's experiences form a connection with a place. The places gain individual, but also communal meanings. The individual and communal meanings linked with places also come up in the experiences of ageing and age-friendliness. Therefore, ageing is linked with a place, the meanings linked with said place and, at the same time, the opportunities to grow old on the countryside that concretely define the everyday life.

Local information is needed in decision-making and reinforcing age-friendliness. This includes the older people's experiences of a smooth everyday life and factors that make daily tasks easier. Services and structures cannot be updated, or equality safeguarded without local information. As one older person from the rural area said at the end of our discussion: "If only I could live on my own as long as possible and decide on my own affairs." This is great starting point for age-friendliness, where the information and experiences of the ageing people are appreciated and used in support of ageing well.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 18 March 2021*

# A visible, ageing countryside

TERHI MYLLER

What is age-friendliness on this greying countryside of long distances? This is a topical question when we think about the future of North Karelia.

Age-friendliness takes the needs of the older people into consideration in construction and provision of services. Age-friendliness focuses on accessible outdoor areas and buildings as well as transport and exercise options. Places of exercise, culture and leisure should be available and accessible to everyone.

Age-friendliness also means the opportunity to live meaningfully and safely, participate, be part of a community and influence affairs that have an impact on you. Voluntary work and making different work opportunities accessible are also related to age-friendliness. Everyone should have the opportunity to work irrespective of their age.

Important viewpoints on age-friendliness include interaction and communication between actors. Functional social and health care services are integral to age-friendliness. Age-friendliness takes people of all ages in consideration in a far-reaching and comprehensive manner.

On the countryside where distances are long, the experiences of the older people, from the viewpoint of age-friendliness, have been largely forgotten in the public discussion. Living environments and the boundary conditions of living have not been highlighted very much. These themes do not appear as the main goals of different rural project fundings either.

Well, the voice of the youth from the distant countryside has not been heard in public discussion either, besides in a few studies. The World Health Organisation encourages communities and cities to review the implementation of age-friendliness – unsurprisingly by carefully listening to the older people and the actors in these areas, for example by visiting the living environment in person and reviewing the implementation of age-friendliness. WHO directs these encouraging words to cities, but it's good to remember that 95% of Finnish land is countryside, and 28% of the population lives on the countryside. (Ministry of the Environment 2021.)

What methods would help highlight the issues of the countryside? Examples of inventive involvement include peer interviews and interviewing older people while walking in their own living environment. It is also important to include the older people when making decisions on age-friendly solutions. These things would bring visibility to age-friendliness in the countryside of long distances, or vice versa, to the factors that hinder this development.

It is easy to list different definitions of age-friendliness as an answer to the questions: What is age-friendliness in the countryside of long distances, and what is it like? From a city-dweller's perspective, I cannot say how life and age-friendliness work out in practice and how people experience them on the most remote rural areas. It is especially important to ask the older people themselves about these matters, and thus make the rural areas visible.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 21 June 2021*



# A friend to granny, a wife to farmer

ARJA JÄMSÉN

Many efforts have been made to find a solution to loneliness experienced by people living on the countryside. Bachelors looking for a lady have made newspaper announcement to find women who know how to milk a cow. Tens of thousands of rural people put their faith in the IEVA computer program displayed in agricultural shows in the 80s. Now they are looking for a partner in reality TV.

Living alone is a modern phenomenon both on the countryside and in the city. Large families and multi-generational communities are history. As the life expectancy gets longer, the chances of having to live alone are getting bigger. People living alone on the countryside are not a homogenous group. There are middle-aged and old people, men and women, workers, unemployed persons, and retirees. A large portion of those living alone is men. Lone women most often live in the city.

Living alone does not mean that a person feels lonely. Still, living alone may be associated with feelings of loneliness and insecurity. Namely ageing might bring along issues with everyday life, on top of the loneliness.

Is loneliness on the countryside thus more problematic than in the city? I would say yes. Living on the countryside is often more difficult, it requires work and energy. The nature might surprise a rural resident and leave them in trouble with the weather and snow. In rural areas, it is trickier to reach another person than in the city. Everything is far away, and public transport doesn't come by often.

What would be a creative solution to support living at home on the countryside? How would a form of mutual support and living together look like, in a way that would be light, safe, functional, and trustworthy when one does not yet need official home help but a little something to safeguard a smooth

every-day life with help and support?

Would a good combo be mobile services, cottage janitor services for rural areas and unofficial help from neighbours? The service palette should also be suitable for a pensioner's wallet.

We do have many functional home-made living arrangements. Many older people in rural areas can keep on living at home thanks to a daughter or a son living with them. It's quite common for "basement-dwelling" sons to help their own parents and other older people in the neighbourhood with groceries, heating and ploughing snow. It has been observed that when such working-aged close ones are "activated" in the job market, many older people in the neighbourhood lose their everyday support and cannot cope anymore. This is yet another difficult equation of the countryside.

These creative solutions are often unofficial and home-made, naturally formed. People have always looked out for their neighbour. Are they still doing well? Sometimes they have arranged daily phone calls, sometimes they watch if the lights are turned on and if smoke rises from the chimney.

I have a dream: older people living on the countryside can keep living in the familiar environment if they so wish. We find new forms of living and support where the service system of the public sector meets the unofficial help from neighbours.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 3 May 2021*

**“It’s been so long that  
I can’t recall. I can’t  
remember if I was anxious  
on my way here.”**

**“Nobody here will  
say that you already  
said that”**

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE BY NORTH KARELIA MEMORY ASSOCIA-  
TION'S GROUP FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE A MEMORY-RELATED  
DISEASE AT WORKING-AGE (TSEMPPARIT).

# Older people on the edge of Europe

ARJA JÄMSÉN



Let bygones be bygones. Well, let us first take a look at the rear-view mirror. I dig into my moth bag and take out over ten years old ideas of the ageing population at the borderland of Europe.

Professionals working with ageing issues in public sector and NGOs in North Karelia participated in two back-to-back development projects funded by the EU. The first one was *Our Life as Elderly (OLE)* in 2004–2006 and the second one *Older People for Older People (O4O)* in 2008–2010. One thing was shared among the European development partners: the observation that the population at the Europe-an borderlands was ageing. (Jämsén 2009; Jämsén et al. 2011a; Jämsén 2011b; *Older People for Older People* 2021.)

Some of the participants of the *Older People for Older People O4O* project had already participated in *Our Life as Elderly OLE*. This is how two European projects became a continuum of development. I shall now discuss my observation that were mainly sparked by the latter O4O project. The O4O project was funded by the EU programme Northern Periphery and lead by the Scottish Center for Rural Health, UHI Millenium Institute Centre for Health Science.

The geographical and socioeconomic environment, well-being systems and services in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, Norway, Faroe Islands and Greenland were different than the “Finnish model” in the early 2000s. The glaciers of Greenland are melting, and small fishing villages are inhabited

by older people with basically no traditional livelihood left. In Scotland, a small bus visits villages, following winding narrow roads on the mountainous countryside, picking up older people. On the other side of the road is Loch Ness, and on the other, moor as far as you can see.

Still, everyday questions on life and well-being were surprisingly similar even back then. The population is ageing, and the youth are moving in hubs. Both commercial and public well-being services are disappearing in these hubs. Public transport routes are becoming increasingly rare in remote areas. Everywhere in the borderlands of Europe, people are fighting for the older people's rights to independent living, for communities and access to flexible services.

**As the name of the O4O project (Older People for Older People) suggests, old people help other, more frail older people.**

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, local communities and villages are active actors, and there is a strong tradition in voluntary and NGOs work. It is easy to start a visible and audible campaign or demonstration for, say, the well-being of older people. In Belfast, people start banging their pots and pans in the streets when they want to draw attention to the living conditions of the people during a cold and humid winter.

In Scotland, many meal and delivery services, lunch clubs and friend groups are powered by a combination of voluntary work and societal and social efforts. As the name of the O4O project (Older People for Older People) suggests, old people help other, more frail older people. They pick them up for lunch clubs and trips and ensure that they are included in the everyday life and celebrations in the community.

## THE PLACE IS MEANINGFUL

The development work of the O4O project was largely based on research. Many of the Scottish development partners were researchers with a background in geography. They highlighted the importance of people, culture, and landscape, along with the environment and community. The connection between the environment and health or well-being is multifaceted. It also incorporates risks and protective factors. Professor Sarah-Anne Munoz (2021), among others, puts emphasis on the importance of place, and not only the spatial location.

The landscape is taken into consideration in the architecture of nursing homes as well. They try to design the rooms so that even the bed-bound older people could admire the familiar landscape with its mountains and lakes through the large windows. Social well-being is emphasised when assessing the capacity to act. In Scotland, they ask how many people you meet every day, and in Greenland, they want to know how often you go to the bingo, hunting or fishing.

On top of “older people helping older people”, cross-generational interaction and cooperation of the young and the old were considered meaningful. A Scottish local history project was one sub project of the O4O project. Older people living in withered fishing villages and mining towns made a collection of their memories together with the youth. They gathered old photos and recorded interviews with older people. They were used to showcase local history and the bygone way of life to schoolchildren. In Greenland, they had traditional handicraft clubs for the young and the old. In Northern Ireland, they established a radio station for older people, and in Sweden, they had technology clubs and village junctions for the older people. In North-Karelia, we conducted a review on the hopes and needs of older people living on the countryside. This included, for example, voluntary work at cafes for friendship.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND A TOOLKIT

Skilful and active communication was typical for the O4O project. The results were compiled into policy recommendations and a toolkit that concretely shows how to do it and how communities could support independent living and an active life for older people. The policy recommendations high-

light the idea of older people as a positive resource and a valuable opportunity. (O4O Toolkit 2010; O4O: Older People for Older People Toolkit 2021.)

The Finnish partners were impressed how O4O project goals were linked to regional development. The ageing rural areas and well-being of older people living in remote borderlands were considered a matter of both regional politics and the socio-political service system. The regional business development centre was therefore a suitable Finnish partner in the project. Finnish participants also included North-Karelian municipalities and educational institutions.

One essential policy recommended was the possibility of societal and social ventures and their importance for rural services. The recommendations also highlight activating the competences and experiences of older people, partnership-centred thinking, and the opportunities for people of all ages to meet and learn from each other.

The O4O project won the RegioStarts award in 2012. It is granted to EU funded projects that adopt an innovative and participatory approach to regional development.

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# Village lights on the edge of darkness

EEVA KRÖGER

Safety and preparedness gained a new kind of attention in public discussion during the coronavirus pandemic. Citizens were building their own “security of supply” by hoarding dry food, canned food and especially toilet paper. E-commerce and home delivery helped with groceries and volunteers and neighbours rushed to help older people.

We talk about home supplies for the times of crisis; everyone should have a supply of food and drink for three days. They help you to survive if you cannot go to a store because of special conditions, such as illness. A home supply means practical preparedness and it’s relatively easy to set up. But what about a mental home supply?

Taking care of safety is important in normal times as well. A crisis might strike whenever and turn a person’s life upside down in a blink of an eye. Unusual weather phenomena and issues with electricity and water supply hinder a smooth everyday life, but if you or your spouse fall ill and you are left alone, your life changes completely. If that happens, it’s important to know you have a safety net. It creates a sense of security. A safety net can be built via everyday encounters and connections.

Studies show that loneliness and isolation are more worrying prospects to Finns than crime, accidents, and domestic violence. It is also interesting that we are worried about older people, but they are often more well prepared and used to different, changing situations than the younger people. Also, older people in particular consider the countryside a safe place to live per se.

An additional source of security is the fact that Finns are very willing to help, especially in the

sparsely populated rural areas. A neighbour might be physically further away than in an urban apartment, but the mental connection is closer. Help from neighbours is invaluable when you run into trouble in your daily life.

It’s important to have neighbours and a familiar “base” in the village, a place that everyone knows. It may be a café, a store, a town house, or a nursing home that operates in the village. There are many functional examples of these in North Karelia. The most important challenge is to have a place to go or call when you need it or are in trouble. The knowledge alone helps and reassures people and keeps different fears at bay.

First and foremost, village safety is community-driven action, “looking after each other.” Safety planning has been systematic since the 1990s. All actors and residents of a village are needed in the safety net, where authorities have their own role.

**Everyone brings light to someone else.**

Everyone brings light to someone else. The lights are always on in some house in the village. The sense of security is a sum of many meaningful and often small lights. Overall safety means that you can live securely one day at a time, overcome daily challenges, and sleep soundly in the night. To sleep in peace.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen  
12 November 2021*

**“A very joyful lot. It’s nice to come here. It makes me feel good when I’ve had.”**

**“Here we go, the life goes on.”**

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE BY NORTH KARELIA MEMORY ASSOCIATION'S GROUP FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE A MEMORY-RELATED DISEASE AT WORKING-AGE (TSEMPPARIT).

# Memory- friendly world as seen by you

ARJA JÄMSÉN

**A** memory-friendly society is part of an age-friendly society. At Karelian Centre for Age Friendly Society (KAFS) at Karelia University of Applied Sciences cooperated with the North Karelia Memory Association, it was mapped out how people with memory-related diseases experience their own well-being and inclusion. In addition, hopes they have for the future, and issues they would like to influence. Peer interviews were used to conduct the review.

### PEER VOLUNTEERS EXAMINING THE EVERYDAY WELL-BEING

*Where are the reporters and the photographer? It's them who should be here!*

Thus spoke a man who arrived North Karelia Memory Association's office as we were starting with peer interviews on everyday well-being and inclusion. The theme of memory was considered meaningful enough for an extensive media coverage.

The experiences and well-being status of people with memory-related diseases are hard to capture in its full spectrum unless the afflicted person participates. Personal and experiential information about the world of people with memory-related diseases has sometimes been showcased in literature and movies. Selected examples include "Still Alice" (2014), "Elizabeth is Missing" (2019) and "The Father" (2020). In Liisa Seppänen's non-fiction book "Muistisairaama maailma" ("The world of people with memory-related diseases"), people with memory-related diseases talk about their experiences, how did it feel to hear the diagnosis, and how their life went on after that (Seppänen 2020).

The group of people with memory-related diseases is an expert group for people with memory-related diseases and their families, operating under the Alzheimer Society of Finland. Its task is to draw attention to important and topical issues for people with memory-related diseases and their families, as well as comment, give statements and make propositions. The goal of the group is to have an influence. It is not a peer support group. (The Alzheimer Society of Finland 2021.) The European Working Group for People with Dementia (2021) acts within the European umbrella organisation Alzheimer Eu-

rope. One member of the working group is Finnish. (Alzheimer Europe 2021.)

The world as pictured by people with memory-related diseases is still meagre and narrow, despite the above-mentioned examples. The changes brought about by memory-related diseases depend on the person. With time, different physical, mental, and social changes might alter the everyday life and quality of life of the patient and their close ones in different ways.

### CO-RESEARCH AND PEER INTERVIEWS AS RESEARCH METHODS

The review was conducted as co-research, the data for which was produced in peer interviews with a cooperative approach. This enabled the participants to have a considerable impact. According to Ryyänen et al. (2021, 11–30), cooperative production of information does not mean collecting data; they do not use the terms "research subject" or "research object" either. Information is produced together with the participants who will also participate in the implementation of the study and evaluation of the results. Co-research purposefully blurs the lines between the traditional research roles.

Briitta Koskiahho (2019) refers to the same phenomenon when she writes about citizen science as a new research method and mentions that citizen science is close to action research and participatory research.

Co-research shows many positive aspects. Producing information in a new way reinforces the participation of the peer interviewers and the interviewees. Simultaneously, the voice of the silent groups and people can have a louder voice and find new channels. The method also promotes interaction and enhances mutual learning. One starting point of cooperation is to utilise research material and knowledge production for participants and co-researchers. The strong points of co-research are interaction and reciprocity. (Ryyänen et al. 2021, 11–30.)

For now, co-research is a little-used method and approach. Co-research was one of the starting points and methods of a participation study conducted under the Age Institute's programme Elämänote. (Hoppania, Vilkkö & Topo 2019; Pulkki

2019; Hoppania & Vilkkö 2020; Hoppania, Vilkkö & Topo 2021.) This North-Karelian co-research pilot utilises the operating model, research problems and experiences of the Elämänote project's participation project. A permission was granted by the Age Institute (Jämsén & Hoppania 2021.)

## **PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF CO-RESEARCH**

All interviews for the co-research were conducted as peer interviews at North Karelia Memory Association. The peer interviews consisted of pre-made thematic questions that were agreed upon beforehand. According to the starting point of the peer interview, both the interviewer and the interviewee were peer volunteers at North Karelia Memory Association.

The co-researchers, the peer interviewers, and the peer interviewees, were chosen amongst those that participate in North Karelia Memory Association's activities. They practiced interviewing and how to use a recorder in advance. At the same time, they made the themes and questions more understandable and "suitable for their mouth."

Two equal currents were the background influence on a cooperative information production. Firstly, they wanted to explain the world of memory and their everyday well-being as seen and experienced by themselves. Secondly, they wanted to pilot a co-research and peer interview as a method of information production.

The starting points of the interview were rooted in resources and individual solutions for an everyday well-being. The themes varied from living arrangements to hobbies. The interviews also include discussion about normal daily lives, how the interviewee stays in contact with others and from where and whom they can get help when needed. They also discuss the importance of Memory Association's activities and participation in groups from the interviewees' viewpoint. Finally, the interviewees have a chance to make an impact by sending memory-friendly "greetings" to anyone they wanted: decision-makers, authorities, cashiers or even the whole neighbourhood.

They had a "practice round" in May 2021, and the actual interviews were conducted in September

2021. Finally, in October 2021, they organised a group meeting to summarise the research experience, review the results and discuss peer interviews as a research method.

Ten peer interviews were implemented. Both the peer interviewers and the interviewees were North Karelian men and women who live independently, either alone or with their spouse. Some of them live on the countryside, some in the city, and in addition, some rural residents have a winter apartment in the city. Their age range is 70–82 years. The duration of the interviews is 20–30 minutes on average.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. They were also anonymised. No one can be identified, and their personal information will not spread. North Karelia Memory Association granted Karelia University of Applied Sciences a research permit, and the peer interviewers and the interviewees signed a consent form for the interviews.

The material produced in these peer interviews is intended as a source for developmental research. In this way, the material will contribute to a memory-friendly society. When people with memory-related diseases have participated in producing and formulating the data, their voices can be cleared directly and in the most authentic way.

We want to transmit their words in the most rich and authentic ways possible, thus minimising the possibility of outside interpretations. The following shows some results of both the peer interviews and a later group interview by interview theme. It also includes many passages of the interviewees' speech in literal quotes (translated into English, of course). The interview consisted of four main themes: 1) housing and a life of one's own, 2) smoothness of the everyday life, 3) peer support, and 4) impactful greetings.

## **FEELS LIKE HOME – HOUSING AND A LIFE OF ONE'S OWN**

The environment and the experience of well-being are closely connected. This includes both risks and protective factors (Munoz 2021). As memory-related disease progresses, a person's functional capacity changes, and he/she becomes more dependent on the environment. He/she might also experience and interpret the environment in a different way. On the other hand, a familiar environment supports



the well-being of people with memory-related disease and helps them keep living a life of their own. (Björkqvist & Rappe 2021.)

The significance and importance of one's own home could be heard everywhere in the peer interviews. An especially good aspect of living in North Karelia was the peace of nature. The nature provides many sensory experiences, other experiences, and feelings. In the winter, people living in their urban apartments miss the lake near their cottage and their smoke sauna.

*As the wind whispers, you are close to the nature. ... by the lake... unbelievably beautiful view, as the evening sun sets. I'm very content.*

Home and housing have a strong connection with family and familial relations. A detached home tells a story of life, work and success. It carries many memories; it is often built by the resident and the spouse. A home is more than a house.

*Home is not just a house... the feeling of home is largely in the wife.*

All debts have been paid. We, too, started from nothing, two penniless people. Then we built a detached home over there.

A familiar environment offers opportunities for action and experiences of success. Men highlight doing small tasks around the house and in the yard, women focus on aesthetics, beauty, and cosiness indoors. Almost everyone mentions being very content with their living arrangements. Some of them would like a larger apartment, and some wish for better soundproofing. Sauna is a prerequisite for life, both in detached homes and apartments.

*There is a plot of my own and I take care of it, berry bushes and other things.*

*Sauna is important. The youth don't go to sauna, have you noticed. They heat up the sauna for us, even though only one person in the house is going to bathe. Friendly lot. I've said that it doesn't have to be hot.*

*Every day, when I come back from work in the forest, I start heating up the sauna, a wood-fired sauna.*

*... that you have decorated your house, colours and so on. Flowers by the window and on the table.*



*All furniture is my own, furnished after my tastes. ... wallpapers are hanged so that the wallpapers are chosen by me... rugs and curtains, so that it's sophisticated... and balanced colours.*

Some people have moved from a farm into a detached home, or from a detached home to a terraced house. This has required some time to adjust. A change of environment might call for support in order to continue leading a self-directed and independent daily life.

*... slowly you get used to it after living in a detached home on the countryside.*

The most important aspects of housing and having a life of one's own are privacy and leading a life of one's own. A familiar environment creates a sense of security. In this way, people still have resources to act, participate and try new things.

*... and to be able to lead a relaxing life. No need to be anxious over anything. To have a safe kind of feeling.*

*... that you can do whatever you want. That there is nobody telling you what to do or giving orders.*

*That I can do whatever I want to. To act and participate and all this, as long as you have resources. Of course, this memory disease is somewhat restricting, but I'm quite content.*

*Exactly, at my own pace. If I put both feet in the same trouser leg... It will get out after some time...*

*You just want to do everything that feels interesting. A certain curiosity towards every-thing so that it feels like a part of my life.*

## **SMOOTHNESS OF THE EVERYDAY LIFE – A DAY STARTS BY PORRIDGE**

A good everyday life is regular and follows a familiar rhythm. Daily routines give a structure to the day and make life and the environment one's own and familiar. Hobbies are on-site hobbies and cosy. Besides jogging and spending time outdoors, it means "brain puzzles, sudokus and cross-word puzzles." Sports, exercise, and jogging are important. One goes on ski trips, the other does orienteering, and the third one swims in a hole in the ice. Many read newspapers and watch television daily. News and the political situation are considered interesting. Many couples take care of their home together.

*... I vacuum and my wife follows me with a mop.*

Social relationships consist mostly of children,

grandchildren and siblings that often live somewhat close. They meet and talk on the phone with each other. Men might have their own "gang", or a friend group, to jog with. Sometimes apartment-dwellers have managed to find a good neighbour to jog with or sit in swing and chat.

*I always visit my neighbour to unburden. We chat and laugh.*

*... I call my sister, which part is not sore today...* Helping neighbours and friends comes naturally. Some of the peer interviewees live in the city centre or in the suburbs, some in an entirely rural environment. Having a car of one's own is very important means of transportation on the countryside. If either spouse does not have a driving licence, their family and or neighbours will help them with transport when needed.

*We help the less fortunate.*

*I like to help when I have neighbours that ask for help.*

*...There are many things that I can do, others are older and cannot do it by themselves anymore. It makes you feel good to help sufficiently.*

Willingness to help could also be seen during the interviews. When the interviewee was unsure if they had understood the question, the peer interviewer said calmly: "Let me help you a bit." Often either of the spouses can use a computer and take care of bank affairs, for example. Some of the interviewees had found outside help with cleaning or house help. Many people that live alone have a way of getting their medication.

One interviewee mentions their personal nurse at the health centre as an important helper. Some have bad experiences with health centre services, "as well I could call a wall." However, the majority does not have significant issues with the accessibility of health care services because they have not felt like they need many services, "I have been healthy."

## **PEER SUPPORT: UNDERSTANDING AND PRESENCE, I AM NOT ALONE**

North Karelia Memory Association provides various group activities and opportunities for group meetings, activities and experiencing communality. The experience of parity is meaningful at different stages of illness. The most important is the feeling that "I'm not alone."

Peer support can often help getting over the depression that might raise its head at first. The groups create a schedule, a form, and a rhythm for the daily life, "it's like going to work." The groups provide activities, brain exercise, sports, and art hobbies. Some have found new hobbies through the group, "I was given a new life with my memory disease." Many people feel like they are learning so much new that the progression of the illness seems to have stopped. Another important form of support that comes up, besides the hobbies, is almost always spending time together with peers.

*... I notice that I'm not the only one, meaning that you are one good example already. We are approximately the same age and I recognise that I cannot recall everything clearly anymore. I must accept this, and it supports me when I notice that others have it as well.*

*... When I was diagnosed with a memory disease, I dropped at the very bottom. I rose up through this... If I weren't here, I would be six feet under. I will not start explaining it. I would be six feet under.*

*... it's nice to visit and you get these, all kinds of advice and instructions for the everyday and new things and understanding and being present.*

*Before Corona virus there was more activities... Brainstorms, gyms, and pools.*

*Word searches, a new hobby stemmed here from the Memory Association.*

*There is ... stimuli, brain exercises. We learn to use our brains and encounter things, through kind of verbal images. Sometimes we draw but being together is still one of the most important forms of support here.*

*I'm like 100% content with Memory Association. It's like a "hiding place" when I'm able to go... I tell my husband that (this is how) I have the energy to take care of you and myself. I get energy, vitality, positivity.*

*The atmosphere within the group is nice. It feels like we know and understand each other. I enjoy that atmosphere.*

*They take great care of our affairs. It's nice to come here (at Memory).*

*Here you can get both mental and physical help. Discussion and meeting are important per se. Then the gym... This Memory Association is an unfathomably important association in the Finnish society.*

*We should appreciate its existence even more. The memory disease has clearly slowed down with this help.*

## **IMPACTFUL GREETINGS: MEET ME AS A PERSON, NOT SOMEONE WITH A MEMORY DISEASE**

The peer interviewees sent their regards to both the young and the old, politicians, social and health care professionals, their close ones, and neighbours. The essential could perhaps be summarised like this: a person with memory-related diseases wants to be a person first and foremost, not someone with a memory disease. They want to feel like an important part of our society, and that they are taken care of and not left alone. People have a need to participate and have an impact, a need to be heard.

**The memory-related disease is only one part, but the person is the most important until the end.**

*To take people's illnesses into account more. To have enough money and actors for these activities and to have this kind of memory association in the future as well.*

*Actually, first, thank you for all this that already exists. Because we have a memory association and activities and everything, let's just continue with these. Friendliness and love.*

*Same kind of greetings to everyone, for politicians to manage this society in a way that people with memory-related diseases could feel that their own society and fatherland, and feel that they take care of me, I'm not alone.*

*And the same for doctors and nurses, that when I'm in contact with them, that they would treat me as a person and not someone with a memory-related disease.*

*The memory-related disease is only one part, but the person is the most important until the end.*

*To doctors and nurses and practical nurses, resources and awareness of their calling... To politicians, more education for doctors and practical nurses, and an adequate salary for practical nurses.*

*To my neighbours and family, try to tolerate me.*

*As the number of the older people keeps growing... Baby boomers, there will soon be too many of us. How will the youth take it? Will they think? ... Do they really know what the future is. The shape of the society will change radically. How can we coach the youth? ... Something at schools. It will be a sociopsychological problem..*

## **INCLUSION AND PARITY IN THE FUTURE**

The peer interviews were met with enthusiasm among the participants at North Karelia Memory Association. The method itself was considered at least as important as the actual interview themes. The need to express one's views and the desire to be heard are meaningful.

*It's a kind of formative activity and here as well, whatever these questions are. Of course, you won't think about these things every day, but these interviews forced us to think about how we view these things and what kind of things all this includes in our own lives. It's a very healthy set of questions.*

*It is good see that this kind of group is noticed as well.*

Peer interview is a promising method of data collection that is becoming more used as participation is becoming a more common theme in discussion. Participating in a peer interview can be a strong and personal experience of participation and inclusion. It may create a feeling of strength and make a person feel the significance and importance of their experiences and feelings. One's own voice gains new power and poise. As a research method, peer interview supports the principle of active ageing.

In the group meeting after the peer interviews, we also discussed the idea of an age-friendly society, an age-friendly society that would bring together different bodies that are interested in building a

memory-centred society. It would include people with memory-related diseases and their families, as well as other bodies from multiple sectors and professions, for example services, education, and re-research. The question "How does it sound like would you like to participate?" was met with another question and a giggle: "Do I dare to say that I can't remember?" And another person continues, saying that they are interested, but are unsure if they could do it next year.

The idea of an age-friendly society was supported by the participants of the group discussion. One of them compared a memory-friendly society with the matching problem prevalent in the job market. In their opinion, social planning should include encounters where professionals from different fields discuss, among others, constructions, and housing for people with memory-related diseases.

*I wonder where my place in the in the society is. Does this society work in a way that someone with a memory disease needs. I have a bit political viewpoint on this. I'm a test ball in the new Finnish system of social and health care services. It's a good start... When my condition gets worse, the care gets better.*

In the future, these themes will be discussed and promoted in cooperation with North Karelia Memory Association and Karelia UAS. At the same time, we will ponder the importance of the peer interviews and results in future memory-friendly work.

Karelia UAS will use the anonymised material even more extensively in the planning and implementation of an age-friendly society and any potential publications. The collected data can be utilised in many ways in reforming the activities of North Karelia Memory Association. Karelia UAS will also submit the anonymised material to the Finnish Aila database in accordance with the principles of open science and research. Other users will be able to use the material in Aila database.

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## KEY MESSAGES FROM THE PEER INTERVIEWS

- **People first.** A memory disease does not determine the lives of the interviewees. They recognise and accept the constraints of the disease, but they want to continue to lead a life of their own, nevertheless.
- **A life of one's own means** a smooth everyday life, close contact with the nature and meaningful tasks, friendship, and communality.
- **Peer support** is very important for the well-being of people with memory-related diseases. The group activities organised by the memory association bring participation and joy into their lives. The activities also have a rehabilitative aspect.
- **Satisfaction with life** is the most important attitude. Life is considered good, and people want to maintain a certain curiosity and desire to learn something new.

# Memory problems in the wilderness

ARJA JÄMSÉN

In North Karelia, slightly over half of people with memory-related diseases live in remote rural areas. Every single person has different circumstances. Some live with the spouse, some have other close ones near or far. The number of people living alone is growing.

In villages or urban settlements, basic needs may be reached by foot or with a walker. If one happens to live in a sparsely populated area, wilderness they say, services and stores are far away. Transportation is not very praiseworthy either. Many people want to grow old in their own home no matter what, even if they have a memory-related disease.

It's important to be close to the nature. All kinds of small tasks provide experiences and become a life-line. Familiar places, routes and routines help people cope. Older people living on the countryside often have great and versatile survival skills. They might even miss the first issues that come with a memory disease because they have so many everyday skills.

What might be problematic, though, is that it is hard to stop working because you want everything to stay unchanged. The yard and vegetable garden must be as splendid as before even if you no more have the energy.

Can people with memory-related diseases cope on the countryside or should they move in urban settlements or even cities for "safety"? There is no correct answer. We do have arguments for both view-points.

People are different and for some, it is natural to be satisfied with meagre means. From an outsider

perspective, their life might look inadequate, but the person might be content with their life and the familiar environment.

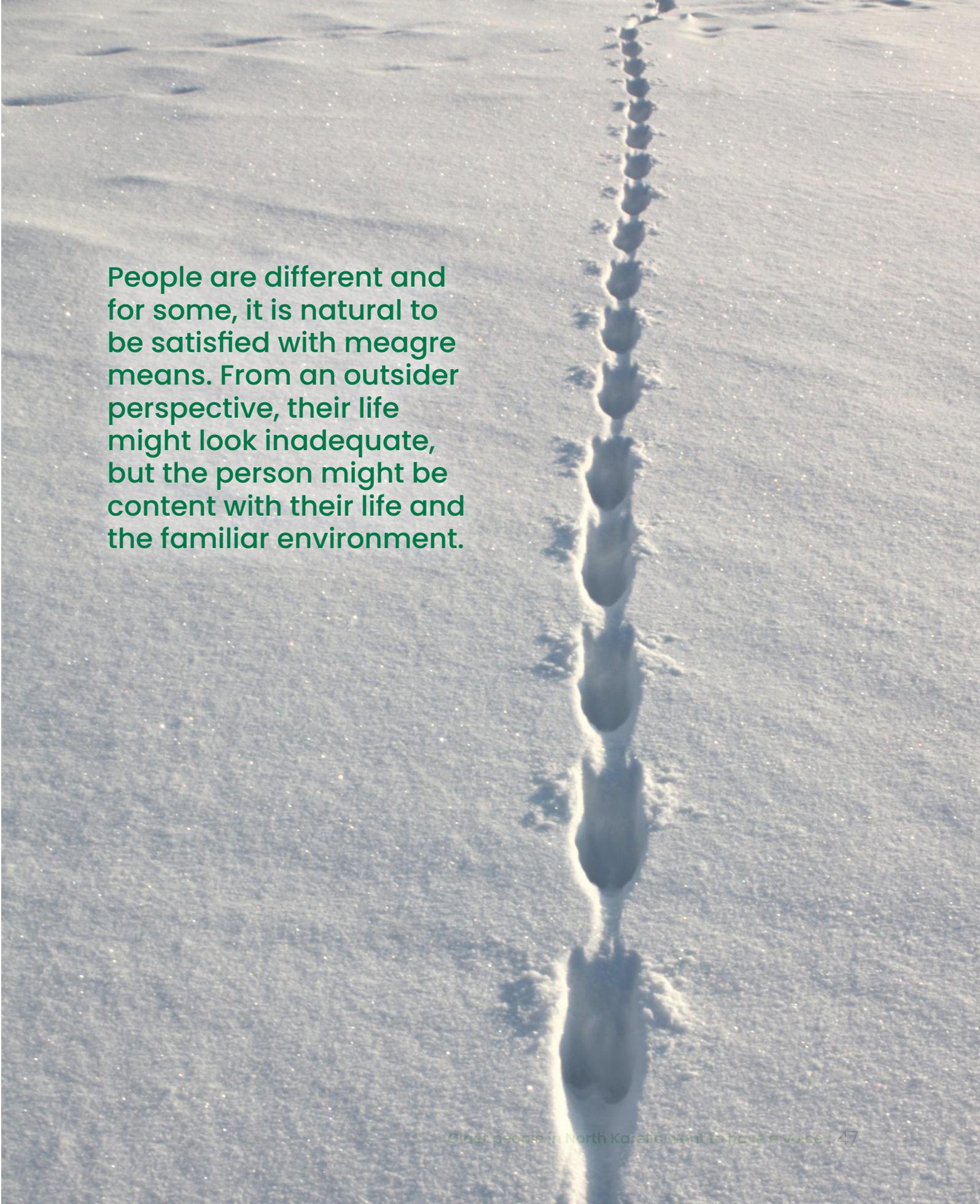
It's also a big step to move from the far countryside to more urban circumstances. It's important to have a discussion on housing and the possibility of moving, to see the affairs from different perspectives and accept different viewpoints. Children are worried about how their older parents cope and they cannot provide them with care from far away. Still, no outsider can define how someone else's life feels like.

There might be no perfectly good, top-tier solution to the housing and living conditions of older people living on the countryside. You need to consider the great questions in life from all perspectives: on one hand and on the other. You must think whether you can influence certain matters or not. What does a life of my own mean and where can I find the necessary safety nets?

It's good to keep in mind that a large portion of the older people are active and cope well. Couples often do well together even if one of them has a memory-related disease. One plus one is more than two. Living together for decades creates an atmosphere of familiarity and trust. They keep doing shared tasks and having culture hobbies; they visit concerts, the theatre, and exhibitions just like before.

Lately, associations and social and health care services have tried and tried to establish a "seeking and finding" work with older people. Who wants to be found? Do you feel like you want to be found? What are you looking for? Support, friends, or some joy of living?

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 11 August 2021*



People are different and for some, it is natural to be satisfied with meagre means. From an outsider perspective, their life might look inadequate, but the person might be content with their life and the familiar environment.

# Age-friendliness all around

HANNELE KOMU

We need age-friendliness in living circumstances and services. We can promote well-being by enabling living and participation in different environment. Jolanki et al. wrote about these things in the *Gerontologia* journal in 2020. According to Jolanki et al. age-friendly regional planning and design of housing worthwhile for both social and economic reasons.

Through age-friendliness, we can promote the quality of life of older people and decrease the use of social and health care services. Age-friendly living should be possible irrespective of where you live. Age-friendliness starts with decision-making and willingness.

## Age-friendliness starts with decision-making and willingness.

We can promote age-friendly living despite of the place of residence with transport and digital services, and by ensuring versatile service networks. We need availability and accessibility. Useful service networks consist of a good cooperation between different actors. It's important to maintain health and capacity to act.

The possibility to move around and take care of affairs at a municipal and/or regional centre is an important right. If older people don't have cars of their own or help from their close ones to move around, we need to have purposeful transport in

municipalities. This way, people can travel to municipal centres and continue onto regional centres. It's already possible to manage many affairs online but we also need to meet other people. Not everyone has the required facilities to manage their affairs even though they are becoming increasingly common among older people.

People need to meet and be in contact with each other. Social interaction is important. We get social interaction in different hobbies and events, for example. Now, in the time of coronavirus, they have become less common, and we have developed other ways to keep in contact with others and come together safely. We have virtual clubs, concerts, and coffee dates, broadcasts stimulating and rehabilitative programmes to every household. Also, North Karelia has healthy amounts of association activities and a culture of taking care of one's neighbours, which is fortunate.

The time of coronavirus also encouraged the digitalisation of social and health care services, and these services made a quick digital leap. They updated their range of remote services (home visits, doctor's appointments, medicine robots), for example. We need efficient data connections for these services. I'm glad to see that many North-Karelian municipalities have optic fibre networks and that carriers have worked on creating extensive networks. The digital leap has reduced from its part the importance of place of residence.

Therefore, we can influence the availability and accessibility in many ways and thus promote age-friendliness irrespective of where you live.

*Column in Newspaper Karjalainen 20 May 2021*

**“The journey  
continues, bravely  
forwards.”**

**“I can't lose  
my sense of  
humour.”**

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE BY NORTH KARELIA MEMORY ASSOCIATION'S GROUP FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE A MEMORY-RELATED DISEASE AT WORKING-AGE (TSEMPPARIT).

# The old age of war invalids

ARJA JÄMSÉN



**A**geing war invalids have been described like this: men grow old, wounds become younger. After the second world war, there were around 70,000 war invalids in Finland. In the beginning of the 1980s, most of them were in retirement age. The average age was 70, and the youngest were 62 years old. It was clear that for some of them growing old made the war wounds worse.

Earlier studies have shown that the conditions during the war time and at the frontline had caused additional strain, wear and increase in morbidity. In North Karelia, the living conditions were worse and the morbidity greater than elsewhere in Finland. This further deteriorated the well-being and health of war invalids. This is why North Karelia Nursing Home Association proposed reviewing the living conditions of North Karelian war invalids. The proposition lead into funding from Finland's Slot Machine Association, and the review was conducted at University of Joensuu in 1987–1988.

A census study was conducted in North Karelia, and all 2,100 war invalids received a survey. The respondents considered the survey important, and mentors at local war invalid departments helped with the actual work in the field. Consequently, the response rate was high (85%). The survey included a separate section for a spouse or other helper that was most often a child or another relative.

The aim was to chart the difficulties and shortcomings of living conditions in order to use the results to develop the services and support for war invalids. The discussion of the results highlighted observations on the fact that both governmental aid to the war invalids and their own mutual support and help had a special place in the Finnish society. Grit and survival were prevalent attitudes.

The most common problems were related to living conditions. The standard of living was poor, especially in sparsely populated areas. Other problems stemmed from lacking transport and other services and meagre hobby opportunities. The spouses' physical and mental strain were mentioned especially in sparsely populated areas. The third important result is that the living conditions of the "0-percentile" were proportionally worse than for other war invalids. They had a war-related illness or injury that was considered healed enough to deny them war injury compensation.

Currently, in the 2020s, there are around 100 war invalids living in North Karelia and 400 in the entire country. Respectively, there are 200 front-line veterans and war veterans in North Karelia, and around 4,000 in the entire country.

Jämsén, A. 1988. Sotavammaisen vanhuksena. Sotavammaisten elinolot Pohjois-Karjalassa. Joensuun yliopisto. Yhteiskuntapolitiikka ja sosiologia. Keskustelualoitteita N:o 7. Joensuu: Joensuun yliopiston monistuskeskus.

# **Older people who moved to cities from the countryside 30 years ago**

TUULA KUKKONEN



**W**hen we think about age-friendly living environments in Karelia in the 2020s, especially from the point of view of ageing on the countryside, it reminds me of 30-year-old thoughts. The questions of ageing were interesting even back then, and I had the opportunity to write my master's thesis in social policy about the experiences of older people that had moved to the city from rural areas. When reading this publication that applies approaches of biography and lifestyle research, I paid attention to the ages of older people I had interviewed. The interviewees were 69–78-years-old. This is how our way of speaking evolves: They were called elderly back then, but nowadays the term is definitely not used.

The background to the study was an observation that had surfaced in earlier studies on the image of ageing among older people in Joensuu: older peo-

ple that had moved to the city from the countryside had the most negative image of ageing. That made me wonder why this group considered old age a life stage full of isolation, inactivity, and impaired functional capacity. It led me to think about the big and simultaneous life changes among these older people: on top of ageing and retiring, their environment had changed when moving to the city. A change of environment was the special feature of this group: living on the countryside and often working on a farm were an integral part of their earlier way of life. Time before moving time meant stability and clarity to them.

The study was based on biographical interviews, and it outlined two groups that had different experiences of the move: "The retainers" described their attachment to the bygone, and they had not found

any specific benefits in their new environment, besides easy living.

*Q: Did living here in the city meet your expectations?*

*A: Well, I had no expectations, I could imagine this would be a waste of time.*

*Q: Did you have any previous acquaintances here?*

*A: Well, not too many, and I haven't met any new people.*

*... I can make do for the winter as long as I can leave [to the countryside] for the summer*

*A 69-year-old woman*

*I just live my life, everyone is just a nodding acquaintance that I greet, but I haven't had anything special, all of them are strangers. Because those who are born and raised in the city cannot understand life on the countryside.*

*A 78-year-old woman*

"The retainers" had not found any new activity opportunities in the city: the opportunities offered by the city did not matter to them. The heavy focus on work prevalent in the rural habitus probably influenced this: work was still a meaningful way to spend time to them.

The other group, "the readjusters", adopted the new situation and environment and paid attention to their current situation and the future instead of longing for the past.

*Well, it's better for a retiree to live here in the city, everything is nearby, and I can enjoy myself, I'm very content.*

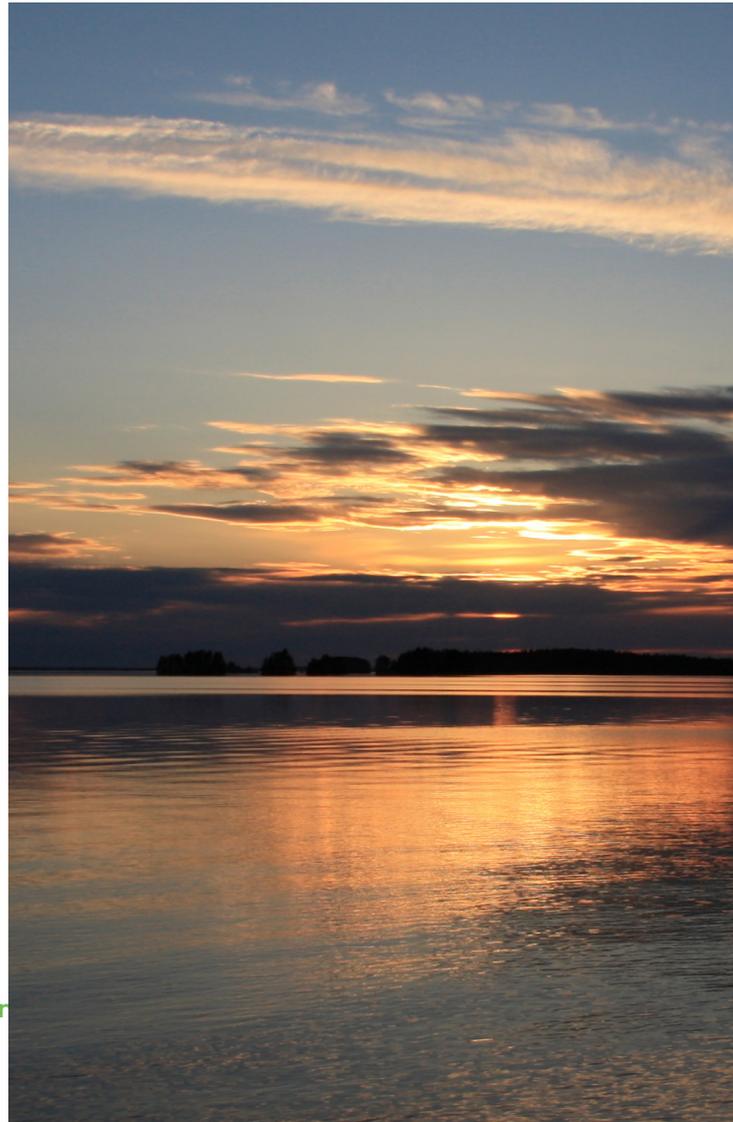
*A 76-year-old woman*

*Q: Do you have any contacts there [in the previous place of residence]?*

*A: Well, not really since so many things have changed [ ...]*

*A 74-year-old woman*

*Q: How does the old place of residence and thinking about it feel now that you live here?*



*A: Well, it doesn't feel like anything really, that I'd want to go back, not at all.*

*A 73-year-old woman*

For “the readjusters”, the new environment had provided new opportunities and choice of activities. They also had a more positive outlook on ageing than “the retainers.”

The different experiences surface when examining the stage when they moved to the city from the countryside, and the subsequent life in the city. The moving was seen either as a necessity or a goal. The meanings infused into the moving were seen in a similar light as the meanings of ageing. The significance of the environment, or more accurately, the significance of the experience of the change of environment, was considered very important.

## The different experiences surface when examining the stage when they moved to the city from the countryside, and the subsequent life in the city. The moving was seen either as a necessity or a goal.

Could a 30-year-old study bring an interesting addition in the development work in the 2020s? It looks like we should pay attention to the experience of the change of environment and the meanings infused into the move. These changes and how people experience them could be reflected onto the experiences of ageing and thus influence the perceived well-being. We should ask if we could pay more attention to the importance of the living environment in old age: could we, for example, provide more support during the moving process and when adjusting in the new environment. And vice versa, how could we help people perceive their environment as adequately enabling and safe – even when ageing – so that moving wouldn't feel like a necessity due to environmental conditions and the availability of services.

Kukkonen, T. 1991. Muuttuivatko muuttajat. Maalta kaupunkiin muuttaneiden vanhusten habitus. Joensuun yliopisto, yhteiskuntapolitiikka ja sosiologia. Keskustelualoitteita N:o 12. Joensuu: Joensuun yliopiston monistuskeskus.

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