Cooperation of city networks in the European TooLS project

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Abstract

The ability to meet the challenges of an ageing population depends very much on information which enables the cities to assess their own situation in comparison with other cities. Active Ageing and the need for care determine the demand for infrastructure and services. Comparative information will facilitate co-operative learning and targeted policy measures. It is the objective of the TooLS project to develop methods and facilities to provide this information to networks of cities. TooLS combines available secondary information with data from primary surveys in a central information portal, making it available for decentralised use and application.

The partners of the TooLS project are DUVA, the Institute of Sociology of Freiburg University with its associated Institute for Applied Social Science FIFAS e.V., UrbanAudit and the cities of Amsterdam and Helsinki with their experienced research institutes Dienst Onderzoek en Statistiek (Amsterdam) and City of Helsinki Urban Facts. With the information management system DUVA a powerful technical tool is
utilised as the technical core of the TooLS-project, providing a web-based information portal, tools for data capturing, data analysis, etc. The project of the European Commission started in 12/2009 and will finish in 12/2012.

Keywords
TooLS; active ageing; need for care; demographic change; cities network; DUVA; information management; information portal; survey; meta-information; metadata; Urban Audit; Institute of Sociology of Freiburg University; Institute for Applied Social Science FIFAS e.V.; city of Helsinki; city of Amsterdam

1. The TooLS project
European cities are confronted with an ageing population. The ability to meet the challenges of an ageing population as well as to utilise the chances associated with this process depends very much on information which enables the cities to assess their own situation in comparison with other cities. Most of this information must come from the cities themselves.

The European Commission considered existing city networks under the umbrella of the German KOSIS association and the cooperation with cities in Finland and the Netherlands to be good starting points for the “development of comparable surveys at the local level” in order to provide the necessary information for decision making, benchmarking and cooperative learning. The project (www.tools-project.eu) started in 12/2009 and will finish in 12/2012.

It is the objective of the TooLS project to develop methods and facilities to provide this information to networks of cities, which contribute and share this information, to
improve the knowledge base by co-operative learning. It will help politicians and planners at the local level to acquire the necessary overview and to monitor the evolution in comparison with others. TooLS combines available secondary information with data from primary surveys in a central database, making it available for decentralised use and application. A common Internet-based information system is the technical core of the project.

The information compiled in the project consists of “objective” statistical data and “subjective” data on the perceptions, attitudes and perspectives of senior citizens, collected in coordinated local surveys to be compared with the results of European surveys, such as the EU perception survey on the quality of life, the European Social Survey and other sources.

Active Ageing on the one hand and the need for care on the other determine, together with mobility, health, housing, income and last but not least social inclusion, the demand for infrastructure and services. It is this growing demand that the cities will have to satisfy. Comparative information collected and used in city networks will facilitate co-operative learning and targeted policy measures. Two topics are in focus under the substantive aspects in the TooLS project: The first is about the opportunities of demographic change. For this purpose, the project focuses on the question, what “active ageing” means and the conditions under which it is possible. The second is about the challenges that stand in the forefront. These are inter alia the fact that more and more people reach an age at which the probability of long-term care is relatively high. Data on these two topics are collected and made available.

2. The TooLS project partners
The aim of the TooLS project is to provide tools that facilitate the development, implementation and presentation of comparable surveys at the local level. With the information management system DUVA (www.duva.de), a powerful technical tool is utilised in the TooLS-project, providing a web-based information portal (http://www.duva-server.de/webkatalog/tools), tools for data capturing, tools for data analysis, etc. Within the TooLS-project, DUVA is being comprehensively improved, picking up ideas and requirements of the users involved in the project. The DUVA association was founded in 1990 from several German cities to develop an information management system based on metadata. Meanwhile it consists of 58 public organizations including 51 German cities.

The Institute of Sociology of Freiburg University (IfS) with its associated Institute for Applied Social Science FIFAS e.V. developed a theoretical concept for the two main themes “active aging” and “need for care”. They developed a set of standard modules of questions and tested them by co-ordinated surveys in the 13 partner cities. At least 300 written questionnaires were carried out for each partner city in a random sample among the population aged 50 years and above. A total sample of 7484 cases is available for the evaluation. The datasets and a set of tables were made available to the participating cities for further evaluation. The institute also provided an analysis comparing its results with European sources, such as the European Social Survey, the Eurobarometer, the perception survey and the Labour Force Survey.

The Urban Audit was started by the EU in 2003 to get comparable data and indicators for the European cities. Meanwhile there are 900 European cities included, among them 125 German cities. The European perception survey identifies subjective attitudes on the quality of life in selected European cities. The German
Urban Audit coordinates the data collection in Germany. The information from this two data sources are used to extract specific information on senior citizens. This information is complemented by an overview on services for seniors provided by the cities. The intention is to intensify co-operation with municipal service providers and to include a growing number of cities in the TooLS network.

The European partner cities of Amsterdam and Helsinki with their experienced research institutes Dienst Onderzoek en Statistiek (Amsterdam) and City of Helsinki Urban Facts ensure that the project takes European requirements into account.

Surveys were conducted in the following 13 partner cities with the questionnaire developed for the TooLS survey: the cities of Berlin (district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg), Düsseldorf, Freiburg, Koblenz, Moers, Much, Nuremberg and Saarbrücken in Germany, the cities of Espoo, Helsinki and Vantaa in Finland and the cities of Almere and Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Sixteen other cities had been very keen to participate in the project, but could not take part eventually for various reasons. The organisation and implementation of these questionnaires was taken over by the partner cities. Data management and analyses were carried out by DUVA, FIFAS and the Institute of Sociology.

3. The information management system DUVA

In popular data warehouse and information systems, the effective organisation of data is paramount. The systems allow for the analysis and summarisation of factual data. In the DUVA, the focus is on meta-information. Meta-information stands for the totality of descriptive and explanatory information that is generated by the procedure of the survey and the further processing of factual data. Meta-information is generated already at the beginning of a study. While the amount of factual data
decreases in the course of further processing by summarisation, the amount of meta-information increases with every step of the study. The goal of DUVA is to capture and manage this metadata, and to link it with the factual data at any time. For this purpose, the necessary meta-information is structured and systematised. DUVA has developed a complex data model for meta-information. This meta-information, like factual data, is effectively organised in databases. One challenge is that meta-information consists of texts and rarely of numbers. Therefore, full-text search and the consideration of synonyms are important components of the meta-information system. Access to the factual data is carried out via the meta-information, which is available in every processing step and can be expanded. Based on this philosophy, DUVA has implemented an information management system with a meta-database at the centre and a variety of modules that cover the entire processing procedure. This contains modules for data acquisition, plausibility checks, statistical confidentiality, data processing and summarisation. In addition, there are interfaces to other commercial systems, modules for interactive data analysis, provision of data on the Internet and a dynamically generated web portal.

An information portal based exclusively on DUVA modules has been created for the TooLS project (http://www.duva-server.de/webkatalog/tools).