

TRIADE 6-8 MARCH 2017, ITALY

Brainstorm on Quality of Life and (Re)valorization of elderly (care)

RECONSTRUCTING THE DISCUSSION¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

► **RIGHTS AND QUALITY OF LIFE AS THE KEY FRAME OF REFERENCE**

It is considered important to include the *rights* of people with disabilities *at and between the different policy levels*. Several participants underline the fact that all people have the same rights (including the right to qualitative care and the right to realize their full potential), irrespective of their age or disability. In this respect, they stress the importance of *qualitative care for all*, in which the *quality of life* of the people involved is used as a key frame of reference.

► **THE CLIENT'S FOCUS**

Different groups emphasize that professionals have to (learn to) listen to the client. Key in this context is not to have *the client in focus*, but to respect and take into account *the client's focus*.

► **ASSESSMENT?**

The question of how to assess the contribution of services to the quality of life of elderly people with disabilities evokes a lot of discussion. Some participants refer to the development of *assessment tools* that can measure their quality of life. Others express their concern that these tools may risk to reduce the complex and dynamic issue of quality (of life) to a more static and technical one; to something that can be scored according to fixed categories that are defined beforehand. Therefore, they rather suggest more space for *continuous processes of negotiation, dialogue and reflection* through which a myriad of meanings and problem definitions can be taken into account. At the same time, however, it is mentioned that the construction of an instrument with certain *indicators (not necessarily scores)* may be vital as a starting point to consider – together with the actors involved – what happens/should happen in practice. In this respect, some participants argue that without certain *tools for reflection*, the required process of questioning, deconstructing and reconstructing interventions may never occur. Nonetheless, we should remain cautious about how and to which end these instruments are used in practice.

¹ This report is based on audio files and notes taken during the general discussions on the 8th of March in Treviso.

► **THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

A crucial role in contributing to both themes has been attributed to education and training.

- Some of the members point out that qualitative education and training is not only promoted by sharing and discussing theoretical knowledge, but also by *making explicit links to practice*. To this end, they for example advocate the employment of teachers with experiences in the field.
- Furthermore, it is stated that education and training (also at the level of the organization) *has to fill the gap* between ‘old competences/vision’ (cfr. purely medical approach) and ‘new competences/vision’ (cfr. holistic approach, focus on quality of life).
- Since not all organizations have the same means to provide training, it is stipulated that *additional funds and initiatives* are required to support the continuous development of care practitioners.
- The cooperation and mutual exchange of knowledge and competences should be stimulated and facilitated at different levels (government, organizations,...).

► **INTEGRATED SYSTEMS**

The need for integrated laws and financing systems – instead of the contemporary split in regulation between disability and elderly sectors – has been highlighted.

► **DECATEGORIZATION**

Participants stress the necessity to *interrupt current processes of categorization*. They state that policy should not be based on externally defined categories and associated care strategies, but rather on needs since you cannot simply categorize a person.

► **THE VALORIZATION OF CARE**

Another issue raised during the discussion is the fact that formal as well as informal care jobs risk to be not highly regarded and low paid. This is also a question that requires more attention at different policy levels. In this context, it is argued that since policy makers wish to encourage informal caregivers to be more present throughout the ageing process of family members, they should also provide the resources (such as a leave, services, financial means...) to support the balance between work and family life.

► **CHOICE! – CHOICE?**

Furthermore, different participants argue that elderly people should remain able to exercise control over decisions and actions that have an impact on their lives. In this context, the *ageing-in-place*-principle has been defended: every person (with disabilities) should have the right and the possibilities to choose where he/she wants to live. However, in different contexts, the question remains whether and how the contemporary discourse on ‘free choice’ is also realized in practice.

► **DESIGN FOR ALL**

Participants point out the importance of investing in new technologies that could enhance people’s quality of life and *support them in growing old where and how they prefer this*. In this context, specific reference has also been made to tools and technologies that can help them to *express these needs and aspirations themselves*. To encourage the use of these technologies, it is mentioned that (1) they should be made *accessible for all* and (2) they should be *implemented in the education and training* of practitioners. Furthermore, it is stressed that not only tools, but also society as a whole should be made accessible for all.

► **IMPROVE THE IMAGE OF ELDERLY**

In order to fight existing stereotypes of older people, it is mentioned that society should consider elderly more as a *resource for society*. Campaigns or even legal procedures (in case the image of elderly people is damaged) have been suggested.

► **BE CREATIVE**

It is argued that the decrease in public funding should not diminish the engagement of organizations and practitioners to contribute to people's quality of life. Therefore, *creative thinking* and the search for *alternative resources* (e.g. collaboration between stakeholders, crowd financing,...) are encouraged.