

# Rethinking Ageing: Conceptualization, Measurement and Policy Implications

Jekaterina Navicke, Zeimante Straseviciute

Department of Social Policy, Vilnius University, Lithuania

## ABSTRACT

The paper examines the links between the way ageing is theorized, conceptualized, measured and treated in the modern western societies, EU in particular. We look into alternative concepts of ageing that move beyond the narrow emphasis on economic activity promoted by the mainstream notion of active ageing. We explore the theoretical lining behind these normative concepts and the way it interacts with empirical measures of ageing. We then look into the policy implications and possibilities to further develop inclusive, context-sensitive policy frameworks and indicators that acknowledge diverse pathways of ageing and promote well-being, security, and meaning in later life beyond the constraints of the active ageing model.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical concepts of ageing and their measurements are **inherently normative** and emphasize specific dimensions of ageing. In policy contexts, choosing one index over another can **reallocate attention and resources**, sometimes productively (by countering ageism and promoting strength-based narratives), but also by **entrenching prescriptive standards** and **unrealistic expectations** for older adults. It can be argued that the concepts of **healthy, active, and productive ageing** are quite instrumental, lack subjective aspects, and are biased towards biomedical and productive framings of ageing. Notions of **resilient and optimal ageing** place a lot of emphasis on individual adaptation, with a risk of normalizing structural problems. Concepts of **positive and successful ageing** have a strong normative connotation, but also have potential to broaden policy debate and serve as more balanced integrative models. However, there is a lack of readily available and widely acknowledged empirical measures for the latter concepts.

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