

# The construction sector as strategic contributor to the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP-AHA)

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# The construction sector: a strategic contributor to the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP-AHA)



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## **T**he construction sector: A strategic contributor to age-friendly environments

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) published its seminal report on "Global Age-friendly cities".<sup>1</sup> Its key message is that the built environment matters crucially in shaping how we get old. The way we design and build houses, cities, public spaces, communities and regions can stimulate physical and cognitive activity, offer opportunities for social participation, enable access to health and care services, provide access to communication and information, support inter-generational relationships, and increase sense for security and safety. The WHO report was among the first to strive for concrete guidelines on how to create such age-friendly environments. Since the publication of the report our knowledge base about what constitutes age-friendly environments, and how to design them has increased tremendously. This is also reflected in the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP-AHA), which has a dedicated action group on "age-friendly environments". This action group brings together key stakeholders and best practices that explore and demonstrate the working of age-friendly environments on building, city and regional levels.

A clear challenge, therefore, is on the table – how to scale and disseminate the abundance of existing solutions and knowledge, and translate them into robust innovation processes that will lead to the implementation of age-friendly environments across European cities and regions? **The construction sector** is a pivotal contributor to reaching this next level of innovating for

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.who.int/ageing/age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_guide/en/](http://www.who.int/ageing/age_friendly_cities_guide/en/)



age-friendly environments. Due to its size and the long life of infrastructures, the construction sector and construction innovation, in particular, is involved in all stages of designing, planning and implementing age-friendly environments. For Europe to successfully face the "grand societal challenge of ageing", the construction sector needs to be proactive, deliver cost-effective solutions based on state-of-the-art knowledge, and define associated new business models.

It is clear that this challenge also *disrupts* existing modes of value capturing and entrenched ways of "doing things" in construction. New forms of collaborations and innovative business models are needed, when Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as well as medical and care services need to be integrated

in construction innovation; when construction projects need to be aligned closer with the needs of older persons; when the abundance of best practices in Europe have to be scanned and structured for tangible lessons learned; and when new housing policies for affordable housing and home care need to be addressed.

### **"Active Ageing and the Built Environment": A new ECTP focus area**

The European Construction Technology Platform (ECTP) is one of European Technology Platforms (ETP). It is an industry-led forum that brings together all important stakeholders along the value change in construction innovation. ETPs are a privileged instrument for dialogue between stakeholders and the European Institutions, in particular with the Commission.



### The ECTP's contribution to the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP-AHA)

In 2013, the ECTP joined the Commission's EIP-AHA action group on "Age-friendly environments" in the form of a large-scale, international commitment with 25 partners from 13 countries. With its focus on cross-sectoral innovation processes, the ECTP will make a strategic contribution to foster the upscaling and dissemination of solutions for age-friendly built environments along four dimensions: It paves the way towards construction innovation for connected and smart environments to support active ageing; it facilitates the knowledge exchange and dissemination about such environments among researchers and practitioners from the construction industry, architecture, urban planning, ICT, and the ageing sciences including Gerontechnology; it explores and collects existing data and best practices from different regions, cities and communities about solutions, business models and design guidelines/methodologies for such environments including new projects as well as the retrofitting and operation of existing environments; and it provides advice on construction innovation that involves ICTs and insights from the ageing sciences including best practices of existing projects.

To reach these ambitious goals, the ECTP commitment develops and applies an original methodological approach based on the emerging Technological Innovation Systems (TIS) methodology to integrate existing knowledge about construction innovation, identify strengths and weaknesses of existing innovation processes, and map pathways and roadmaps towards age-friendly innovation systems in construction across Europe. To this end, we will organize 3 transdisciplinary workshops that bring together internal and external partners from construction industry and research, innovation research, the ageing sciences and Gerontechnology. The first of these workshops took place in Amsterdam in January 2014, and a full report can be downloaded from the ECTP's website. The workshops will result in a Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) for the construction sector for the design of integrated and ICT-driven age-friendly environments.

The construction sector is strongly committed to play its strategic role in delivering opportunities for active and healthy ageing for the European population. To this effect, a strong collaboration between all civil society actors and the European Institutions is our best bet for a successful future.

The ECTP is thus an excellent opportunity to develop research and innovation strategies to facilitate construction innovation for age-friendly environments. Hence, the ECTP has recently initiated a dedicated focus area on "Active ageing and the built environment" (AABE).<sup>2</sup>

Connected homes, communities and cities are an essential ingredient on the path towards more age-friendly environments. Such environments make use of new technology and smart urban design and architecture to support and foster independent living and active ageing, and to shift access to health and care services (where needed) from hospitals and institutional houses to private homes. The transition towards age-friendly built environments transdisciplinary efforts that cut across the expertise from construction, ICT, architecture, health care, the ageing disciplines, older persons and others. Currently, the activities of these sectors are fragmented and localized. The AABE focus area connects the relevant actors from these sectors, and provides guidelines for innovation in construction with the potential to increase the healthy life span with 2-5 years. In particular, it addresses the following challenges:

- **Cross-sectoral innovation in construction** for connected and smart environments to support active and healthy ageing: Designing age-friendly environments requires cross-sectoral collaborations between the construction sector, the health and ageing disciplines, and ICT, at the least; the AABE focus area maps the relevant challenges and defines research needs for cross-sectoral, project based innovation

processes in construction for smart, connected and age-friendly environments.

- **User involvement and co-creation:** age-friendly environments need to proceed on a holistic perspective on the quality of life in old age and how this is related to the built environment. The AABE focus area addresses the challenge of designing flexible solutions on building and community levels that are adaptable to a variety of (evolving) needs and explores different forms of user involvement and co-creation in construction innovation to address this challenge. It also explores innovative business models for creating and capturing the value of such project-based flexible innovations.

- **Design guidelines for construction:** There is a good number of ongoing projects and pilot sites focusing on age-friendly environments in Europe, but few approaches exist to evaluate the usefulness of these insights for the construction sector. This creates a risk of double work, and expertise that remains local and dispersed. The AABE focus area will discuss smart ways to evaluate and connect insights from different projects and pilot sites, and establish a platform for knowledge exchange and dissemination that takes relevant knowledge to a next level.

The focus area thus serves as a trans-disciplinary knowledge exchange platform for all players involved in construction innovation for age-friendly environments. As such, it establishes a network of partners in construction innovation to serve the needs of older persons through designing connected and smart environments.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ectp.org/AABE.asp>