

**Aging-related organizations that develop older adults' programs and services in New York city and state: Is sustainable consumption education part of their mission and objectives?**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Global populations, at all gradients of socioeconomic levels, are rapidly aging and increasing longevity is requiring cultural transformation to foster active aging based on health and vitality across the life course. The expanding longevity is expected to pose an unprecedented demand for programs, services, and products in the coming decades (WHO 2018; 2017).

The World Health Organization (WHO 2017) launched the Ageing and Health Strategy, adopted by the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly and provided a plan to: Support healthy aging; Align health systems to the needs of older populations; Develop systems for providing long-term care; Create age-friendly environments; and Improve measurement, monitoring, and understanding of healthy aging to ensure that all countries have the opportunity to experience a long and healthy life, based in the Madrid international plan of action on aging and WHO's policy framework on active ageing. The organization describes 'age-friendly' as an environment for all ages where service providers, public officials, community leaders, faith leaders, business people, and citizens would promote inclusion in all areas of community life. For WHO (2015, 2002) healthy aging is "the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age" and, for the Decade of Healthy Ageing starting in 2020, aging is conceptualized from "the perspective of the functional ability that enables older people to be, and to do, what they have reason to value" (WHO, 2018).

Cities are described as engines of social capital, as well as, territories of social inequalities. Planning cities to provide people of all ages opportunities to lead an active and healthier life is a new trend for the 21st Century. Planning a livable community for all ages represents a significant challenge and an indisputable opportunity to cities and states around the world facing rapid population aging (Marston & Van Hoof, 2019). The promotion of healthy aging will require transformed public health practice and intentional action to face the interplay of commercial and social determinants of health and to

endorse the universal access to integrated social protection systems in the cities and countries. The aging political agenda of promoting a useful inclusion of older persons will have to contemplate education, health, safety, intergenerational and anti-ageism programs, as well as, the participation of older adults to evaluate the evidence-based programs, services, and activities to foster active aging in the cities.

Developed by the World Health Organization the global movement *Age-Friendly Cities framework* inspires communities to redesign an urban culture towards aging sensitive structures and services to meet the capacity and needs of older people (Van Hoof & Kazak, 2018).

It is increasingly important to develop a comprehensive global approach, as well as, an in-depth regional understanding of the opportunities and challenges that each city around the world is facing. The global movement showcases existing initiatives and identifies global age-friendly city's initiatives by mapping some of their feature regarding the metrics they used to assess the effectiveness of policies, programs, and services involving older people.

In the US the proportion of 65 years and older population is increasing rapidly, and the group considered "oldest old", over 85 years old, is the most accentuated. The proportion of New York's older adult population of 60 years is increasing dramatically and by 2040 it will represent 20.6% of the total population.

New York was a coherent choice as a city, given its importance in the history of Aging Friendly City Network and the relevance of NY City initiatives towards older adult's population. New York was the first city to join the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities and also the "first municipality in the world to meet the WHO's criteria for an age-friendly city". Age-friendly NYC initiatives began as a partnership between the Mayor's Office, the New York City Council and the New York Academy of Medicine.

This project objective is to explore web sites that offer age-related guidelines, programs, services, and activities to improve the quality of life for older adults in New York City and New York State.

The research was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What organizations and agencies in New York city and state are providing services and information for older adults?
2. How would be the visual representation of word frequency regarding the central features of the age-related organization's mission statement and objectives that they displayed on their websites?

The research also aims to present the institutions goal, mission or purpose, and list their web page addresses. The mapping can support the identification of critical strategies that agencies are adopting to maintain and improve older adults' ability to remain physically, cognitively, emotionally and socially active and healthy. One key element for addressing the older adults' capacities and needs would be to improve the knowledge about cities initiatives, services, and evidence-based programs that are being managed to provide and advocate for dignity, accessibility, independence, safety, and quality of life for older adults.

The need for government and community action with a focus on evidence-based programs and strategies ensuring healthy aging and the challenge to prepare a comprehensive Action Plan for the Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020-2030) will require an integrated effort around the world. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the result of the research will provide new insights and cultural scripts to age-related networks, educators, researchers, public officials, administrators, elected officials, volunteers, funders, policymakers, community leaders, public and private entities, business people, foundation, faith-based organization, and citizens in general seeking information to adapt the public policies, institutions, and city infrastructure to develop to meet the challenges and opportunities for other countries.

This translational research could assist the integration of research with policy, the identification of actions for implementation of the age-friendly agenda and the support for programs and resources to promote inclusive whole system environment friendly for all ages, families and communities.

This research was conducted in collaboration with the Office of Global Health Education at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York. This paper presents only a part of the research that was developed.

## II. Method

A qualitative approach with analysis of primary and secondary database using Documentary Research Method and network meetings with NYC age specialists. A content analysis was used to treat qualitative data.

The research is a cross-sectional, exploratory-descriptive study design where data were gathered using online searches and aging related meetings to find out which websites develop age-related services and programs in New York City and State.

A Documentary Research and Networking Meetings were organized in order to identify program/ service/ institution/ agency/ policy implementation toward an aging population in New York - USA. As part of the aging network several meetings were arranged with NYC older residents, Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner of the NYC Department for the Aging, directors and board members of community-based organizations, senior centers directors and program directors, university aging center researchers, caseworkers and social assistants, members of aging networks, and professionals from aging advocate organizations accepted the researcher's invitation to talk about the opportunities and challenges of aging in NY. From September to November 2018 a total of 54 meetings allowed the researcher to identify additional information regarding the complexity of the services and programs targeting the older adult population.

A convenience sample of 449 websites of agencies and age-related organizations is distributed in 12 categories: International age-related guideline and activist organizations, Government (National, State, City), Nonprofit Organizations (National, State, City), Faith and Ethnic-based organization, Academic organizations, Age-related networks, and Foundations. These categories, pedagogically allotted, is limited because sometimes they might describe a dual or mixed nature of some organizations, such as public-private, nonprofit and religious/ethnic, and so on.

A word content analysis allows an overview of the main topics and the main feature of the selected agencies and organizations. The image representations illustrate the main focus of each category allowing the readers to understand main themes faster (McNaught & Lam, 2010). To create the word cloud, each category of the site had the

site's mission statement, goals, or 'about us' statement summed and entered into WordClouds.com, a word cloud generation software, to depict the frequency of the words.

The information gathered in the interviews will not be presented in this article

### **III- Results and discussions**

#### **Mapping of age-related government and nonprofit organizations that develop programs and services in New York City, USA.**

In order to answer research question one, about what organizations and agencies in the USA and New York are providing services and information for older adults, the researcher reviewed a convenience sample of 448 age-related websites. The distribution of the selected sites by category where half of the sample (50,3%) are national, state and city nonprofit organizations, followed by 17,4% representing the three levels of Government agencies that develop some project or service related to older adult population and 10,7% being ethnic, religious, and minorities organizations. The other categories respond for smaller proportions of analyzed sites (Table).

The sites contain essential information, policies, initiatives, evidence and strategies to promote older adults' right to age with dignity, confidence, security, and autonomy in their environments for as long as possible. The websites portray opportunities and challenges, as well as, distinct civil society and governmental actions targeting the complex phenomenon of the aging population.

In general, the government and nonprofit sites aim to promote active aging, remove barriers to older adults' social integration on society, and provide programs and activities to foster the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of social, cultural, and economics in the community where they live.

Several state and city non-profit websites aim to support people as they age to maintain, improve or manage their physical, social, financial, and mental health well-being.

**Table.** Category of Aging-related Websites included in the study, 2019

<b>Type of Organization</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Internationals Sites</b>		
Global Guideline Sites	13	2,9
International Organizations Sites	20	4,5
<b>The USA and New York City and State Sites</b>		
Federal Government Sites	30	6,7
State Government Sites	18	4,1
City Government Sites	32	6,9
Nacional Nonprofit and Civil Sites	106	23,8
State Nonprofit and Civil Society Sites	26	5,8
City Nonprofit and Civil Society Sites	94	20,7
Faith, Ethnic and Minorities Sites	48	10,7
College and University Sites	14	3,1
Age Networks	18	4,1
Foundation Sites	30	6,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>100</b>

Font: Author

The three most prominent words highlighted in the word cloud of the *global guideline* sites were ‘cities’, ‘communities’, and ‘research’. It confirms that the *global guidelines are based on research, as well as evidence-based decisions, and focus in the cities and the local communities where aging is occurring*. The recommended term ‘older adult’ or ‘older person’ had prominence, and the stereotyped word ‘elder’ or ‘elderly’ are appropriately absent. The word ‘sustainable’ has a lower-order frequency (n=3) and it is related to the sustainable development goals in general and access to universal health coverage and programs. Sustainable consumption was never mentioned despite the

increased awareness and urgency to target global consumption levels. The terms 'age-friendly' and 'healthy' are materialized the representation.

The words 'older people', 'education', 'global', and 'network' are more cited in the sites of the *international organizations*. The terms 'society', 'life', and 'rights' are present, reflecting the fact that the discussion of aging needs to take in consideration that it is a societal question and a global matter of rights and the defense of life. However, the term 'ageism', "sustainable consumptions", and "conscious consumption" fails to materialize in the mission of the international community. Social questions like 'marginalization' and 'poverty' appears only once and due to the low frequency is not included in the cloud.

In terms of the *national USA nonprofit organizations* the words 'people', 'care', and 'community' show the highest frequency. Discussing aging from a perspective of people-center is encouraging. However, the term 'senior' (n= 44) is still widespread in the discourse of the organizations mingled with the more adequate expression 'older adult' (n=35). The terms 'programs', 'services', 'health', as well as, 'advocacy', 'resources', 'education', and 'caregivers' were also prominent. The analysis suggests that health promotion and advocacy are being targeted in the services and programs developed toward the older adult population and the caregivers. Two new words 'family' and 'network' appears with moderate frequency. The terms "sustainability" and "sustainable" are mentioned with a very low frequency (n=2).

The findings reveal that national nonprofits view aging as an opportunity (n= 12) rather than a challenge (n=3). The increasing use of the internet to help clients and families to navigate the system is signified by the appearance of a new word 'web-based' (n=6); however, 'technology' is only mentioned twice in the mission and/or goal statements of 106 sites.

The terms 'services', 'health', 'programs', and 'community' are the more frequent at the *USA federal agencies* selected sites (30 agencies), followed by 'disabilities' and 'violence'. On the other hand, the topic of suicide and safety was mentioned only once. The majority of the federal government sites provide support for community-led organizations and facilitate communication and collaboration among diverse partners and providers. Unfortunately, the language is not adequately used to promote an asset-based view of aging. Ageism is not mentioned and the term 'sustainable' appears only once.



The word 'research' is more present in the international and national organizations than in the federal agencies.

The most prominent words in the *New York State* sites are 'services', 'programs', and 'community'. The New York State sites recognize that the communities and services for older persons are not homogenous. However, the programs and services listed in the sites offered information and assistance to guide older adult, as well as their families, policy makers, caregivers, and providers. The language adopted appears to be in a positive transition and the term 'older people' (n= 8) had a higher frequency than the inadequately words 'elderly' (n= 5) and 'senior' (n= 5) that are still being used by the state government. However, ageism is not mentioned once (Figure 1).

The majority of the state sites contained descriptive information about their activities targeting older adult population, but the evidence regarding program evaluations and pilot projects results with published outputs or outcome of the implemented programs and policies promoting active aging are insufficient. There are no programs related to "sustainable consumption"; however, there are several neighborhood-focused programming initiatives and a rich variety of community services that serve as bases to develop the topic. It was observed a scarcity of published initiatives of combining assets among public agencies, nonprofit, and private organizations working together in a coordinated plan to accomplish coordinated services and flexibility in designing, implementing, and monitoring services and programs and overcoming the silo mentality of aging institutions. 'Quality' emerges only as a marginal term, which perhaps indicates a problem, given its importance in the monitoring and evaluation of 'services' and 'programs' highly frequent at the word cloud (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Word cloud analysis of NY State Government Aging Related Agencies, 2019.

Figure 2 shows that the highest word frequencies of *nonprofit state organizations* are 'services' and 'care'. The term 'advocacy' is moderate present reflecting the fact that the organizations have adopted the discourse of promoting the preservation of older adults' autonomy. However, very few sites present in their mission and goal any contend against corporate capitalism, the commercial determinants of health and the suppression of rights to "Age in Place". The strategies to enable older adults to age successfully in their communities and to access a continuum of affordable housing to promote the reality of "Age in Place" are loosely connected with persistent problems of racism, xenophobia, and intergenerational poverty. Very few times the word 'intergenerational' is presented. According to an online survey (Generations United, 2018), about 92% percent of

Americans believe that intergenerational activities can assist reducing loneliness across all ages; however, organizations sites delivering intergenerational programs and providing care settings to bring older and younger people together are not a norm in the investigated websites.



**Figure 2.** Word cloud analysis of NY State aging related Organizations e Associations, 2019.

In terms of the *New York city government* agencies the words ‘services’ and ‘programs’ are more frequent; however, the word ‘quality’ is scarcely mention and the word ‘evidence-based’ is not present. A recent study report that “There is an absence of interventions targeting quality of life of older adults” combined with the fact that “Many evidence-based community interventions were first designed for effectiveness and not for



appearance of a new word 'homeless', but gentrification fails to materialize. More worryingly is the fact that almost 60% of public housing units in New York City are located in community districts that are classified as gentrifying neighborhoods (Dastrup and Ellen, 2016). The majority of the sites does not aim to formulate responses to the affordable housing disruptions in the city and the need for structural NYC housing-friendly initiatives. The terms 'planning' and 'age-friendly' are mentioned only three times and there is a need for a more comprehensive and integrated interagency plan to respond to the heterogeneous demands of the aging populations. In addition, the sites do not provide enough information to recognize if their services or programs are making intentional efforts to engage seniors in the planning process as co-designers. Consequently, there is a continued exclusion of older people from decision making and planning regarding urban environment plans.

Among the *NYC government websites*, the agency that provides the majority of the information regarding policy, programs, age-friendly initiatives, and reports regarding monitoring and evaluations is the NYC Department for the Aging (DFTA). DFTA is the city central agency providing services and supporting programs to identify and address aging issues. The agency fosters interagency collaboration and coordination of programs and services among a variety of stakeholders. By coordinating with multiple agencies, the department aims to facilitate the breakdown of silo mentality toward cross-program ground up solutions and collaborative partnership with non-profits, philanthropy, business, faith-based institutions, and public-private organizations. DFTA is the only NYC government's agency that include the word 'ageism' in their mission statement (Figure 3).

Figure 4 shows that the most frequent words are 'community', 'programs', 'services', and 'nonprofit' are the most prevalent at the *nonprofit and civil society agencies*. The involvement of civil society in the development of policies addressing the rights, needs, and the potential of older persons are well documented in the high number of the nonprofits and services available for older persons. The semantic adopted by the organizations websites appears to be in the middle of a cultural transition. The term 'older people' had a slightly higher frequency than the inadequately words 'senior' that are still highly used by the civil society organizations. The word 'ageism' is cited four times and age 'discrimination' tree times only. The discourse of 'aging' demands room for human

agency advocacy in a more concrete participation and engagement of older person in the planning of city, but there are very few sites that discuss age stereotypes and the cultural production of barriers against productive social and political engagement in later life. Sustainability is neither in the mission nor in the objectives of the analyzed agencies websites.

The frequency of the words 'health', 'justice', 'advocacy', and 'care' suggests that the equality value-focused of programs and activities are essential to promote health access during the lifelong process of aging. The words 'food', 'housing', and 'violence' suggest the identification of systemic inequities and yet gentrification is not mentioned once. It is not clear if the 'advocacy' discourse is associated with opportunities for older persons to act upon the political agenda of aging and defend a more sustainable base of living.

Several websites present technological approaches in providing virtual services related to education, computer training, art and culture, social integration, and innovative perspectives about aging (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Word cloud analysis of NY City aging related nonprofit civil society organizations, 2019

Figure 5 shows that the highest word frequencies of Faith, Ethnic and Minority NYC organizations are “Community”, “Programs”, “Immigrants” and “Families”. The analysis of the sites allows the readers to understand how age-related programs and interventions in the community are being managed by multiples actors from different perspectives and angles. Several organizations target immigrants and services for older adults and their families. New York City has an important immigrant community with nearly 40% of the residents being foreign born. It is not surprise that these non-profit organizations are responding to the challenge to empower older adult immigrants and their families. The high frequency of the word ‘LGBT’ in the picture suggests that the organizations are responding to the expanding needs to safeguard and support the rights and well-being of the LGBT community, including LGBT older adults. The image shows that the word

'senior' is more prominent than the more adequate one 'older adult'. "Economic" issues and "poverty" are being addressed



**Figure 5:** NYC Faith, Ethnic and Minority Organizations, 2019.

The four most prominent words highlighted in the word cloud of the the *age friendly universities and colleges* sites were 'health', 'older adults', 'care', and 'research'. Developing research, disseminating the results of the studies on health and care for older adults, as well as, offering access to higher education, such as non-degree learning opportunities to older adults are the main focus of the organizations in this category. However, 'ageism' fails to materialize, 'geriatric' features as a higher order than 'gerontology', and 'program' shows medium frequency even though 'evidence' appears only as a minor term, which is a surprise, given the role of academic institutions. The term 'age friendly' was mentioned only twice. Versey et al (2019) discuss the implications of gentrification as potential risks to aging in place in New York age-friendly cities. New York



city is undergoing major gentrification process, housing concerns are increasing among older adults and affecting their perception of age-friendliness of the changing neighborhoods.

The terms 'health', 'care', and 'community' are the most frequent words in the word cloud of *New York City older adult network*. In the light of increased longevity and high costs of institutional care and formal home care, older adult networks is providing essential information regarding community programs available.

Finally, the words "community", 'programs', and 'health' as the most prominent terms for *New York City Foundations and Funds* supporting age related programs and services. Despite the high frequency of word 'program', the word 'evidence' appears only once in the sites. Foundations play a vital role in funding evidence-based community programs and health promotion policies to assist older adults to overcome barriers to successfully age in place. They can also play a role in advancing cultural disruption and improving the equity of outcomes for vulnerable population. Nevertheless, 'ageism' fails to appear in the word cloud and 'advocacy' has a very low frequency.

Foundations are important stakeholders in the struggle to remove the barriers that prevent full participation of older people in society. At the center of these barriers are ageism and negative attitudes towards getting older and older people. Foundation and fund available addressing common concerns regarding older persons quality of life is essential to engage the community to evaluate evidence-based interventions toward the challenges of *age in place*. Central to most of the government agencies and non-profits strategies is the adoption of comprehensive, neighborhood-based approaches at the community level to achieve a more sustained cross-neighborhood advocacy to support age in place.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Limitation**

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first attempt to map the services and initiatives of government, nonprofit, academic and civil society sites toward older people and build word clouds analysis of what is being targeted.

Cities have been the indelible scenario of 21st century human development and population. Urban development characteristics can have major positive or negative effects on the well-being and quality of life of older persons. There is a need of literature on the topic of aging in urban centers, especially regarding the large proportion of older population living in precarious urban spaces and unprotected socio-economics conditions. The broad concepts of “age friendly environments”, “age friendly communities”, “friendly city for all ages”, and “age friendly city” are not frequent in the sites to encourage key changing challenges facing cities in order to promote initiatives that will flourish inclusive cities for all ages. These concepts are being presented as central components and operational approaches for international, national and city policies that combines public policies, innovation, antiageism, and interagency urban planning to produce environments that improve the quality of life for older persons, particularly its most vulnerable older residents.

A lack of clarity in communication of some of the selected websites might led to an insufficient share of information for potential users, especially older persons in need of essential information to access services. It is possible that the mission and objectives words are not enough to describe all multidimensional aspects that the agencies are working and the issues that they are addressing in their services and activities.

NYC has a robust community-based network of nonprofit organizations designed to intervene earlier and prolong the ability of the older adult population to maintain their independence and autonomy to age in place. On the other hand, even though New York City is home to 3.1 million immigrants the word ‘immigrant’ only appears in the mission or goals of the organizations from the “faith, ethnic and minority” category. This finding is particularly relevant due to increasingly unfriendly federal immigration policy developments that possibly will affect the access of public services for immigrant older adult. More alarmingly for a New York age-friendly city and state, are the low frequencies of the terms “evidence’, ‘quality’, ‘ageism’, and ‘sustainability’. These words have been supplanted by the terms ‘programs’ and ‘services’ which may point to the substantial increase in demand for older adult ‘care’. The word clouds reveals that the demand for care that the ‘community’ are facing are being designed with the leadership of all categories of non-for-profit and governmental organizations.

To conclude, in order to achieve the maximum potential of older persons quality of life it is essential to combat ageism and strengthen the social support systems, improve monitoring and evaluation of programs and services, and broad opportunities older adults to become co-designers of solutions in their own communities and participate in the planning of their cities. More important, it is necessary to involve people of all age to build a fairer and sustainable city. Older adults are capable and they have the right to be included in the city agenda to further promote friendly environments for all ages.

The Documentary Research analysis using site information is limited in a number of ways. The mapping does not include information that was not available on the internet, it is based on web site information that might not be updated or accurate, few sites have captured the voices of older adults, and it represents a visual portrait of assets and services in the community with minimal in-depth analysis of the identified programs.

The main weak points of this approach, however, are related to the fact that findings from the websites' content do not have the assurance of human validation and the level of transparency of the information that could lead to an insufficient judgment. Therefore, this documentary research in the selected sites does not allow to identify key steps that policymakers and institutions took to promote and maintain sustainable neighborhood changes appropriate for all ages in the city.

The study results provided a view of aging and urban inequalities, the knowledge gap regarding potential urban barriers, key challenges in sustainable urban planning for older populations and some implications for the construction of theoretical perspectives on age friendly environments.

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