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The Age-Friendly Media and Information Literate (#AFMIL) City: Combining policies and strategies for ageing populations in media and information rich societies.

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Abstract

This paper proposes a model for developing an Age-Friendly Media and Information Literate (#AFMIL) city. It starts by addressing general issues concerning ageing and ageism. Key features of UNESCO's framework for a media and information literate city are described. The authors proceed to identify relevant international handbooks, guidelines and initiatives concerning age-friendly environments, cities for human rights, smart cities, creative cities and informational cities. Drawing on these documents, the authors outline a model for developing an #AFMIL city, centred on older people enacting three roles: their role as consumers of media and information; older people as represented in the media; and older people in their role as creators, critics and innovators. They highlight the role of librarians in this development.

Keywords

cities, media and information literacy, older people, policy

1. Introduction

In this paper we focus on the neglected issue of the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) of older people, and specifically older people in urban environments. We outline the issue of ageism, introduce UNESCO's framework for the Media and Information Literate (MIL) city (UNESCO, 2018a) and examine key international frameworks and guidelines relevant to age-friendly urban environments. We draw on these documents to propose a model for developing an Age-Friendly Media and Information Literate (#AFMIL) city, and identify ways of engaging older people in formulating urban policies and plans.

Age and the implications of ageing populations are vital dimensions of public policy (e.g. Harper, 2016; United Nations Population Division, 2017; Zimmer & MacDaniel, 2013), including developments such as MIL cities. These dimensions are currently under-appreciated, for example described in very basic terms of digital inclusion (e.g. Abad, 2014; Green & Rossall, 2013). Whilst there has been research in the information and library community into the behaviour and needs of people at a variety of life stages, the greatest attention has been paid to information literacy in formal education. In the media literacy field, there is an even narrower focus with a strong emphasis on the media literacy and media education of young people, for example, the EAVI

(Media Literacy for Citizenship) project (EAVI, 2017) has a focus on media literacy for youth, and there is a preponderance of sessions about youth (including a youth day) in UNESCO's Global MIL Week feature conferences (e.g. UNESCO, 2019).

The personification of human engagement with digital technology as fundamentally a 'youth' experience has been a feature of the discourse more generally, for example the well-worn 'digital native' trope. This representation is paired with a discourse that frames older people as digitally inept. For example, the closing video for the 2016 European Conference on Information Literacy (Pitaš, 2016) positions an old person as deficient and helpless (fumbling through out-dated printed materials) and 'saved' by patronising young people putting a smartphone into her initially resistant hands.

These approaches serve to distort the conceptualisation of media, digital and information literacies, and divert attention from the experience and potential of populations as a whole. There is a need for a significant uplift in policy thinking and practice and in this paper we give a corrective to balance the narrative.

It is important to take the needs of people of all ages seriously. In 2017, Europe had the largest percentage (25%) of the population aged 60 or more, and this age group is growing more rapidly than younger age groups, in percentage terms, throughout the world (United Nations Population Division, 2017). Even in countries with younger demographic profiles there may be issues specific to the older groups, such as caring responsibilities for grandchildren whose parents have succumbed to a disease such as HIV/AIDS or who have been killed in conflicts. Research has shown that information needs of older people and their carers are not met by local government even when legislation seems to require it (Baxter, Heavey & Birks, 2017; Think Local Act Personal, 2017). Earlier research by the authors identified that local government's own information illiteracy in dealing with its citizens' information needs is a problem (Webber and Johnston, 2002).

Moving on to the question of the city, this has become a key unit of analysis and action in contemporary sociocultural and policy debate, and is used here as a significant focus of our combined interest in MIL and older people. Cities are predominant as centres of population, economic activity and cultural experience: UNESCO (2016) states that half the global population lives in urban areas. Indeed a number of conditioning terms have been attached to the city to site it as a centre of major developments, including creative city (Florida, 2004; UNESCO, n.d.), Smart city (Mora, Bolici & Deakin, 2017), informational world city (Born, Henkel & Mainka, 2018; Mainka et al. 2013); and Age friendly city (World Health Organization (WHO), 2017).

Our positionality as authors of this paper is, firstly, as people who have researched and taught information literacy for more than two decades, and, secondly, as older people who reject the stereotypes of older people that we are presented with, both in everyday life and at MIL conferences. In particular, Johnston is active in the older people's movement (Johnston 2016; 2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c). Additionally, both Webber and Johnston were involved in the consultation process for the MIL Cities Framework.

2. Ageing and ageism

Demographic ageing is a key challenge for societies and numerous issues arise (Second World Assembly on Ageing, 2002; Harper, 2016; Thomson, 2018): risk of intergenerational inequality; negative portrayal of older people in the media; need for urban renewal for anticipated population changes; specific adjustments in health, care and housing to accommodate older people; and the need for opposition to ageist behaviour (Johnston, 2016; Johnston 2019c; Macnicol, 2015; Sutherland, 2016). These particular facets are driven by:

- Fundamental demographic shifts in age structure & disruption of “traditional” elder roles and relationships (e.g. British-Irish Council, 2016; Government Office for Science & Foresight, 2016).
- National & supra-national bodies developing rights-based approaches to ageing, rather than deficit/dependency models (e.g. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018).

The social situation and legal status of older citizens in the population is therefore an important matter. Age is a protected characteristic in UK Equalities legislation (Equality Act 2010) but is not as high profile as the aspects related to gender, religion and ethnicity, neither in the legislation, nor in popular attention. In popular narratives older people have come to be presented in stereotypical and negative forms (Sutherland, 2016) and erroneously presented as a homogenous group, for example:

- seniors as frail and lonely, deficient, a burden, incapable (Hall, Rennick & Williams, 2019)
- older workers as being technically incompetent, inflexible and with diminished physical and mental capacity (Harris, Krygsman, Waschenko & Rudman, 2018)
- older people expected to be grateful and thankful for any attention from politicians or younger people.

The thrust is to characterise older people as needy and dependent on younger generations, such as the politicised discourse on Baby Boomers (e.g. Cox, Young, Guardia, & Bohmann, 2018). This deficit and dependency model of older age tends to ignore the lifelong contributions made by older people (Hall, Rennick & Williams, 2019), their ability to contribute to society after retirement and, fundamentally, their democratic rights as citizens. This portrayal has been challenged using the term ageism, as described in the EU report on Equalities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018, p.11) in the following terms:

Ageism is the stereotyping of, prejudice or discrimination against individuals or groups based on their age. Although ageism can target young people, most studies in this area focus on the unfair treatment of older people. Ageism is deeply structural, “find[ing] expression in institutional systems, individual attitudes and inter-generational relationships.” All manifestations of ageism – at the individual, group or societal level – gravely undermine older people’s right to human dignity and reduce their potential to contribute actively to society.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2018, p.12) also identifies that ageism is intersectional, and the most frequently mentioned discrimination in the European Union.

3. UNESCO’s MIL Cities Framework

UNESCO drafted, invited consultation on, and published its framework for a MIL city in 2018 (UNESCO, 2018a). In this document, cities are taken to mean local authorities, and thus towns and rural areas are included, with particular reference to digital developments across a range of services, cultural and economic enterprises. The framework states that the MIL Cities concept aims:

... to promote creative dissemination of MIL knowledge in all forms of city activities. By taking a place-based approach, it aims to enable creative ways to promote MIL education as a complement to formal education, stimulating the involvement of non-traditional stakeholders.

(UNESCO, 2018a, p.1)

A MIL city is framed as involving all forms of city-based activity and engaging journalists, libraries, municipal leaders, and a range of local based services. Smart cities and smart citizens are explicitly mentioned. A key purpose is to enable people’s critical capacities and its overriding objective is to empower citizens. As indicated in the quotation above, this is a complement to formal education: the intention is to address all age groups.

Twelve criteria for the aspiring MIL city are listed. These include incorporating MIL into local government actions and city life; collaborating with relevant civil society groups; empowering and training various groups such as youth and marginalised citizens; and raising awareness of MIL. Of particular relevance to this paper, two of the criteria for a city to be designated a MIL city are that it should:

- 'Infuse MIL training for the older population in existing city programmes designed for their well-being, so that they are not left behind or marginalized;'
- 'Offer political and practical support to libraries in offering MIL training, both alone and in partnership with other actors;' (UNESCO, 2018a, 4)

Cities who do not yet meet the criteria are exhorted to become 'MIL-ready' and examples are given of the actions that could be taken by different stakeholder groups. Those for 'Local authorities and libraries' are:

- 'Partnerships can be fostered to stimulate MIL through libraries, including actions undertaken by local and regional libraries, those libraries within school environments, and informal community libraries. Examples include a series of workshops offered by a library on MIL topics, a section of the library devoted to books on MIL topics, film screenings at the library with a facilitated discussion about an MIL topic, etc.'
- 'Organize a library day in schools where librarians or writers explain how information is produced, the usefulness of libraries, issues related to MIL, such as functions of media, online privacy, and/or intercultural dialogue' (UNESCO, 2018a, 6)

Overall it seems that MIL Cities is a strategic development by UNESCO adding to the various other city/place-based political and economic approaches to cities, which we discuss in the next section. However it does not give a rounded picture of how a MIL City should be strategised, nor is it explicit how it could be brought into being for an older population in a manner which does more than avoid their marginalisation.

4. Older people and varied conceptions of the city

4.1 Introduction

Organisations and commentators offer a range of conceptual lenses to view the city through and to guide policy and practice, which complement and enhance the MIL City framework. We briefly consider five of them in relation to the theme of older people and cities, namely: age-friendly environments, cities for human rights, smart cities, creative cities and informational cities.

4.2 Age-friendly environments

The WHO's (2017) handbook on Age-friendly environments is the most direct international responses to the issues outlined in the previous section. The WHO (2017, p.3) handbook identifies that

Age-friendly cities and communities foster healthy and active ageing and thus enable well-being throughout life. They help people to remain independent for as long as possible, and provide care and protection when they are needed, respecting older people's autonomy and dignity.

'Communication and information' is one of eight policy domains identified in the WHO (2017) handbook. Some recommendations intersect with objectives familiar from smart city initiatives (e.g. digital connectivity for good access to assistive technologies in the home, smartphone apps tailored to needs of older people, closing the digital divide). However, the Handbook also identifies that age-friendly communication and information involves using word-of-mouth, traditional media, public meetings and neighbourhood centres. It means improving the accessibility of all forms of communication (from websites to signage).

Overall, WHO (2017) identifies action areas for Communication and Information concerning age-friendly information, a clearinghouse for health-related information, health literacy, public events and addressing the digital gap. Key guidance points include:

- Organising public face-to-face events such as festivals for older people, seminars, lectures, and discussions.
- Using varied dissemination channels, including local broadcast media; 'tailored information material produced as leaflets, brochures or maps; newsletters; poster campaigns; and [physical] message boards', 'illustrative personal stories of older people' (p.99); taking account both of preference and accessibility.
- Creating a clearinghouse for health and age-related material: whilst the internet is an obvious place to put this, WHO (2017) notes that this online focus is not going to be useful for those who, for whatever reason, do not use the internet.
- Creating accessible information, using age-friendly formats. Websites need to be accessible (e.g. to those with visual disabilities or limited dexterity). Among the common elements of age-friendly communications are 'clear, concise formats and use of easy language; large print versions (for example, of forms, manuals and directories); and better legibility of LED signs and displays.' (p.99)

Other policy domains provide guidelines on, for example, empowering older people in local decision making, and involving older people in evaluating services, mentoring and advising. The guidelines advocate having 'A protocol, charter or act on how to involve older people [in public life] to be followed by agencies'.

4.3 Cities for human rights

Whilst WHO (2017) provides an encouraging basis for developing MIL for older people, a caveat is that these guidelines are currently aspirational, rather than enforceable. The same applies to another relevant initiative, the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, 2016). The Charter includes paragraphs explicitly addressing MIL:

- 'The city undertakes to give its inhabitants free access to all existing sources of information and to facilitate the creation and the development of new free and pluralist sources of information.
 - 'The city encourages the creation and the development of free and pluralist media and information bodies, freely accessible to all inhabitants, without discrimination.
 - 'The city facilitates fact-finding for all journalists without discrimination and ensures that they have free access to the widest range of information, particularly concerning the city administration.
 - 'The city encourages debates and exchange of ideas and information. It ensures that all inhabitants have free access to public meeting places and facilitates the creation of such places.'
- (UCLG, 2016, p.16)

It also contains a mid-term goal 'Encourage access of the elderly to all public services and to life of the city', however, more attention is paid to those in other protected groups (e.g. children, women). The Global Charter is, though, valuable in setting out the values (such as freedom of information and tolerance of diversity) that should underpin an #AFMIL city.

4.4 Smart cities

Of the 'aspirational quality' city initiatives, the smart city has been the one to receive most attention. Mora, Bolici and Deakin's (2017) bibliometric analysis reveals the fragmented nature of the literature about smart cities, and the authors identify two dominant discourses: one techno-centric, and the other a more 'balanced combination of human, social, cultural, economic, environmental, and technological aspects, which stand alongside one another' (Mora, Bolici & Deakin, 2017, p.12). Whilst the later seems more aligned with sustainability and environmental goals, high profile initiatives of the techno-centric kind persist, such as Alphabet's (i.e. Google's) Sidewalk project in Toronto (Sidewalk Labs, 2019). However this techno-vision of a smart city is

subject to increasing critique. For example, Green (2019) outlines alternative goals for a 'Smart enough city', focused on technology supporting democratic values, the reality of complex problems, and innovative policy reforms (rather than just innovative technology).

The City of Boston, USA, is a city which pushed back against high-tech pitches (City of Boston, 2016) and instead aims to focus on human-centred design, stating that:

We think a truly smart city is one that creates equal opportunities for people to connect with each other and with the world. It allows its residents to decide what their definition of "smart" should be, and what creates real civic value. (City of Boston, 2019).

This includes ethnographic research, storytelling and funding community-led projects (City of Boston, 2018). Both Green (2019) and City of Boston are helpful in articulating human-centric goals for technological innovation, and in providing examples of how communities could be involved in proposing and planning innovation as opposed to top-down, corporate technology models of change.

Another useful source for mapping a future #AFMIL city is the Smart Cities for All initiative, which arose in response to concerns that smart city initiatives promoted digital exclusion. Its mission is 'to eliminate the digital divide for persons with disabilities **and older persons** in Smart Cities programs worldwide' (our emphasis, Smart Cities for All, n.d.). Their research into the views of experts and people with disabilities discovered that 'most Smart Cities are not accessible today, and the result is a growing digital divide for persons with disabilities. Global experts see no clear link between ICT accessibility standards and Smart Cities programs worldwide.' (Smart Cities for All, 2018a, p.1).

They have produced a 'toolkit' of guidelines and advice about making (and advocating for) digital inclusion in Smart Cities (Smart Cities for All, 2018b) and in 2018 started to pilot a Smart City Digital Inclusion Maturity Model. In terms of older people, their emphasis is on the impact of disability, and on the design and procurement of ICT and related infrastructure. They also stress expert intervention, rather than action by the older/disabled people themselves. However, their material provides further examples and guidelines that may be used in developing a framework for an #AFMIL city.

4.5 Creative cities

The concept of the creative city emerged from Richard Florida's research and writing (Florida, 2004). He identified creative capital as key to cities' development and proposed technology, talent (creative people) and tolerance as urban success factors. Repudiating the charge of elitism, Florida states that 'creativity is as biologically and intellectually innate a characteristic to all human beings as thought itself' (Florida, 2004, p.4), although his focus is on economically active and entrepreneurial creatives, and his view of the city has been subject to critique (e.g. Dorling, 2018; Taylor & O'Brien, 2017).

UNESCO (2016) also links creativity, culture and innovation with successful cities, and sets out a framework for culture and sustainable cities with the three key themes of people, environment and policies. This framework has a strong focus on tolerance and inclusion, emphasises the centrality of people's needs and wellbeing, includes the physical and digital, and acknowledges the value of memory and existing cultural assets, as well as innovation. UNESCO (2016) is referenced as a key document by UNESCO's Creative Cities network. This network was launched in 2004 and had 180 members in 2019, which 'commit to place culture and creativity at the core of their sustainable development strategies, policies, and initiatives' (UNESCO, n.d.).

Of these creative city documents and initiatives, UNESCO (2016) has the most to contribute to the development of a MIL city. It acknowledges the complexity of city life in different countries of the world, and the variety of places and spaces in which culture may be preserved, embodied, created

and performed. This is in contrast to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network's prime focus on those in the creative industries, and initiatives aimed at young people.

4.6 Informational cities

Finally, Born, Henkel and Mainka (2018) synthesise elements of the Smart, Creative, Digital, Knowledge and World city to develop the concept of the Informational World City and identify 31 cities that meet their criteria. Born, Henkel and Mainka (2018) do not address the issue of older people, but they do outline the characteristics of a library to meet the needs of the Informational World City through physical and digital services, for example, supporting digital inclusion, managing knowledge, fostering creative activities and educating for information literacy. However, whilst they identify the library as an important public space, they do not position it as fostering civic engagement.

4.7 Relating city initiatives to #AFMIL

It makes sense to draw on all these initiatives to develop the #AFMIL concept. The Second World Assembly on Ageing (2002, described further in the next section) and the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, 2016) provide a base level of commitment and understanding of older people's human rights, and the responsibility of local government in enacting those rights.

WHO (2017) provides an overall framework for cities to adopt and implement in order to better serve the needs of older populations. It makes the older populations a priority and gives details of implementation (i.e. going beyond aspiration to implementation) and considers all aspects of the environment. Thus it can be used to create the contextual conditions for a MIL cities approach. Specifically, it also explores what information means for an older population and how MIL aspirations might be tailored to older people's needs.

UNESCO (2016) provides a human-focused vision of a creative and culturally-sensitive city. This vision can inspire, and provide an ethical foundation for, a MIL city which treats older people as creative beings and as valuable curators of history and memory. Of the smart city initiatives, the Smart Cities for All (2018) is particularly relevant in looking at practical and ethical issues of digital inclusion in all aspects of MIL city life.

The next section returns the focus to the rights of older people, and offers an outline of how a merged approach to the #AFMIL City might be shaped and enacted.

5. Developing the #AFMIL Cities Framework: Rights, values, roles and strategies

5.1 Introduction

We argue that there should be a fundamental focus on the rights of older people rather than seeing deficits that lead to needs, in MIL, as in all other areas of life. This frames older people as agents, rather than just passive consumers. This active rights based approach needs to underpin the model of an #AFMIL City. A rights based approach is relevant to the political and democratic situation of older people; their access to and contribution to information; one's capacity to leverage information in one's own interests; media's role in 'constructing' older age; and media as a major source of information and former of public opinion.

A holistic approach to defining areas where rights are to be secured includes addressing the different roles that older people may have (i) as subjects portrayed by the media and others; (ii) as consumers of information and media; and (iii) as active MIL creators, innovators and critics. We expand on these roles in the next three sections.

5.2 Older people as portrayed by media, government agencies and experts: avoiding stereotyping & disinformation

The Political Declaration of the Madrid International Plan of Action for Ageing (Second World Assembly on Ageing, 2002) is based on 20 years of policy development and identifies key actions for implementation at state, national and local government levels, which can be used to assess progress since then. The objective concerned with 'Enhancement of public recognition of the authority, wisdom, productivity and other important contributions of older persons' contains the following exemplary points, which indicate the desired direction of travel and specify some key actions:

- a) Develop and widely promote a policy framework in which there is an individual and collective responsibility to recognize the past and present contributions of older persons, seeking to counteract preconceived biases and myths and, consequently, to treat older persons with respect and gratitude, dignity and sensitivity;
- b) Encourage the mass media to promote images that highlight the wisdom, strengths, contributions, courage and resourcefulness of older women and men, including older persons with disabilities;
- c) Encourage educators to recognize and include in their courses the contribution made by persons of all ages, including older persons;
- d) Encourage the media to move beyond portrayal of stereotypes and to illuminate the full diversity of humankind;
- e) Recognize that the media are harbingers of change and can be guiding factors in fostering the role of older persons in development strategies, including in rural areas;
- f) Facilitate contributions by older women and men to the presentation by the media of their activities and concerns;
- g) Encourage the media and the private and public sectors to avoid ageism in the workplace and to present positive images of older persons;
- h) Promote a positive image of older women's contributions to increase their self-esteem.
- i) (Second World Assembly on Ageing, 2002, para. 113)

This set of actions offers a profound acknowledgement of the importance of older people in society and the responsibility state and other actors have to make serious efforts to overcome stereotyping, marginalisation and discrimination based on age, which we believe are fundamental to a fully developed MIL Cities initiative. As has already been noted, MIL experts and educators are amongst those perpetrating stereotypes of MIL-deficient older people. Thus, reflection and changed practice for those in the MIL field in recognising their ageism is a vital first step.

5.3 Older people as consumers of information and media: taking account of their preferences, practices and life experiences

Turning to the second of our three potential roles for older people, WHO (2017) provides a good starting point. We note that it explicitly covers information which is not media, and is particularly comprehensive in the area of health information. This complements the media focus of the examples and actions in the MIL cities framework.

The concept of the informational city expands on the role of libraries in this context. What is lacking, however, in both UNESCO (2018a) and Born, Henkel and Maina (2018) is a full discussion of the role of the *librarian*. As MIL experts and activists, librarians and information professionals could be engaged in promoting the existing research on older people's information behaviour and preferences, in co-creating (with the older people) new evidence about their information needs, and developing new MIL initiatives. This should not just involve public librarians (and indeed cannot, in those countries where the public library service is underdeveloped or under attack), but also librarians in government and third sector organisations, and in higher education libraries.

5.4 Older people as MIL creators, innovators and critics

This emphasises that older people do not run out of new ideas, or stop creating, just because they are old. The role includes integrating older people into city planning. For example, WHO's (2017) Handbook for Age-friendly Environments includes 'Involving senior advisors and older people as experts and in mentoring opportunities'. Concepts such as the 'Silver city' (Cox et al. 2014) also identify older people's potential for civic contribution. Lifelong learning opportunities should move beyond seminars 'correcting' older people's deficiencies in using technology (using patronising labels such as 'silver surfer'). At the moment, the exciting and innovative MIL creation programmes are aimed almost exclusively at the young. The more holistic people-centred conception of a smart city should serve as a model here (e.g. the Smart Enough city, or the example set by the City of Boston) rather than the technist models promoted by technology companies.

5.5 Model for developing an #AFMIL City

The development of these roles for older people in the MIL city requires strategy and vision, and engagement from key stakeholders such as the city council, third sector and media organisations, libraries, educational institutions and the older people themselves. There is no need for them to start from scratch: drawing on the discussions in the previous sections, we have identified international documents which together provide value statements and guidelines that form an enfolding model for developing an #AFMIL City.

The model in Figure 1 synthesises values, operational units and people in a relational structure, which seeks to overcome silo thinking and facilitate conceptualisation of an #AFMIL city. All parties in a given city could use the model to focus their thinking, engage citizens and begin to plan change.

The upper set of circles represent how the existing guidelines, charters and frameworks could be used to construct firstly a set of enfolding values for urban life; secondly a set of values and strategies for empowering older people and combatting ageism; thirdly values and goals which foster MIL and empower MIL citizens. Together, these form an enfolding framework for developing an #AFMIL city. Enfolded within the framework are the 'Values, policies and vision of city councils working with older people and other stakeholders to co-create the #AFMIL city'.

The lower part of the diagram unpacks this central element. At the centre is the older person in an #AFMIL City, with the three roles of consumer, of creator/innovator/critic, and as portrayed in the media and other communications. Vital to co-creation of policy and action are the city council, the city's infrastructure, stakeholders (such as libraries, universities, third sector organisations), the media (and others who present images or stereotypes of older people) and older people's assemblies and think tanks. In the next section we will elaborate on what we mean by assemblies and think tanks.

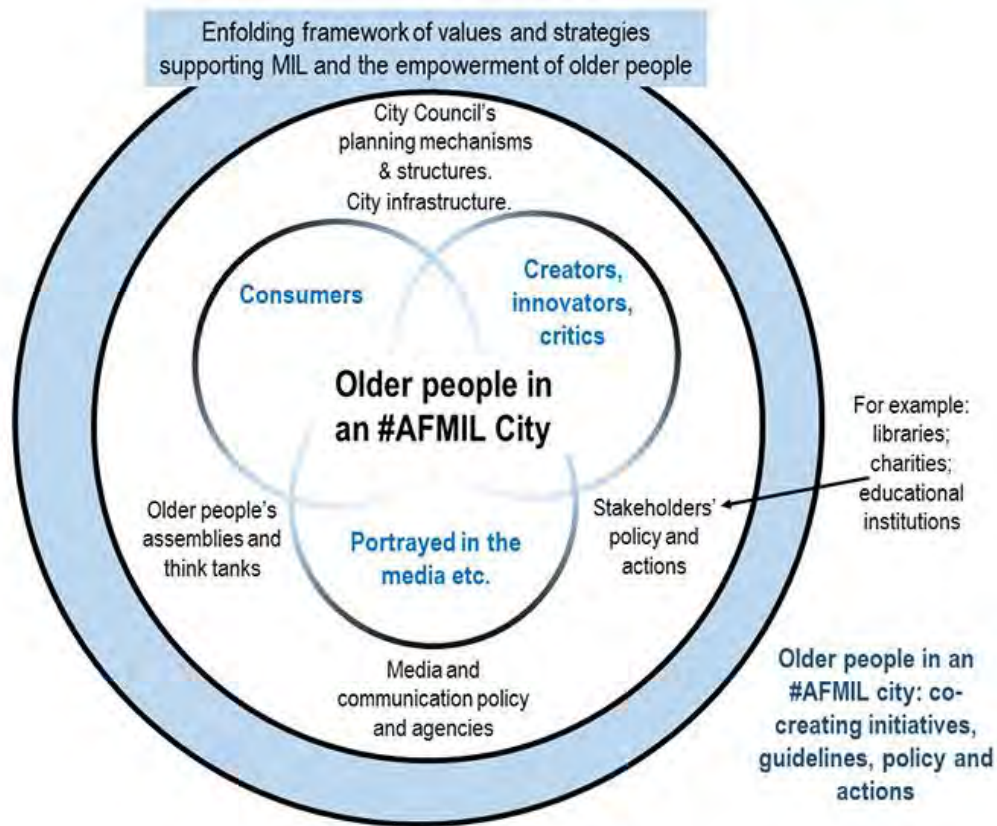
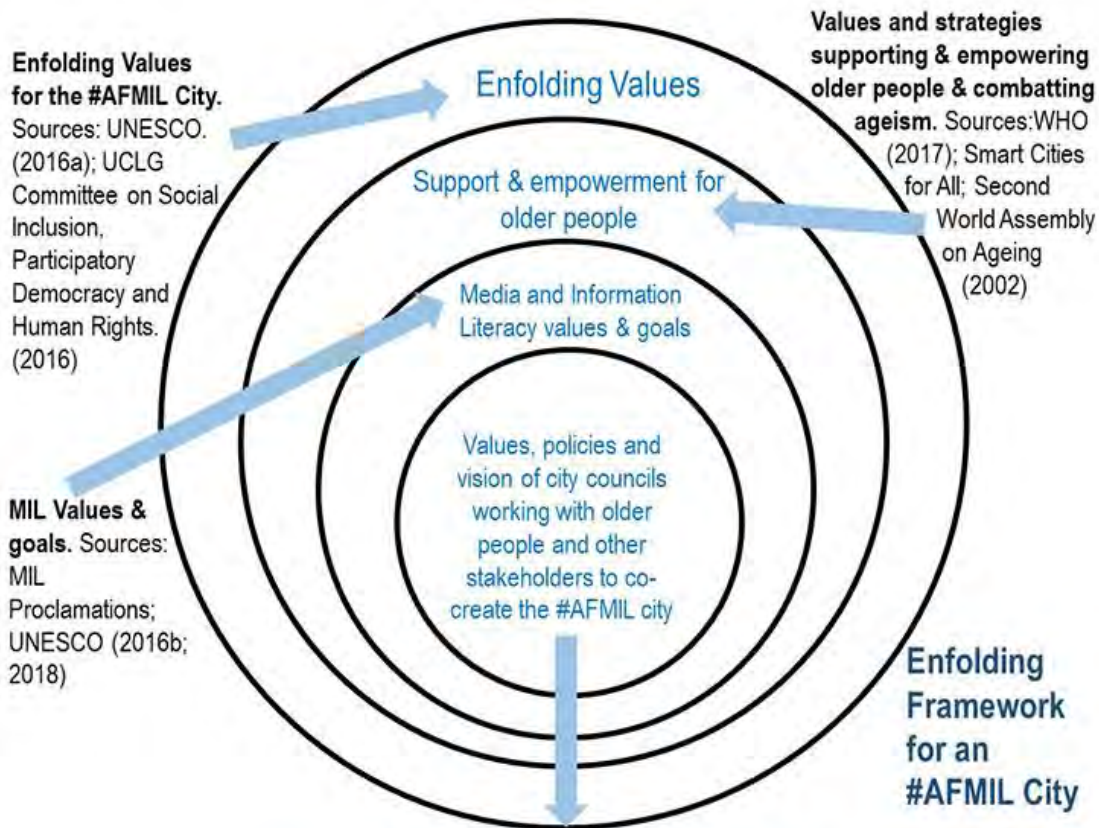


Figure 1: Model for developing an #AFMIL City

6. Implementing the model of an #AFMIL City

In this section we focus on how older people can be actively engaged in implementing an #AFMIL City, making a constructive proposal building on relevant existing practice. One key generative focus of older people's MIL roles in society is the encouragement of older people's agency and capacity to participate in policy formation and decision-making on their own behalf. This can be contrasted with being endlessly 'consulted' by politicians, civil servants and pollsters, who may then 'interpret' older people's wishes in line with the presumptions of official thinking. It offers a direct challenge to the deficit and dependency framing of older people and instigates a positive routing of older people's right to be heard and taken seriously.

We propose an older people's independent think tank with explicit responsibility for exploring and developing new perspectives as an innovative strategic option to circumvent current negativities and open new development routes. As social policy and people's experience of social provision are intimately linked to media representations and information experiences, MIL could be both a mode of operation and a thematic focus for activity for such a think tank alongside initiatives concerned with service audits and developments. An independent think tank would need a democratic form, resources, professional and academic support as well as a basis in the older people's community. Establishing such a think tank would engage the objectives and action points of the Madrid Declaration (Second World Assembly on Ageing, 2002) and incorporate the content and provisions of subsequent high-level reports and frameworks.

The members of such a think tank could take our #AFMIL City model (Figure 1) as a starting point to create new national and local performance frameworks to drive change in their own city. Thus global perspectives would be translated into place- and age-based initiatives in response to older people, backed up by the kinds of expertise and knowledge combined in the think tank model. In time a number of think tanks could emerge and be networked across and between nations. Engagement with such a think tank could be framed as a lifelong learning initiative, given that older people could be expected to reflect on their experience and research alternatives to current accounts of ageing and the services provided by the state. This could involve concepts of learning drawn from adult education theory and practice such as transformational learning (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Equally a practice of citizens' research (e.g. University of Stirling, 2017) can be advanced as a practical approach.

An initial operating model for such an organisation could be the example of the Experience Panel mechanism developed by Scottish Government to help design the new Social Security system for Scotland. This is a panel of users of the current social security system who were involved in giving first-hand experience of what was needed and what should be excised from the existing system (Scottish Government, 2018).

The Social Security example is pertinent as it illuminates how negative experience of the relations between people and the state can be challenged and changed by direct involvement, as opposed to consultation modes of working, in order to secure greater recognition of marginalised groups and improved access to rights. Given the, often, negative portrayal of the recipients of social security as 'scroungers' by politicians, and government ministers, with the attendant reporting of such attitudes in the media, it is relatively easy to make an analogy with the negative portrayals of older people as 'needy' and a 'burden' on the public purse.

At a broader conceptual level this strategy is consistent with growing interest in the concept of deliberative democracy (see e.g. Taylor, 2018), which seeks to base decision-making on direct engagement of citizens in fully informed debate and collaborative discussion. This development is closely aligned to the practice of Citizens' Assemblies as a mechanism of informed deliberation. A notable example is the Irish Citizens' Assembly, which brought forward proposals on the place of abortion in the Irish constitution, and had a pivotal influence on the changes brought about by the

2018 referendum on the matter (Citizens' Assembly, 2018). In addition, in 2019 the Scottish Government proposed to include a citizens' assembly as part of their proposals for a Referendum Bill to enable a second Scottish Independence Referendum (Sturgeon, 2019).

A substantial adjunct to these emerging approaches is the well-established Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (n.d.). The EHRC is the effective guardian of equal rights in the UK and has statutory powers in addition to its role influencing the state and civic society. This involves both promoting equal rights and ensuring no reduction or marginalisation of existing rights. Consequently the EHRC could provide a valuable ally in developing MIL and #AFMIL as we have described them, particularly in relation to challenging ageism and promoting improved practice.

As noted in section 5.3, above, librarians and information professionals also have a valuable contribution to make in developing a location-specific implementation plan for the #AFMIL city. This could also usefully involve local professional library and information groups and academics in the library and information field, to work cross-sectorally. Self-critique of existing library initiatives and representations of older people should be part of the process (for example, do initiatives fall into the trap of only aiming to remedy 'deficiencies' in MIL, rather than also offering stimulating and creative opportunities?) However, library and information professionals can also speak up assertively as MIL advocates and experts.

Whilst the integration of various strategies is required to design the initiatives to implement an #AFMIL, it is worth remembering that cities function along lines influenced/determined as much by political, economic and social processes as by deliberate urban planning. Understanding these dynamic processes in a given city and aligning #AFMIL strategies with their flows will be essential to support implementation of #AFMIL innovations. The possible tensions between design and implementation could be addressed in the civic participation/think tank modes of working, which we have suggested.

7. Conclusions

We contend that a MIL city develops and enables the MIL of its citizens and (through its policies, procedures and representatives) itself engages with its citizens in a media and information literate manner. A MIL city should collect, communicate and manage the information needed by its citizens, at all stages of their lifecourse, applying ethical and transparent information policies. We have shown that there are relevant and useful guidelines available. We propose our model of an #AFMIL City as the vehicle to integrate MIL with the requirements of demographic ageing at the city level. Our view is that an #AFMIL city focuses on rights rather than seeing deficits and challenges ageism in all its forms. An #AFMIL City perspective could be used to form strategic partnerships to implement a mutually supporting programme for MIL City development focused on older demographics at a city level. Our proposals around the idea of an independent think tank for age, ageing and older people's issues would act as a focusing mechanism to translate initiatives into practice.

In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: 'As we get older, our rights do not change. As we get older, we are no less human and should not become invisible' (HelpAge International, 2016, p.3). An #AFMIL city could take as its mission the challenge of ensuring not only that older people are visible in a positive frame but have the agency and capacity to advocate for their rights with the same media and informational strengths as the state and other powerful social actors.

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