

“Neighborhood in Solidarity”: A community development methodology that emerged throughout an action research experience

Marion Zwygart and Alain Plattet

Community Social Work Unit, Pro Senectute Vaud, Switzerland

Dario Spini

Institute for Social Sciences and National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

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Abstract

Population aging and urbanization are often associated with a restriction of the living environment and an increasing tendency to remain at home. This community development report presents the “Neighborhood in Solidarity” methodology as a response to counter or at least slow this restriction and enhance the ability of elderly persons to be active within their neighborhoods. Co-constructed throughout the action research process, the Neighborhood in Solidarity methodology is based on a 13-year experience, accumulated through 22 projects in 17 cities, with promising results in the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland. The genesis and the emergence of the methodology throughout action research workshops and interregional structures are described in the document. The description of Neighborhood in Solidarity is a snapshot of a living methodology, which continues to evolve on a daily basis. The process focuses on empowering the older people through a five-year methodology, which is intended to create an autonomous community that can resolve its own problems. The methodology comprises six steps described throughout the paper: (1) preliminary analysis, (2) diagnostic, (3) construction, (4) project design, (5) project implementation, and (6) empowerment. In 2013, an external assessment evaluated the Neighborhood in Solidarity methodology as effective at and appropriate for achieving its objectives. The promising results of this original methodology motivated this publication.

Corresponding author:

Marion Zwygart, Community Social Work Unit, Pro Senectute Vaud, Marion Zwygart, Maupas 51, 1004 Lausanne, Switzerland.

Email: marion.zwygart@vd.pro-senectute.ch

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Introduction

Population aging and urbanization are major demographic features of this century. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) first encouraged *Active Aging* to optimize opportunities in health, participation and security to enhance quality of life as individuals age. Then, because urban growth is accompanied by a gradual increase in the number of citizens over 60 years of age, the WHO proposed *the guide on Age-Friendly Cities* to encourage cities to better adapt to the needs of the older people (WHO, 2007).

Old age,¹ particularly old old age,² is associated with numerous losses and frailty but also with a highly active and generally successful young old age³ (Baltes & Smith, 2003; Neugarten, 1974; Lalive d'Epinay & Spini, 2008; Rowe & Kahn, 1998). There are clear indications that aging is associated with increasing vulnerability and capacity losses in the final stages of life, which for many lead to a restriction of the living environment and, for a small minority of the aged, to isolation. Older persons may be especially sensitive to changes in the physical environment given its importance for the maintenance of identity and because of the length of time spent at home (Philipson, 2011). Philipson encourages systematic intervention to support population aging at a community level.

Population aging is also a challenge in Switzerland. Swiss demographic projections are explicit: persons aged over 65 represented 16.4% of the population in the Canton of Vaud in 2015, and they will represent more than 20% in 2030; persons over 80 will represent more than 15% of the population in 2030 (755,369 inhabitants in the Canton of Vaud and 8,237,666 in Switzerland⁴). Swiss elderly policy is primarily oriented towards dependent older people requiring medical treatment through hospitals, nursing homes and homecare, which is efficient and essential but not sufficient. The report "Ageing and Health cantonal policies for the Canton of Vaud" in 2012 recommended improvements, for example, to home care coordination. Older people who do not require special care tend to be ignored by Swiss elderly policy once their working lives are behind them. While they are often asked to care for their grandchildren, the public perception of them appears to be one of helplessness in a world primarily focused on individual and professional success.

This paper focuses on community engagement, which is distinct from formal volunteering. Both community engagement and formal volunteering are part of the broader concept of civic participation, which also includes political participation (O'Neill, Morrow-Howell, & Wilson, 2011). Here, formal volunteering is defined as a formal activity undertaken by an individual who is unpaid and that is structured by an organization (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). Community engagement, by contrast, is elective involvement through an action that contributes to society without formal engagement. Several academic researchers highlight the positive

influence of activity on well-being and participation in society (Bickel, 2003; Bickel & Girardin, 2008; Jacobs, Hammerman-Rozenberg, Cohen, & Stessman, 2008; Kern, 2007; Wang et al., 2006). Gerontologists have long promoted volunteering as a way to remain active. Historically, volunteering was considered a leisure activity, which compensated for role losses in employment and parenting (O'Neill et al., 2011). Volunteering through formal organizations has dominated discussions of civic participation and attracted the most attention (Martinson & Minkler, 2006). However, the aspirations, aims and motivations of the older people have changed. Contemporary “young old” individuals express desires and needs to be useful and listened to and to belong—to social groups just as middle-aged individuals do. Furthermore, a shift from volunteering toward community engagement has recently been observed (Lalivé d’Epinay & Bickel, 2003; O’Neill et al., 2011). Community engagement strengthens relational resources (e.g., the number of contacts in one’s address book), cognitive resources (knowledge, information) and self-esteem (Lalivé d’Epinay, Bickel, Maystre, & Vollenwyder, 2000). Scholars offer several explanations for this change in perspective. Gains in health, education and longevity (20 or 30 years past retirement) have increased individuals’ capacity and desire to take on civic roles in later life. Reduced feelings of disqualification among the older people, intimate relationships and prior participation (Atchley, 1971, 1999) also affect their desire to participate (Lalivé d’Epinay et al., 2000). Many governments with stagnant or decreasing resources struggle to develop new win-win partnerships with the older people (O’Neill et al., 2011).

This paper proposes a *community development* methodology as an innovative cross-sectorial work⁵ opportunity to improve home care coordination and as a response to counter or at least slow the restriction of the living environment and enhance the capacity of the older people to remain actively engaged in their neighborhoods. *Community development* is a set of processes by which a group of citizens actively collaborates with governments to improve their economic, social and cultural well-being (Doucet & Favreau, 1992). Various community projects or theories describe *community development* processes. Bilodeau (2005), for example, describes six steps, primarily based on intervention, (1) preparation for the action, (2) pre-analysis, (3) the selection of an action’s project, (4) planning of the action, (5) implementation of the action and (6) evaluation of the action. *Community development* strengthens the local community. These programs generally involve local communities that share common interests, identities and territory (Bilodeau, 2005). The “Neighborhood in Solidarity”⁶ (NS) methodology has been co-constructed throughout an action research process. *Action research* is a mode of reflection and action that improves community empowerment. The process was first introduced to improve minorities’ conditions (Lewin, 1951), but the decline of large institutional programs has made this mode of action relevant to a larger public (Le Bossé, 2003). The themes and issues are identified as priorities by those directly involved. The accumulation of knowledge through a shared analytical process creates stronger social ties within the community and greater potential for action. As a result, new win-win partnerships are created.

The NS methodology, developed by Pro Senectute Vaud⁷ and the Leenaards Foundation,⁸ facilitates the emergence of elderly communities capable of solving problems for and by themselves and being active in and for the neighborhood. Based on *community development* and *action research*, NS has been developed to address the characteristics of contemporary elderly persons in Switzerland as an innovative and complementary response to homecare and as a cross-sectorial work opportunity. The aim of the program is to integrate and empower elderly persons in their neighborhoods to improve their quality of life. The primary objectives are thus to (1) develop regular relationships and cohesion within the community; (2) facilitate the availability of information for older persons regarding access to services and activities; (3) develop financial, human and structural resources for the older people; and (4) facilitate the involvement and self-organization of the older people in social projects. A recent external assessment evaluated the NS methodology as effective at and appropriate for achieving its objectives (Ettlin & Ruffin, 2013).

Genesis and emergence of the NS methodology

The NS methodology was developed in response to the need to reinvent Pro Senectute Vaud's approach to working with the older people because a meeting center in Lausanne was closing due to low attendance. Understanding the new needs and wishes of the older people was urgent. Following a call for proposals launched by the Leenaards Foundation, the project "House in Solidarity" won first prize. The principle of "House in Solidarity" was to promote the visibility of buildings where a solidarity charter was signed. In 2002, under the name "Neighborhood in Solidarity", the first project was launched around the closed center in Lausanne. The concept was to go into the streets, meet older persons and understand their aspirations. There was no framework at the time, but there were numerous motivations and inspirations from America (Alinsky, 1946; Freire, 2013) and France (Renaudot) among the team of community agents and numerous resources and motivations among the older people. The pilot project was born.

The first action research workshop was created within Pro Senectute Vaud in 2005. The Leenaards Foundation was also member of the workshop. The purpose was to exchange experiences, learn and build common references. Themes were discussed, such as: do we develop the project for everyone? Does the local project stop? What is the right posture? How far might I support activities? What is a community activity? Do we also work in wealthy neighborhoods? Do we need to work with other partners? For example, to address this last question, we split the workshop members in two parts: one group arguing, "we need to work with partners" and another group arguing, "we don't need to work with partners". After a week of reflection, the two groups met again and debated. The idea of "working without" was to avoid interaction with partners to avoid conflicts of interest. Local institutions occasionally regarded community work as intrusive. The "with" group held that partnership is inherent to the community work. The right question was instead how to work carefully with other associations. The action research

workshop created a first draft of the NS methodology and a set of tools, including a model collaboration agreement for working in partnerships. Thanks to funding from the Leenaards Foundation and others,⁹ new projects were started. An initial study documented the NS experience in 2008 (Genton, Boggio, & Cherpit, 2008). A few years later, two projects ceased operation and a preliminary analysis was added to the NS methodology to assess the feasibility of a project. The preliminary analysis is presented through the NS steps and the discontinued projects are discussed in the discussion section. In 2009, the unit of community social work became an official part of Pro Senectute Vaud, and the institutional phase of the NS project began.

At the same time, a fruitless attempt to create synergy between inhabitants of local projects was made. The older people were especially interested in becoming familiar with other projects, but did not learn a great deal from the meetings intended to familiarize them with the methodology. Community agents did not know what posture to adopt, namely, encouraging or observing the participants. Improved structures were developed in a stepwise manner. In addition to action research workshops, several broader reflexive spaces were created to allow participants to learn about and reflect on the process and to share practical know-how. An interregional forum gathered inhabitants, professionals, institutional partners and authorities from all projects on an annual basis to improve the coordination among the four groups and ensure that the methodology reflected the reality of each local project. The forum shifted toward a sustainability platform in 2013. Each year the subject and the perspective were changed to reflect to the interests of each group. Older people, professionals and authorities have also reflected on their practices over the course of a two-day annual training since 2011. The aim of the trainings is to explore community development through several themes, such as group dynamic or management of the meeting space. Last year, 50 participants were involved in the training, most of whom were older people. The platform, trainings and action research workshops caused the NS methodology to evolve and led to annual updates, shaped by the methodological coordinator. These reflexive spaces ensure the circular and iterative nature of the process that led to the co-construction of the NS methodology. For example, in the platforms developed in the interregional meetings the inhabitants requested a community meeting space four years in a row, and the closure of the meeting space was added to the collaboration agreement. In addition to methodological aspects, communication tools were also requested to allow for sharing on a local and interregional basis. A journal¹⁰ and a website¹¹ emerged in 2014 to generate the communication and production of know-how offered by the older people and the interregional spaces.

The team of community agents is now the unit of community social work and comprises 15 community agents, five trainees, a methodological coordinator and the manager of the unit. The methodological coordinator is the first author of the paper and ensures the development of the NS methodology. The manager is the second author and is responsible for the supervision, internal evaluation and overall development of the project. They have both been deeply involved in the NS projects for over 10 years. The manager oversaw the first NS project in the

neighborhood in Lausanne in 2003, and the methodological coordinator oversaw the first NS project in a village in 2006. They both come from a psycho-sociology background as taught at the University of Lausanne and decided to collaborate with an academic scholar in social gerontology, the third author, in this publication. As was the case for many participants and community agents, NS has represented a large part of their personal and work life.

Description of the NS methodology

Working within the unit means not only apply a methodology but involves commitment: we commit ourselves to the project, and we feed ourselves from the methodology and from our field experiences and from those of our colleagues, while simultaneously nourishing the methodology. A community agent¹²

The description of NS is a snapshot of a living methodology, which continues to evolve on a daily basis. Co-constructed throughout an action research process, the NS methodology is based on thirteen years of experience with 22 projects developed in the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland. The unit of action is always the local community, not an individual, family or group. The projects were developed in neighborhoods, towns and cities with populations ranging from 1500 to 12,000 inhabitants.¹³ These projects were developed in neighborhoods of cities with various right- and left-oriented political leaders and included neighborhoods with different (1) proportions of retired persons (from 9% to 20%), (2) socio-economic levels (from working-class to wealthy neighborhoods) and (3) cultural backgrounds (for example, from 13% to 40% foreign-born residents).

NS distinguishes itself from the type of community projects defined in the first section in several respects. The target population is now clearly defined as individuals over 55 years of age for several reasons. First, the older people have experience, interest and time. Having retired from work, they potentially have more time and may be prepared to take on responsibilities. For these reasons, the authors' hypothesis is that a specific methodology should be employed for community development involving the older people. Second, the older people are the target population of Pro Senectute Vaud, and this priority shapes the range of actions. Thus, the NS methodology has been developed with and for the older people. However, the process also supports intergenerational and intercultural coexistence, as cross-sectorial themes such as health, urban planning, social integration and intercultural ties concern all ages in a neighborhood.

Different *community spaces* have been implemented throughout the NS process to facilitate the sense of belonging and reflexivity. Many authors describe intermediate spaces between public and private areas, such as common space (Tassin, 1991), third space (Rutherford, 1990) or secondary areas (Fischer, 1997). This important characteristic is systematically implemented in the NS methodology. *Community spaces* are permanent spaces (meeting places) and ephemeral

spaces (forums, groups or activities). Open and visible from the neighborhood, permanent spaces ensure a sense of belonging for older people who feel part of something clearly identified from the outside. Ephemeral spaces facilitate reflection and shared analysis process between authorities and inhabitants.

The NS methodology provides important professional support at the local level. A community agent (Pro Senectute Vaud's social worker) commits 70% of his time to facilitating the process and assisting in collaborations among inhabitants, political authorities and associations. He is accompanied by a trainee (50% or 100% of this individual's time is devoted to the project, depending on the neighborhood). Both the agent and the trainee leave the project after five years. Shifting from a central to an external position with respect to the neighborhood, the community agent prepares for his scheduled departure by adopting a specific posture, specifically, the community posture, striking an appropriate balance between being active and responding to requests. Depending on the group's degree of autonomy, the community agent may act as an interventionist and on other occasions simply be a participant (Author, 2005). This posture is described in the NS steps. Specific training is held annually to develop the community posture, including six days of *action research* for the team of community agents and two days that are open to all other participants, as described in the genesis section. The methodological coordinator and the manager support the community agents as often as necessary and through four annual formal evaluations.

Six-step methodology

Flexibility and trust and solidarity are integral parts of the spirit of creativity. It is the driving force inherent in our work. This is certainly framed by a methodology that is now well established, but the adaptability of our practices and of our way of being are also important." A community agent¹⁴

The six steps of the methodology are (1) *preliminary analysis*, (2) *diagnostic*, (3) *construction*, (4) *project design*, (5) *project implementation* and (6) *empowerment*. Step 1 lasts for two months and steps 2 to 6 for one year (see Figure 3).

Step 1. Preliminary analysis

The first step is a preliminary analysis mandated by political authorities. The community agent contacts several potential local partners¹⁵ to assess the feasibility of a project. The feasibility of a project is determined using four criteria: (1) the identification of needs; (2) the definition of an initial, concrete objective; (3) the potential for community involvement; and (4) available financial resources. This step leads to a collaboration agreement that details the necessary professional resources, local resources and local partners that will conduct the process. Local partners are authorities, socio-medical institutions, local associations, religious institutions and

various interested stakeholders. If the decision is made to initiate a NS, the process continues with the diagnostic step.

Step 2. The diagnostic

During this step, the community agent creates three groups. The political authorities form a (1) *strategic group* and local partners a (2) *resource group*. The strategic group consists of local partners that finance the process (primarily political authorities). The functions of this group are to ensure that the project's strategy is appropriate. The resource group gathers stakeholders with different professional and interest backgrounds. The primary function of this group is to provide resources in the form of skills and networking to support the process. The community agent also creates an (3) *inhabitant group* of elderly inhabitants, who actively participate in the process.

The community agent visits different places, meets a variety of neighborhood residents and conducts interviews to determine the various needs and specific resources available to the older people and professional and non-professional networks. Needs for meeting spaces or better communication tools are often mentioned in interviews. The community agent invites the older people he meets to join the process and participate in the inhabitant group. The novel aspect of the process is a diagnostic evaluation performed with and for the older people. Some elderly individuals from the inhabitant group are trained as interviewers and recruited to interview other, randomly selected elderly persons. Face-to-face interviews lasting one to two hours are conducted with the older people. The respondents selected for these interviews must also include persons who generally remain at home or participate in a limited number of neighborhood activities.

The diagnostic provides an overview of a community's quality of life from a *holistic and pluralistic* perspective. The overview is holistic because it analyzes themes such as health, mobility and habitat and intercultural, intergenerational and social integration. The overview is pluralistic because the perspectives of inhabitants, professionals and political authorities are included in the diagnostic step. All results are presented and discussed in the first forum, to which all elderly individuals in the neighborhood are personally invited. This forum represents the first meeting of the strategic, resource and inhabitant groups. A diagnostic report coauthored by all participants is published at the end of this phase and is an important output. Based on the results of the first year, the authorities negotiate the future of the process.

Step 3. Construction

With the assistance of the community agent, the inhabitant group holds two forums during the construction step. Discussions are organized around diagnostic issues and led by an expert or a facilitator (the community agent, trainees, partners or inhabitants). Participants select priorities and resources to develop the first specific projects. The first request is often the access to a meeting space to lead the inhabitant group.

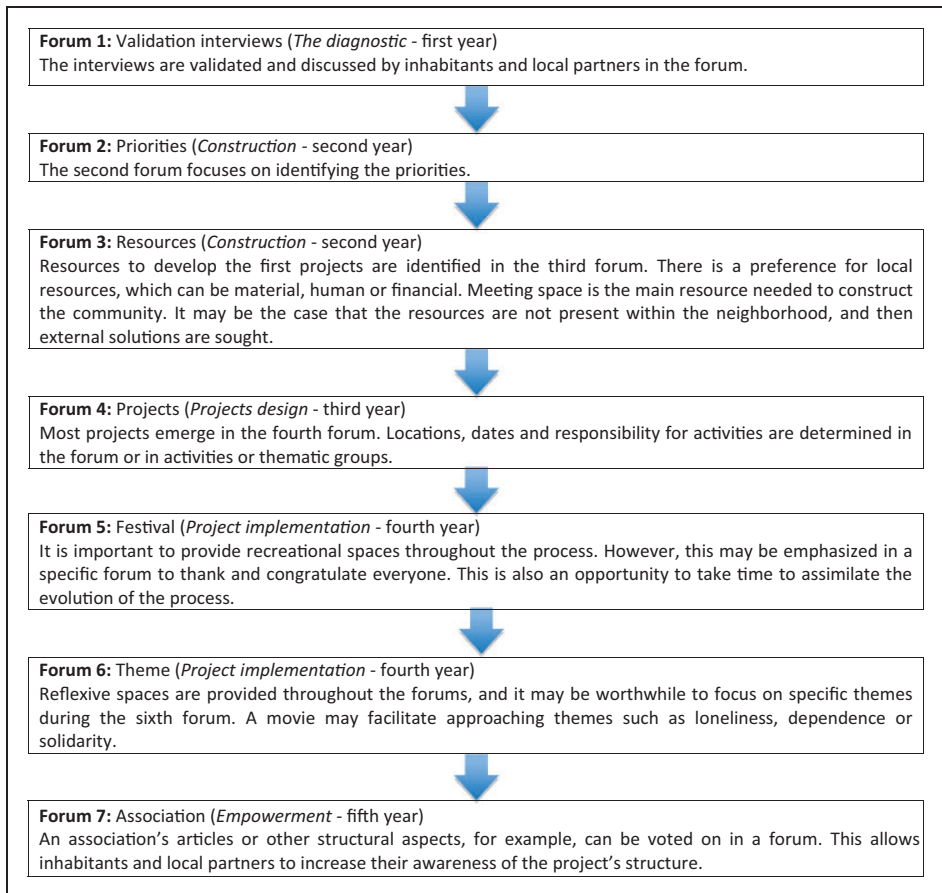


Figure 1. Example of the forum process.

The forums are open to all: retired persons, their families and any person living or working in the neighborhood. Considered *community spaces*, the forums are held twice per year, which creates stronger ties among the strategic, resource and inhabitant groups. A common language is also developed. Forums with different goals are organized throughout the process (see Figure 1). A key aspect is the development of an inclusive, open-minded and friendly atmosphere.

Step 4. Project design

Motivated individuals develop the first concrete projects such as walking, coffee meetings, and diners in the new meeting space. Based on the desires and ideas expressed in the forums, the first projects favor the confidence and skills of others. The community agent's role is crucial. The agent promotes the involvement of

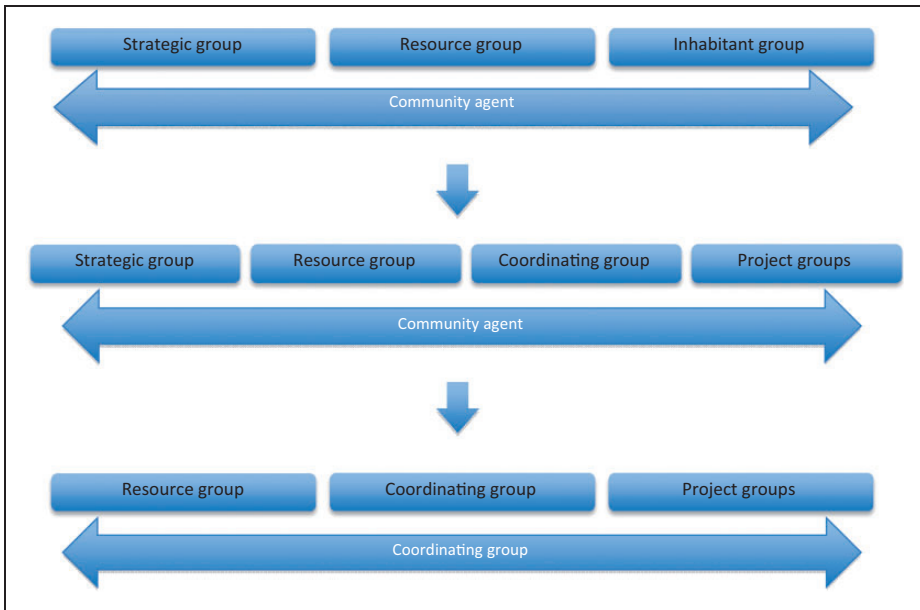


Figure 2. Group structures during the diagnostic step, NS steps and after the NS process.

community members in developing their own projects but also assists with, encourages, facilitates or even supports the conception of projects in certain instances. The local process consolidates its own organization through local groups (see Figure 2):

- The *inhabitant group* becomes a coordinating group that coordinates the various activities;
- Various new groups emerge in the form of project groups to develop:
- Activities for and by the older people (such as coffee meetings, diners, walking)
- Cross-sectorial activities (such as a neighborhood party, school visiting)
- Reflexive groups also emerge to work out themes such as communication, forums, etc.

Step 5. Project implementation

During this step, additional projects are realized, communication tools may be implemented such as a local journal or a website. The forums still promote processes of reflection, and new individuals are invited to join the process. The community agent ensures openness through *community spaces* to increase the empowerment of the older people and the sustainability of the community. *Community spaces* create stronger relationships among the coordinating group and a sense of identification. There is also a focus on the relationship among the

strategic, resource and coordinating groups. In this vein, the community agent ensures the development of a shared analysis process in *community spaces* that creates stronger relationships among the groups. During this step, the relationship among the groups generally becomes more fluid and efficient. The distribution of power is not changed, but exchanges are necessary to strengthen the legitimacy of each entity and reinforce a sense of mutual understanding between inhabitants and authorities.

Step 6. Empowerment

During the fifth and final year of the NS project, it's time for inhabitants, local authorities and partners to say goodbye to the community agent. To prepare the community agent departure several tools and trainings are proposed to accompany the stakeholders to a larger empowerment, the autonomy of the community. The community agent proposes for example animation, agenda and record groups. The community agent helps also the coordinating group to define its structure and relationships with activities and projects. Inhabitants may decide to found a more or less structured group, such as a formal association or friendly gathering. The strategic group (formed by the authorities and Pro Senectute Vaud) is dissolved (see Figure 2). The resource group remains and learns to work together with the coordinating group. The autonomy book is another innovative tool that helps all stakeholders to clarify their goals, relationships and responsibilities. Signed by

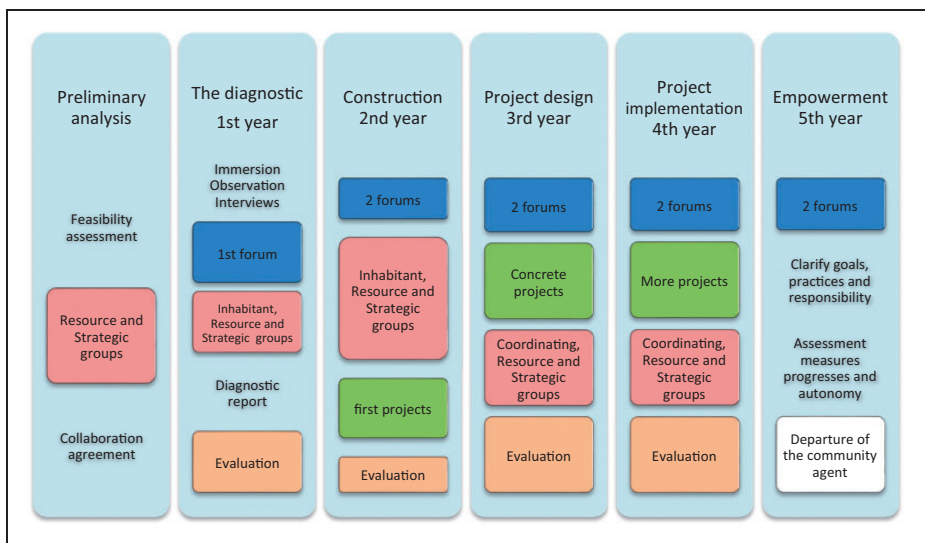


Figure 3. The six steps of the NS methodology.

all participants, the autonomy book is a mutual and moral agreement between inhabitants, local authorities and partners.

An organized community has defined its own functions and developed a capacity for cooperation and action. Inhabitants gained of responsibilities and capacity to serve the neighborhood, for example through intergenerational solidarity or postcards sent to people who left the group for health reasons. Anyway each community is unique and reaches autonomy by following its own singular path.

Follow-up

Once the process is completed, the community does not require any substantial professional presence. However, the regional social action unit that responsible for the area maintains contact with the association. The community social work unit also remains available to support the community. On request, coaching and evaluation are provided to ensure a dynamic and open community. Active inhabitant groups are regularly invited to trainings and interregional platform; they are also interviewed or asked to write articles in the NS journal. These interregional tools contribute to the creation of a broader network of which autonomous communities also feel a part. The authorities may support local projects financially and administratively, which facilitates the process in the long term. They may also devise new forms of follow-up for new types of citizen involvement. These new follow-up tools are a key aspect of the program's sustainability.

Between 2002 and 2016, a total of 22 NS projects were implemented or remain in progress in the Canton of Vaud. Pro Senectute Vaud recorded approximately 395 older people individuals involved in communities, 220 activities organized and 6'530 older people participating in activities in the Canton of Vaud. Twelve are autonomous, and in each case, communities, activities and groups remain active. These sustainable projects illustrate the long-term effects of the NS methodology on citizen involvement and empowerment. Four cities have decided to repeat the experience after the completion of their first NS by establishing a second project in another neighborhood. Two cities decided to halt their NS projects. Sixteen authorities (out of 17) have been providing financial, human and material resources for seniors: approximately 70% of each project is financed by the local authorities, which also provide meeting rooms (*community spaces*) and assist in communication efforts through mailings. A total of 120 local partners have been involved for thirteen years. The large number of projects demonstrates the broad success of the NS methodology.

Discussion

An external and retrospective evaluation was performed in 2013 to assess the NS methodology. The evaluation was launched by the Leenaards Foundation and conducted by a private research firm. The firm¹⁶ was selected following a call for proposals. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and

participant observations with stakeholders from seven projects over five months. Elderly individuals, institutional and association partners, authorities, community agents and members of the Leenaards Foundation were interviewed. Internal documents such as collaboration agreements, the NS methodology and selected indicators were analyzed. The important results of this evaluation are described in this section.

According to the precepts of action research, the NS methodology proposed *community spaces* as neutral spaces to facilitate cross-sectorial work between elder care institutions and the political administration, which led to new synergies and understandings and improved communication. The community agent establishes collaborations and develops projects with professionals specializing in youth, families and migrants. The external evaluation highlights that the associations and institutions were not always present and in some instances interacted with NS in a somewhat confrontational manner (Ettlin & Ruffin, 2013). The challenge is to create partnerships without creating conflicts among areas of competencies (ideological) or territory (physical) (Zwygart, 2008). Competencies and territorial issues were cited as the reasons that two of the 22 NS projects were discontinued. The first city decided to manage the community project on its own after the diagnostic step. The second decided to mandate the creation of an association that considered principles of urbanism. Both highlighted a lack of available financial resources, which is a poor justification for discontinuing an NS project. There were conflicts of interest in both cases. In the first case, for example, the authorities had already developed numerous community projects, and they regarded the NS project as an unwanted and unneeded duplication of effort. Since then, alternative arrangements to accommodate such partnerships have been developed: either the partners join the NS project or the NS project joins another, larger project (Plattet, 2005). In both cases, the posture of the community agent and of the all team is crucial. For example, the agent meets with partners, participates in their activities and proactively includes partners by providing them with an opportunity to present at the forums.

Theory can and should be generated through practice. Theory is useful insofar it is developed in the service of practice focused on achieving positive social change (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). There are multiple links between NS and theory and reflexivity. The existence of several *community spaces* makes it possible to share practical know-how and produce updates and theory that co-construct the NS methodology. The external assessment outlined *action research* training as a key aspect of the development of the NS methodology. Since 2011, the older people, professionals and authorities have reflected on their practice during a two-day annual training. Since 2014, a Journal and a website have facilitated communication and the production of know-how. These tools create space for practical exchange and the public recognition of the methodology. They also activate a key component of identity: the pride of being part of an NS community. Connections between universities and applied universities are constructed through courses provided by our team and trainees. Moreover, high schools ask us for advice on their

training programs. This publication is an opportunity to present and share our work with the scientific community.

The greatest lesson learned over the past several years might be very simple, but it is essential: take time to assure continuity. The challenge of the approach is to take the time to learn, become acquainted, share an identity and develop activities. The challenge is also to become, individually and collectively, the author and actor of a life project that will persist over time and evolve according to its own dynamics. For a young team, as we were, taking time was not always easy. However, we learned by doing, sometimes from the older people, that sometimes we were the ones holding the process back.

“This movement is however not circular: it evolves, develops and gradually achieves maturity. The gain of maturity is an additional step, a new door,” concluded a community agent.¹⁷

Conclusion

The NS methodology has received numerous awards. The Swiss territorial development institute recognized the program in 2008 as a good practice in sustainable development. The program has been supported continuously by the Leenaards Foundation since 2003 and by the Canton of Vaud since 2009 to encourage authorities to initiate projects. In response to the evaluation in the City of Gland, a French real estate company awarded the project the “Live together now and tomorrow” prize in 2011. The “Healthy City” prize was awarded to the City of Yverdon-les-Bains in 2013 and to the City of Prilly in 2015, which are both associated with NS.

In summary, the NS methodology was developed for and by older people of the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland. Generalization represents a challenge for the future of the NS methodology. Thus far, NS has demonstrated its relevance for the older people. Primarily due to the duration and schedule of the process, we found that it was less appropriate for younger age groups. Our position is to develop a specific methodology for each age group and improve the coordination among professionals.

The success of NS offers a promising perspective to extend the geographical and thematic scope of the methodology. For example, Pro Senectute Vaud professionals are adapting the method to other fields of application, such as urban projects and sustainable development. The methodology “Villages in Solidarity” was created in 2012 to reach older people in smaller towns. NS is already being applied more broadly in Switzerland. The external assessment revealed that simply applying the NS methodology as described in its documentation is not enough, and the formation of a new team of professionals is necessary to maintain the principles of adopting a community posture. The positive external evaluation and the promising

results of the NS methodology encourage its dissemination to action research practitioners from other countries.

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Notes

1. “Old” refers to individuals aged 75–84 years.
2. “Old old” refers to individuals aged 85+ years.
3. “Young old” refers to individuals aged 60/65 to 74 years.
4. References from the SCRIS (the statistics office in the Canton of Vaud) on 14 December 2015.
5. Cross-sectorial work is a process by which coordination among associations, institutions and public authorities or among services of the same political administration, for example, is facilitated.
6. “Quartiers Solidaires” is the original name of the methodology in Switzerland (Plattet & Zwygart, 2007/2015).
7. Pro Senectute Vaud is a nonprofit organisation, which contributes to the material, physical and moral well-being of retired persons in the canton of Vaud in Switzerland. The association counts on 90 employees, 500 volunteers and 395 elderly individuals involved. <http://www.vd.pro-senectute.ch>
8. The Leenaards Foundation supports social and public health projects, as well as scientific and cultural projects in Vaud and Geneva cantons. <http://www.leenaards.ch>
9. Loterie Romande, Swiss Society of Public Utility and the Hatt Bucher Foundation.
10. <http://www.quartiers-solidaires.ch/vaud/journal-quartiers-solidaires-314.html>
11. <http://www.quartiers-solidaires.ch>
12. Sixth NS journal, p. 1, 2015, http://www.quartiers-solidaires.ch/data/documents/Actualites/journal_N6-15-05-22.pdf (quotes are translated from French by the first author).
13. The term ‘neighborhood’ is used to refer to these units throughout the document.
14. The sixth NS journal, p. 1, 2015.
15. The community agent consults the lists held by the local authorities, churches, local development corporations and on the Internet.

16. Social design is a private research firm based in Bern (Ettlin & Ruffin, 2013).
17. The sixth NS journal, p. 1, 2015.

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Author biographies

Marion Zwygart has graduated from the University of Lausanne as psychosociologist and is working for Quartiers Solidaires since 2005.

Alain Plattet has graduated from the University of Lausanne as psychosociologist and is working for Quartiers Solidaires since 2003. He is the manager of the community social work unit.

Dario Spini is an Associate Professor in social science at the University of Lausanne.