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| Institution: University of Sheffield |
| Unit of Assessment: 22 - Social Work and Social Policy |
| Title of case study: International Impact on Policy and Strategy for Ageing |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study shows how Alan Walker's internationally acclaimed research on active ageing has led to policy and practice changes locally, nationally and internationally in response to what is widely recognised as the grand societal challenge of population ageing. Walker developed the concept of active ageing which has been adopted by national governments in Quebec and Northern Ireland, national charities and Sheffield City Council, leading in each case to significant policy change which is benefiting older people. As a result of this work Walker was awarded the inaugural ESRC Impact Champion prize in 2013</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Context</p> <p>All governments are engaged in planning and implementing responses to the challenge of ageing populations. In the developed world this process began in earnest in the 1980s, partly in response to the UN's first plan of action on ageing, while in less developed countries this has only recently started. In the UK the 'New Labour' Government named demographic change as one of its three 'grand challenges', with the EU giving it a similarly high status in, for example, the 2000 Lisbon Strategy and the current Horizon 2020 programme. But how precisely governments should respond to population ageing and, in particular, the longevity revolution, needs clarification. Walker's development of the concept of active ageing has been core to this process.</p> <p>The Research</p> <p>In 1998 Walker undertook an ESRC consultancy that led to the development of 'Growing Older' Programme (GO), 1998 – 2005 (£3.5m). This comprised 24 projects, all focused on the quality of life in old age. Walker designed and directed the programme, shaping its policy orientation and developing active ageing as a core concept [R1, R2]. In 2004, this concept was further developed in EF research on age barriers in employment (2004-6, £98,000). This project collected and analysed 160 case studies of organisations across Europe, including New Member States in Central and Eastern Europe. The resulting guide to good practice in age management offered a key resource for policy makers and human resources practitioners [R3]. In 2005 Walker was appointed director of the first multi-disciplinary ageing research programme - the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA). The largest of its kind ever mounted in the UK, this programme developed out of the earlier GO Programme and other parallel RCUK investments and was co-funded by five Research Councils (AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, 2005, £22m). It broke entirely new ground in understanding the ageing process and its implications for policy, practice and product development. Apart from designing the Programme's research agenda Walker's roles involved both research (eg. concept development, including active ageing and multi-disciplinarity) and non-academic user engagement.</p> <p>Key Researchers</p> <p>The GO Programme was a collaboration between 40 researchers and 30 universities while the NDA Programme involves 91 researchers and 67 universities. Walker directed both of them. The age barriers project was conducted jointly with Professor G. Naegele of Dortmund University.</p> <p>Originality and Significance</p> <p>The unique contributions of the portfolio of Walker's research underpinning this case study, apart from the scientific ones across a wide range of disciplines, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a new approach to ageing which embodies a life course perspective, a preventative |

Impact case study (REF3b)

orientation, a bottom-up empowering framework that is rooted in everyday later life priorities, and an inclusive account of active ageing which runs counter to the popular images of activity in later life and narrow productivist policy approaches.

- A sociological understanding of the institutional construction of age categories and age barriers within organisations which opens up manifold possibilities for both remedial and preventative action.
- An emerging new theory of ageing which combines insights from a wide range of disciplines – from biology to the humanities – and which rejects limited age determinism.
- A policy oriented conception of the life course which highlights opportunities for interventions to prevent the assumed ‘normal’ course of ageing, for example with regard to health and well-being and skill retention.

Two contributions are especially worthy of note. Firstly, EU and UK Government responses to population ageing are dominated by what can best be described as a ‘deficit’ model of ageing which portrays it as a problem, a fiscal burden and a drag on economic performance. For example, the EU’s approach to active ageing, as expressed in the Lisbon targets, is a matter of just working longer. The new conceptualisation of active ageing takes a much more positive approach in which ageing is life long and, therefore offers multiple possibilities for individual development with very different societal implications. NGOs representing older people have found this new concept of active ageing particularly helpful in creating counter arguments to the prevailing policy orientation. Second, although the WHO framework was a significant step, conceptually and practically, it was biased towards health and not located within a broader approach to, and theory of, ageing. In contrast Walker’s concept of active ageing, as well as taking a life course approach, reflects an innovative multi-disciplinary science of ageing (based in the NDA Programme and combining both biological and sociological insights); a comprehensive policy model which connects all of the relevant domains concerned with ageing; a preventative principle; an empowerment orientation; and is rooted in research among older people (under both GO and NDA Programmes) into what drives later life quality [R4, R5, R6]. The cumulative effect of this research has been to influence policy and practice internationally, nationally and locally.

3. References to the research**Research Outputs** (all by Walker as sole author unless stated)

- R1. ‘The ESRC Growing Older Programme’, Social Policy and Society, vol 1, No 2, 2002, 129-138.
- R2. ‘Extending Quality of Life; Policy Prescriptions from the Growing Older Programme’, Journal of Social Policy, vol 35, No 3, 2006, 437-54. doi: [10.1017/S004727940600986X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727940600986X)
- R3. G. Naegele & A. Walker, A Guide to Good Practice in Age Management, Dublin, EFILWC, 2006.
- R4. ‘A Strategy for Active Ageing’, International Social Security Review, vol 55, No 1, 2002, 121-140. doi: [10.1111/1468-246X.00118](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-246X.00118)
- R5. ‘Active Ageing in Employment: Its Meaning and Potential’, Asia-Pacific Review, vol 13, No 1, 2006, 78-95. doi: [10.1080/13439000600697621](https://doi.org/10.1080/13439000600697621)
- R6. ‘The Emergence and Application of Active Ageing in Europe’, Journal of Ageing and Social Policy, vol 21, 2009, 75-93. doi: [10.1007/978-3-531-92214-0_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92214-0_22)

4. Details of the impact

The new approach to active ageing developed by Walker has resonated strongly among a wide range of policy makers, especially those seeking alternatives to the deficit model of ageing. It has had a powerful impact on policy responses to demographic change internationally, nationally and locally resulting in significant policy change. It has also led to policy changes by national NGOs. In

some cases it has prompted a step-change in organisational approaches.

International Policy

From 1999 to 2002, Walker assisted the WHO in developing its Active Ageing Policy Framework and, according to the then Director of the WHO's Programme on Ageing, was 'one of the most influential and informed sources'. From 2000 to 2001, Walker was a member of the technical committee preparing the UN's second plan on ageing, the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). He was also engaged by the UN to draft the final document prior to submission to the General Assembly. The concept of active ageing is core to this document [S1].

In 2008, a collaboration began between the University of Sherbrooke in Quebec and seven municipalities. Funded by the provincial government, the action research project Age-friendly Cities in Quebec (AFC-QC) now involves well over 500 localities, covering more than 70 per cent of the Quebec population. According to the Directors of AFC-QC the new concept of active ageing developed by Walker is the theoretical basis and model for this collaboration. Community and government stakeholders use this model to frame their policy and practice responses to ageing. It is used explicitly and promoted on the Age-friendly Cities project website (www.madaquebec.ca/) which itself is the gateway to the 500 plus municipalities implementing this approach. Then, in spring 2012 the Quebec Government launched its first strategy on ageing, which also relies on Walker's model [S2].

National Policy

In 2004 Walker presented an early version of his model of active ageing and the research on which it is based to the Prime Minister, other ministers and advisors titled 'An Opportunity Society for All Ages'. A text based on his presentation formed the basis for the Labour Party's 'Mini-manifesto' on older people in the 2005 General Election and also fed into the national strategy on ageing Opportunity Age (DWP, 2005). A version was published in a report for the Department for Communities and Local Government [S3].

National charities/NGOs have adopted Walker's model, for example Age UK and the Third Age Employment Network (TAEN). The creation of Age UK in 2008, following the merger of Age Concern and Help the Aged, led to a long period of policy development and root and branch reappraisal of the existing strategies of the two previously separate organisations. The Age UK Research Director was invited to join the NDA Commissioning Panel as a user representative, and a strategic partnership was created between the NGO and the Programme in which the two would collaborate on knowledge transfer activities. In March 2012 Walker gave the opening keynote to the Age UK 'Agenda for Later Life' Conference and in October, he addressed the Trustees' away day. As a result of these inputs and considerable prior engagement the charity has re-assessed its approach on various levels and adopted Walker's model. In the words of the Charity Director General of Age UK: *'Professor Alan Walker's work and that of the NDA Programme has provided much of the conceptual framework that Age UK has adopted in its corporate strategy, research, policy development and service development. We have taken Professor Walker's concept of active ageing and applied it to all that we do. It has a huge impact and application at the Country's largest older people's charity'* [S4].

TAEN is a national NGO campaigning against age discrimination in employment. It has drawn extensively on Walker's model of active ageing. This impact includes campaigns, particularly around age management, professional guidance and lobbying. For example, according to TAEN Chief Executive: *'our introductory guide to age management for HR professionals, the many seminars and presentations as well as innumerable blogs, magazine articles and presentations at workshops in this country and abroad have drawn energy and inspiration from your work'* [S5]. Specific examples of research that has been particularly helpful to this NGO include the paradox between trends in retirement and life expectancy (Walker, 2002) and the case studies of age management strategies (Naegele and Walker, 2006). Again, in the words of TAEN Chief Executive: *'Our survey of the European chemical industry this year is a case in point, as is my own work on the Employment Experts Group of the Age Platform, our work in the ESF Age Network,*

Impact case study (REF3b)

other international collaborations, the information we have on our website resources section for employers and a recent paper for ACAS. All these and others are examples where the solid ground work you did continues to be relevant'. [S5].

The devolved government of Northern Ireland has adopted Walker's approach to active ageing. In June 2012 Walker was approached by the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland to provide advice on the development of a positive ageing strategy. He met with the advisory group on the development of the strategy (drawn from a wide range of interest groups in the ageing field) and with officials from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (who were charged with writing the strategy). He proposed a new approach based on active ageing and the protection of vulnerable older people. This was subsequently accepted and formed the core of the draft strategy. [S6].

After a period of public consultation the strategy was published in April 2013. According to the Commissioner, Walker's input '*led to a step change in the draft strategy content*'. He was also thanked by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness, in a written answer in the Northern Ireland Assembly: '*We have also benefited greatly from the advice of Alan Walker...and we would like to thank Professor Walker for his input to the development of the strategy, particularly on the importance of the Active Ageing agenda*' (AQO 2649/11-15, 23 October 2012).

Local Policy

Walker's research has had a direct impact upon local policy in South Yorkshire through his input into the new policy framework on ageing 'A City for ALL Ages – Making Sheffield a Great Place to Grow Old' [S7] which was officially adopted in September 2012. Walker's approach to active ageing is embedded throughout the policy document. The framework derives from a city-wide debate 'Rethinking Age in Sheffield' attended by all of the major stakeholders. Walker gave the opening plenary lecture 'Rethinking Ageing – Towards a City for ALL Ages' and then embarked on an intense process of policy development with the lead Council Officer. He was invited to chair the Implementation Board for the new framework. According to the Executive Director for Communities, SCC, '*Alan Walker's ageing research and, in particular, his work on active ageing, have provided the basis for Sheffield's ageing strategy...and, therefore will benefit thousands of older people in the city, focusing not only on health and well-being but also economic, transport, housing and wider issues*' [S7]. The Council Leader has also been highly complementary about the content of the framework and the planned approach. In achieving impact at various policy levels and in the practices of NGOs this research is also likely to have improved the lives and well-being of countless older people.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. A. Sidorenko & A. Walker, 'The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing: From Conceptualisation to Implementation', Ageing and Society, vol 24, No 1, 2004, 147-65.
- S2. The Co-director of AFC-QC will corroborate the key role of Walkers' research in the development of Quebec's ageing strategy
- S3. Walker, A., Barnes, M., Cox, K and Lessop, C., Social Exclusion of Older People : Future Trends and Policies, London, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006.
- S4. The previous Charity Director General of AgeUK will corroborate that their corporate strategy, research, policy development and service development are based upon research by Walker.
- S5. The Chief Executive of the Third Age Employment Network will corroborate the impact of Walkers' research on a wide range of the organisations' campaigns and related activities.
- S6. The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland will corroborate the high impact of Walkers' research on the Northern Ireland Positive Ageing Strategy.
- S7. The Executive Director for Communities Sheffield City Council will corroborate the high impact of Walkers' research on the city's ageing strategy.