

Political Perspective Essay  
**Active Aging in Sardinia**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 World Health Organization Perspective

Every person, regardless of their location, deserves the opportunity to live a long and healthy life. The quality of life during one's later years is a crucial aspect of this journey. "Healthy ageing", as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is *the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age*. It is a concept that places a central focus on enhancing the quality of life as individuals age. This focus on healthy ageing is also supported by WHO's previous "Active ageing" framework, developed in 2002 that states: "Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age". Both definitions emphasize the necessity of cross-sectoral action and the vital role that older individuals play as resources within their families, communities, and economies.

Population ageing is one of humanity's greatest triumphs. It is also one of our greatest challenges. As we enter into a new era, modernity and novel technology will result in increased economy and social challenges on every country. At the same time, older people, while more sensible to changes, remain a precious, often-ignored resource that makes an important contribution to the fabric of our societies. The World Health Organization argues that countries can afford to get old if governments, international organizations, and civil society embrace "active ageing" policies and programs that enhance the health, participation, and security of older citizens. The time to plan and to act is **now**. In all countries measures to help older people remain healthy and active are a necessity, not a luxury. These policies and programs should be based on the rights, needs, preferences, and capacities of older people. They also need to embrace a life course perspective that recognizes the important influence of earlier life experiences.

The environments in which we live significantly influence our health and well-being. These environments can either promote health or introduce risks, such as air pollution or violence. They also determine our access to essential services, such as healthcare and social support, and dictate the opportunities available to individuals as they age. The influence of these environments on the ageing population is particularly pronounced, given the substantial and rapid demographic growth. In 2019, there were one billion people aged 60 years and older worldwide. By 2030, this number is projected to increase to 1.4 billion, and it is expected to reach 2.1 billion by 2050. This demographic shift is unprecedented and will be especially prominent in developing countries.

This transformation in the global population's age composition necessitates substantial adaptations in various sectors, including health and social care, transportation, housing, and urban planning. Crafting age-friendly societies is an urgent imperative to address our changing demographics and ensure that older individuals can continue to contribute meaningfully to their communities. This essay explores the political perspective of promoting healthy ageing within the context of E-Health in Sardinia, Italy, a region facing these demographic challenges.

## 1.2 Age-Friendly World

An age-friendly world is a place that envisions a society where people of all ages can actively participate in community activities. It treats everyone with respect, regardless of their age, and fosters an environment that makes it easy to stay connected to loved ones and those around you. In an age-friendly world, there are mechanisms in place that help individuals stay healthy and active, even as they reach the oldest ages. Furthermore, it strives to support those who can no longer look after themselves to live with dignity and enjoyment.

Many cities and communities around the world are already taking active steps towards becoming more age-friendly. However, numerous barriers persist. Some of these barriers are physical, such as poorly designed buildings or a lack of accessible transportation that prevents older people from accessing the places they want to visit. But many barriers result from societal attitudes and perceptions about ageing, as well as the way older people are viewed and treated.

The following sections of this essay will delve into the specific situation in Sardinia, Italy, to explore the political perspective of promoting healthy ageing, addressing both the challenges and opportunities in creating a more age-friendly environment in this unique region.



Figure 1: Sardinia within Italy

## 2 Socio-Demographic Status of Sardinia

Sardinia (known as Sardegna in Italian and Sardigna in Sardinian) is the second-largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, following Sicily. Situated to the west of the Italian Peninsula, north of Tunisia, and in close proximity to the French island of Corsica, it holds the distinction of being one of Italy's 20 regions (Figure 1).

Sardinia enjoys a unique status among Italian regions, with a special statute granting it a degree of domestic autonomy. Its official title, “Autonomous Region of Sardinia,” reflects this autonomy and is bilingual in Italian and Sardinian. Administrative divisions within Sardinia consist of four provinces and a metropolitan city, with Cagliari serving as both the capital and the largest city in the region.

The linguistic diversity of Sardinia is a notable characteristic, with its indigenous language and Algherese Catalan recognized as two of Italy's officially recognized linguistic minorities, despite facing severe endangerment. Regional laws also encompass measures to safeguard these languages, as well as the island's other minority languages, including the Corsican-influenced Sassarese and Gallurese, and Tabarchino Ligurian.

Sardinia's breathtaking landscapes encompass a rich variety of ecosystems, from majestic mountains and expansive woodlands to open plains, sparsely inhabited regions, meandering streams, rugged coastlines, and extensive sandy beaches. Due to this diverse natural environment, Sardinia has earned the informal title of a “micro-continent.” In the modern era, numerous travelers and writers have lauded the untouched beauty of its landscapes, preserving echoes of the ancient Nuragic civilization.

Sardinia, the fourth-least populated region in Italy, boasts a unique demographic scenario with distinct historical underpinnings. While its population density stands at 69 individuals per square kilometer, just over a third of the national average, the distribution of inhabitants in Sardinia diverges from the coastal-centric pattern typical of many Italian regions. In contrast to the prevailing trend, urbanization has predominantly occurred in the subcoastal areas and toward the island's interior, with exceptions like the fortified cities of Cagliari, Alghero, Castelsardo, and a few others. This deviation can be traced back to historical factors, including repeated Saracen and Barbary raids during the Middle Ages and the early 19th century, rendering the coast unsafe. Additionally, pastoral activities thrived inland, and the coastal plains were characterized by swampy terrain, which was only definitively reclaimed in the 20th century. However, the rise of seaside tourism has reversed this pattern, with major urban centers now gravitating towards the coast, leaving the island's interior sparsely populated.

Sardinia is recognized for its unique demographic characteristics, as it exhibits the lowest total fertility rate in Italy, with only 1.087 births per woman, as well as the second-lowest birth rate. These demographic trends are further compounded by a rapidly aging population, with 18.7% of individuals in Sardinia aged over 65 in 2009. The issue of rural depopulation is particularly acute, with a staggering 71.4% of Sardinian villages experiencing a decline in population between 1991 and 2001. Over 30 of



Figure 2: Two elderly farmers who, despite their age, continue to work (Sebastian Piras Photography).

these settlements are at risk of becoming ghost towns, reflecting a significant challenge. If these trends persist, Sardinia is projected to have the second-lowest population density among European islands, following Iceland, by the year 2080.

However, despite these demographic challenges, Sardinia's overall population estimate has remained relatively stable, thanks in large part to a notable influx of immigrants. These newcomers primarily originate from mainland Italy but also come from Eastern Europe, particularly Romania, as well as Africa and Asia.

The average life expectancy in Sardinia is slightly over 82 years, with women enjoying an even higher life expectancy of 85 years, while men have a life expectancy of 79.7 years. Sardinia shares a distinctive demographic trait with the Japanese island of Okinawa—the highest rate of centenarians in the world, with 22 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants. In fact, Sardinia was the first location identified as a “Blue Zone,” characterized by an extraordinary concentration of centenarians and supercentenarians.

## 2.1 Sardinia’s Blue Zone: A Glimpse into Exceptional Longevity

A unique and captivating phenomenon unfolds in a kidney-shaped region of the island of Sardinia, where the **world’s first blue zone**<sup>1</sup> was identified. This distinctive cluster of villages became the subject of extensive research in 2004 when a team set out to investigate a rare genetic quirk found among its inhabitants. The M26 marker, associated with exceptional longevity, captured the attention of researchers. The geographic isolation of this area has contributed to the preservation of the residents’ genes, which have remained largely undiluted over the years. The result is remarkable: an astonishing tenfold increase in centenarians per capita compared to the United States.

What distinguishes this blue zone even more is its cultural and lifestyle isolation. Sardinians residing in this region have steadfastly adhered to a traditional and healthy way of life. They continue to hunt, fish, and harvest the food they consume, connecting them to the sources of their sustenance (Figure 2). Furthermore, they maintain strong, enduring bonds with friends and family throughout their lives, upholding the importance of social connections. Laughter and the sharing of wine are integral components of their daily existence.

The Sardinian Blue Zone serves as a living testament to the profound impact of genetics, environment, and culture on longevity. In the following sections, we will explore how Sardinia, with its unique demographic characteristics and cultural traditions, presents a fascinating backdrop for examining the political perspective of promoting healthy aging.

## 3 The Secrets of Healthy Aging in Sardinia

In the Blue zones we are having what we can call “Reverence for inclusion of elder generations”: unlike in the U.S (and in other parts of the world), where elderly people live separately in retirement or nursing homes, Sardinians don’t dismiss their elders. If anything, they promote them.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.bluezones.com/explorations/sardinia-italy/>

Let's dive deeper to uncover the underlying secrets behind this phenomenon. To achieve a longer and healthier life, model your lifestyle and surroundings after that of a Sardinian centenarian. Embracing these practices will cultivate habits conducive to enjoying vibrant health well into your centenary years.

### 3.1 Diet

The classic Sardinian diet is grounded in simplicity and emphasizes whole-grain bread, nourishing beans, an array of garden-fresh vegetables, an abundance of fruits, and, in certain parts of the island, the inclusion of mastic oil—a distinct local ingredient known for its potential health benefits. Sardinians also have a strong affinity for pecorino cheese, a dairy product crafted from the milk of grass-fed sheep. This cheese is particularly prized for its richness in omega-3 fatty acids, which are known for their positive impact on heart health and overall well-being. Interestingly, meat consumption in Sardinia is an infrequent occurrence, primarily reserved for special occasions and Sundays.

### 3.2 Put Family First

Central to the fabric of Sardinian society are the enduring and robust family values that prevail in the region. These values play a crucial role in ensuring that each family member receives the care and support they need throughout their lives. The powerful bonds within Sardinian families not only foster love and connection but also yield significant health benefits. Grandparents can provide love, childcare, financial help, wisdom, and expectations/motivation to perpetuate traditions and push children to succeed in their lives.

Research has shown that individuals residing in strong and harmonious families experience reduced rates of depression, suicide, and stress. The sense of belonging and solidarity within these families creates a protective buffer against mental health challenges and the pressures of modern life. In Sardinia, the unwavering commitment to family ties is a pillar of well-being and a testament to the profound impact of social connections on overall health and happiness.

### 3.3 Walking Like a Shepard

Sardinian shepherds, who traverse the rugged terrain daily, cover impressive distances on foot. Walking five miles a day or even more, as these shepherds do, offers a wealth of cardiovascular benefits, as one might anticipate. However, the advantages extend beyond heart health.

This daily walking regimen also exerts a positive influence on muscle and bone metabolism. Unlike the joint-pounding impact of marathon running or triathlons, walking like a Sardinian shepherd minimizes the stress on joints while still delivering a robust workout. The Sardinian tradition of walking not only promotes cardiovascular wellness but also contributes to strong, resilient muscles and bones. It's a simple yet effective approach to maintaining physical health and vitality throughout life.

### 3.4 Wine as a Source of Well-Being (in Moderation)

In Sardinia, wine is enjoyed in moderation, and it is an integral part of the local culture. Among the wines savored in this region, Cannonau wine stands out for its remarkable health benefits. It contains two to three times the level of artery-scrubbing flavonoids compared to other wines.

Sardinians have long appreciated the virtues of moderate wine consumption, and this practice may offer insights into the lower levels of stress observed, especially among men. In moderation, wine is not merely a beverage but a cherished tradition that can contribute to overall well-being and, when paired with a balanced lifestyle, potentially enhance the quality and longevity of life.

### 3.5 The Power of Laughter

In the Sardinian Blue Zone, the men are renowned for their sense of humor, and this element of their culture contributes to their well-being in surprising ways. Each afternoon, they come together in the streets, sharing moments of laughter, both with and at each other, as captured in Figure 3. This communal laughter is not just a social pastime; it carries significant health benefits.



Figure 3: Typical afternoon scenario inside a Blue Zone’s village.

Laughter has the power to reduce stress, and in this close-knit community, it serves as a potent stress-reliever. This daily laughter ritual plays a vital role in lowering stress levels, thereby reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease. The Sardinian practice of shared laughter exemplifies how the interplay between culture, social bonds, and humor can have a profound impact on the health and happiness of individuals in the Blue Zone.

### 3.6 A Guiness World Record: the Remote Sardinian Village with Eight Centenarians

Perdasdefogu is currently home to eight centenarians (four men and four women) in a population of 1740, is 13 times the national average. Ten more citizens could turn 100 within the next couple of years. Perdasdefogu is remote and most of the population elderly, but that doesn’t mean the town is not lively. It hosts several cultural events throughout the year, including a literary festival. Books are believed locally to have played a part in residents’ longevity.

In an interview with The Guardian<sup>2</sup>, Bonino Lai, 102 years old and currently serving as the president of the local football team (formerly an office worker), emphasized the enduring impact of simple activities on his well-being. He shared: “*Reading, walking, playing cards... the simple things are the best things.*”

Luisa Salaris, a demographics professor at the University of Cagliari, providing insight into this remarkable phenomenon, noted, “*There is, of course, the influence of fresh air and nutritious food, but I believe that one of the key factors contributing to their longevity is their approach to handling stress. Born a century ago, they certainly faced challenging times with periods of hunger and war. Yet, these are individuals who have demonstrated remarkable adaptability – when faced with a problem, they swiftly find solutions.*”

## 4 Current State of Aging Services and Technologies in Sardinia

Up until this point, our focus has centered on the traditional villages within the Blue Zones, where the need for technological modernization is often minimal. However, it’s worth acknowledging that Sardinia, as depicted in Figure 4, also encompasses urban areas where the established Blue Zone lifestyle may not align with contemporary assumptions. In such cases, when an older individual is unable or unwilling to embrace the Blue Zone lifestyle, what alternatives are available?

### 4.1 Age-friendly Topics

The WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide<sup>3</sup> highlights eight domains (Figure 5) that cities and communities can address to better adapt their structures and services to the needs of older people.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/08/if-you-talk-you-live-well-the-remote-sardinian-village-famed-for-longevity>

<sup>3</sup>[https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/43755/9789241547307\\_eng.pdf](https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/43755/9789241547307_eng.pdf)

Rank ↴	Commune	Province	Population <sup>[201]</sup> ↴	Density (inh./km <sup>2</sup> ) ↴
1st	Cagliari / Casteddu (Sardinian)	Metropolitan City of Cagliari	154,460	1,805
2nd	Sassari / Sassari (Sassarese) / Tatari (Sardinian)	Province of Sassari	127,525	230
3rd	Quartu Sant'Elena / Cuartu Sant'Aleni <sup>[202]</sup> (Sardinian)	Metropolitan City of Cagliari	71,125	719
4th	Olbia / Terranova (Sardinian) / Tarranoa (Gallurese)	Province of Sassari	59,368	146
5th	Alghero / L'Alguer (Catalan)	Province of Sassari	44,019	181



Figure 4: Main cities in Sardinia. In picture Cagliari, Alghero, Sassari, Nuoro, Oristano, Olbia

- **Outdoor Spaces and Buildings:** accessible, safe, pleasant, clean outdoor spaces are essential for older individuals who use mobility aids or require outdoor exercise and physical activity. In buildings, it is essential to include features such as elevators, rest areas, and accessible restrooms. Additionally, for public facilities, the provision of appropriate customer service is of utmost importance.
- **Transportation:** transportation systems should ensure affordability while offering consistent and reliable services. They should allow everyone to reach key destinations in clean age-friendly vehicles. Courteous and rule-abiding drivers, safety, comfortable conditions, well-located and well-maintained transport stops and stations, and helpful station staff complete the age-friendly transportation framework.
- **Housing:** housing plays a pivotal role in ensuring safety and overall well-being. Age-friendly housing should be affordable and equipped with essential services. It should be well-designed (ample space, appropriate materials, and adaptability) and modifications for older residents must be affordable and supported, with readily available equipment and financial assistance.
- **Social Participation:** age-friendly social participation should encompass convenient accessibility, affordability, a wide range of activities, accessible facilities, flexibility, and effective promotion.
- **Respect and Social Inclusion:** respect and social inclusion for older individuals should be ensured through consultative, affordable, inclusive services, responsive products, and well-trained staff. Community settings and events should be intergenerational, accommodating various age-specific needs. Older people should be actively involved in education, knowledge sharing, and community decision-making.
- **Civic Participation and Employment:** promoting civic participation and employment among older individuals involves offering a variety of volunteering options with proper infrastructure and support. Skills and interests should be matched to positions, and volunteers should receive support, including transportation assistance. Employee organizations and employers should encourage flexible work options, while training opportunities, such as retraining in new technologies, should be available.
- **Communication and Information:** promoting information and communication accessibility for older individuals entails establishing a universal communication system, ensuring reliable information distribution through community service centers, and prioritizing oral communication. Large, clear, and plain printed information should be available, and user-friendly automated communication and equipment are essential. Moreover, providing public access to computers and the Internet, along with tailored assistance, at minimal or no cost in public locations is vital for enhancing information accessibility.
- **Community and Health Services:** ensuring accessible and well-distributed community and health services is essential, with a focus on safety and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Coordination of services, respectful treatment, and minimal economic barriers are crucial. Additionally, emergency planning should consider the unique needs and capacities of older individuals.

## 4.2 Is Sardinia Age-friendly?

As demonstrated by the absence of Sardinian cities within the WHO's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities<sup>4</sup> (Figure 6), it becomes evident that Italy, and Sardinia in particular, has a substantial journey ahead in terms of modernization. The transition towards more age-friendly and technologically integrated urban environments remains an evolving challenge, especially when accommodating those who may not conform to the traditional Blue Zone lifestyle.

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<sup>4</sup><https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/minimalist/index.html?appid=66799d4ec039487e8ef8367f0254a99>



Figure 5: Age-friendly city topic areas

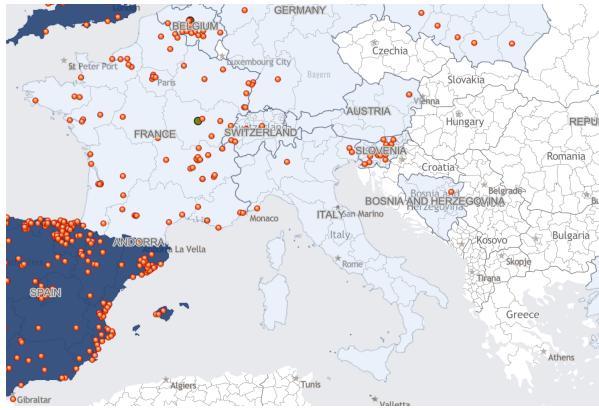


Figure 6: WHO's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities

The age-friendly subject in the context of Sardinian administration can be challenging due to various factors. While the geographical structures of the region may offer unique advantages in certain aspects of adapting to an aging population, the administrative landscape presents a blend of challenges. Some issues are comparatively easier to handle, while others present intricate difficulties. Sardinia, like many other regions, faces demographic changes with an increasing aging population. Adapting administrative practices to be age-friendly involves addressing complex issues related to healthcare, social services, infrastructure, and overall community well-being. Challenges may arise in restructuring services to cater to the specific needs of older individuals, ensuring accessibility, coordinating support systems, and promoting a cultural shift towards understanding and embracing the aging population's diverse requirements. Additionally, financial considerations, policy adjustments, and effective communication strategies need to be carefully implemented to create a truly age-friendly administrative environment. Balancing these considerations while aligning with global age-friendly principles can pose significant challenges for the administration in Sardinia.

#### 4.2.1 Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

The management of outdoor spaces is typically overseen by the municipalities (local administration), but both smaller and larger cities are well-suited for green spaces, with several parks and relaxing areas. Specifically, in my city (the largest one), Cagliari, they have a lot of this dedicated spaces as part of the “maintenance and execution project for green spaces” all in the area <sup>5</sup>, as depicted in Figure 7. Similar administrations exist in Sassari <sup>6</sup>, Oristano <sup>7</sup>, and other main cities.

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.comune.cagliari.it/portale/page/it/parchi\\_verde\\_e\\_gestione\\_faunistica?contentId=ORG9624](https://www.comune.cagliari.it/portale/page/it/parchi_verde_e_gestione_faunistica?contentId=ORG9624)

<sup>6</sup><https://www.comune.sassari.it/it/amministrazione/organizzazione/Ambiente-e-verde-pubblico/>

<sup>7</sup>(<https://www.comune.oristano.it/it/novita/news/Verde-Con-266-mila-Euro-saranno-completate-le-aree-verdi-di-Torangius-00001>

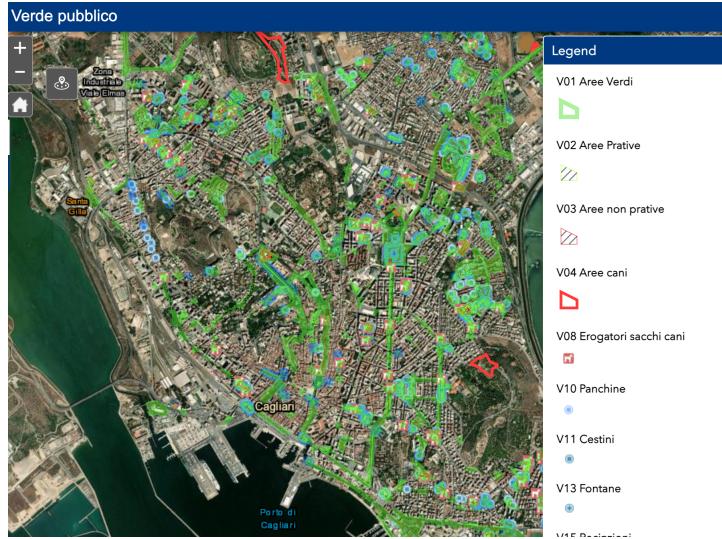


Figure 7: Green areas in Cagliari

Regarding accessible beaches, there are plenty available (though not all) as indicated in an unofficial resource<sup>8</sup>. This makes Sardinia an excellent choice for relaxation, especially for older individuals. As for accessible buildings, it was challenging to draw definitive conclusions with the available resources. Most buildings have elevators, but some older houses in the city centers, specifically, lack this feature. Generally, there is no specific ordinance or regulation on this matter from the Sardinian administration.

#### 4.2.2 Transportation

Public transportation in Sardinia primarily caters to tourists. Typically, older individuals are accompanied by their relatives when they need to travel, and many prefer leisurely walks when possible.

However, the main transportation companies *Trenitalia*<sup>9</sup>, *ARST* (Azienda Regionale Sarda Trasporti)<sup>10</sup>, along with *CTM* (Consorzio Trasporti e Mobilità)<sup>11</sup> and *ATP* (Azienda Trasporti Pubblici)<sup>12</sup>, are predominantly owned by public entities. They ensure that people with disabilities are catered to, providing specially equipped vehicles with ramps for easy access, comfortable seating, the option to request assistance in advance, and designated stops. Importantly, regional regulations mandate special discounts for individuals with disabilities<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4.2.3 Housing

Older individuals in Sardinia typically reside in historic homes, which unfortunately do not align with most of the WHO guidelines. The government has not taken any measures to enhance housing accessibility for the elderly. On a positive note, though not specifically targeted at older individuals, Italy offers a *Nuovo Superbonus* incentive<sup>14</sup> that allows for house renovations with a reimbursement of up to 110%. However, the process is still challenging, requiring a bank loan for those without available funds.

#### 4.2.4 Social-Civic Participation and Employment

While there is no specific regulation, Sardinia, including its urban areas, is a highly sociable region. It is commonplace to observe elderly individuals sitting on benches or in local bars engaging in conversations

<sup>8</sup><https://www.santeodoro.com/it/le-spiagge-della-sardegna-accessibili-dalle-persone-disabili.php>

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.trenitalia.com/it/treni\\_regionali/sardegna.html](https://www.trenitalia.com/it/treni_regionali/sardegna.html)

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.arst.sardegna.it/orari\\_e\\_autolinee/servizi\\_per\\_disabili.html](https://www.arst.sardegna.it/orari_e_autolinee/servizi_per_disabili.html)

<sup>11</sup><https://www.ctmcagliari.it/servizi-per-persone-con-disabilita/>

<sup>12</sup><https://atpsassari.it/>

<sup>13</sup>([https://www.arst.sardegna.it/orari\\_e\\_autolinee/servizi\\_per\\_disabili.html](https://www.arst.sardegna.it/orari_e_autolinee/servizi_per_disabili.html))

<sup>14</sup><https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/dossier/pdf/FI0002.pdf>

or playing cards.

*PASSI (Progressi delle Aziende Sanitarie per la Salute in Italia) d'Argento*<sup>15</sup> (in english: Silver Steps) is the Italian surveillance system dedicated to the elderly population aged 65 and over, complementing the framework provided by the PASSI surveillance system dedicated to adults. Within this project, the exploration of social participation delves into various interconnected facets, including economic engagement (participation in remunerated work), civil involvement (engagement in non-profit activities of economic and social value, like providing assistance or care to family, friends, or acquaintances, or through volunteering), social participation (attendance at social events), and cultural dimensions (such as participation in training courses for personal development). They provided some helpful statistics that can be used to understand the situation in Sardinia. The concept of the “anziano-risorsa” (elder-resource) formulated by the WHO in 1996, emanates from an optimistic perspective on individuals undergoing continuous development and capable of contributing to both personal and collective growth at every life stage. An elder-resource is recognized as someone actively involved in activities that uphold physical and mental well-being, enhance interpersonal relationships, and elevate overall life quality. This contribution not only fosters reduced dependence on others but also serves as an invaluable asset to the community. PASSI d'Argento systematically measures the contributions of individuals aged 65 and above to society within their familial and communal contexts. This evaluation (Work) outputs whether respondents have cared for or assisted relatives or friends, cohabiting or otherwise, in the preceding 12 months. In addition there are others that enjoy to participate in social events, including organized trips, stays, or training courses (Participation).

The Table 1 underscores the positive well-being of elderly individuals in Sardinia relative to other Italian regions, especially compared to those in the southern part of the country, particularly in the domains of Work and Participation. Remarkably, this favorable outcome is achieved without the implementation of specific, concrete policies dedicated to this demographic group at either the regional or municipal level. This observation prompts further interest into the unique socio-cultural dynamics and inherent community support structures that contribute to the positive outcomes experienced by elderly residents in Sardinia.

	elder-resource	work	participation
<b>Sardinia</b>	27.0	<b>13.7</b>	<b>27.7</b>
<b>Italy</b>	<b>27.2</b>	7.6	16.3

Table 1: Comparison between Sardinia and Italy

#### 4.2.5 Communication and Information

The contemporary mode of Communication and Information heavily relies on digital technologies, posing both importance and challenges in bridging older individuals with this evolving world. Notably, several projects in Sardinia are dedicated to achieving this goal. One such initiative is the *Ierfop* Onlus (European Institute for Research Training and Guidance) project titled “Using New Technologies: Computing and Internet for the Elderly”<sup>16</sup>. This project aims to empower elderly learners (aged over 65) residing or domiciled in Sardinia by providing them with the opportunity to follow lessons and acquire computer skills and navigate new technologies, covering topics such as devices, icons, the internet, smartphones, Office packages, and more.

Another initiative founded by the European Union is *Turntable*<sup>17</sup>. The project, led by engineer Antonio Solinas of *Abinsula* (Sardinian company), focuses on the development of technologies for users, including primary users (individuals over 65), secondary users (informal and formal caregivers, care organizations, social clubs, etc.), and tertiary users (mobile network operators and insurance companies). The project aims to involve these users in validating various applications on the platform, ensuring its suitability, widespread adoption, and long-term sustainability. The technologies provided by partners aim to engage the elderly in activities ranging from gardening to making healthy and conscious food

<sup>15</sup><https://www.epicentro.iss.it/passi-argento>

<sup>16</sup>[http://www.iєrfop.org/contributo-fondazione-di-sardegna-pratica-n-2022-0406-progetto-usare-le-nuove-tecnologie-informatica-e-internet-per-gli-anziani/](http://www.iерfop.org/contributo-fondazione-di-sardegna-pratica-n-2022-0406-progetto-usare-le-nuove-tecnologie-informatica-e-internet-per-gli-anziani/)

<sup>17</sup>[https://web.unica.it/unica/page/it/turntable\\_tecnologia\\_e\\_ricerca\\_scientifica\\_per\\_il\\_benessere\\_degli\\_anziani](https://web.unica.it/unica/page/it/turntable_tecnologia_e_ricerca_scientifica_per_il_benessere_degli_anziani)

choices. For instance Turntable developed an easy system for gardening, an AI-powered voice assistant, and a nutrition application, with plans to integrate them into a unified suite in the future.

While specific statistics measuring technological improvements in older individuals may be lacking, it is evident that we are making strides in the right direction. In addition to advancements in technology-based communication, important announcements continue to be disseminated through traditional channels such as television and billboards.

#### 4.2.6 Community and Health Services

The Sardinian region has a dedicated sub-department known as *Sardegnae Welfare*<sup>18</sup> with the stated aim of informing about regional, national, and European measures addressing all aspects of aging, with a focus on active aging and prevention.

The administration has allocated various funds for causes related to the elderly, including the main one, “Support measures for families caring for non-self-sufficient elderly individuals”. This project address the needs of non-self-sufficient individuals and their caregivers. This initiative includes financial support for facilitating the care of non-self-sufficient individuals within their families and formalize the work of caregivers. The program provides a yearly contribution of 3.000 euros to cover social security, insurance, regularization, and contractual expenses for family caregivers.

### 5 Sardinian Objectives for Active Aging

In November 2021, a report was issued as part of the “National Coordinated and Multilevel Coordination of Policies on Active Aging” project, presenting findings from consultations with administration representatives and stakeholders in civil society. The chapters of this document are based on the framework that has characterized the project in all the phases: the commitments outlined in the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (MIPAA)<sup>19</sup> and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs)<sup>20</sup> outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In delineating each commitment, they have explicitly outlined its purpose, recommended a set of actions to be undertaken, identified the current status of the Sardinian administration in relation to the specific matter, and put forth pertinent observations.

#### 5.1 Commitments

The commitments are the following:

1. Integrating aging considerations into all public policies is designed to align society and the economy with demographic shifts, fostering an inclusive society for people of all ages.
2. Fostering the complete integration and active participation of older individuals in society.
3. Enhancing collaboration and partnership with stakeholders.
4. Advocating for the combat against inequalities, poverty, and fostering fair and sustainable economic growth as a response to population aging.
5. Adjusting social protection systems to address the impacts of demographic changes and their socio-economic consequences.
6. Creating conditions for the labor market to address the economic and social impacts of population aging.
7. Promoting continuous learning throughout life and adapting the education system to address changing economic, social, and demographic conditions.
8. Advocating for initiatives that guarantee a high quality of life, independence, health, and well-being across all age groups.

<sup>18</sup><https://www.sardegnaewelfare.it/destinatari/anziani/>

<sup>19</sup><https://unece.org/population/ageing/mipaaris>

<sup>20</sup><https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

9. Emphasizing a gender-sensitive approach in a society facing demographic aging.
10. Providing assistance to families caring for the elderly and encouraging solidarity across different generations.
11. Building Sustainable Cities.
12. Help Elderly Individuals in Emergency Circumstances.
13. Collaborative efforts to advance the implementation of the Regional Strategy aligned with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA).
14. Enhancing Multilevel and Multisectoral Coordination for Active Ageing: Key Actions to Pursue.

## 5.2 Findings and Recommendations

Active ageing is a multifaceted topic requiring attention through public policies across diverse sectors. Presently, there is clear involvement from at least three regional sectors (social policies, education, and agriculture), but the main problem is that these sectors lack dialogue for shaping a unified and coordinated regional program. The prospect of coordination is deemed desirable in the near future to ensure alignment with other regional sectors. However, as detailed in the preceding sections, certain existing policies are effective and should be pursued.

Promoting specific behaviors is a crucial step, regardless of the commitment, as it plays a pivotal role in shaping societal norms and individual actions. This recommendation emphasizes the need for proactive measures such as targeted policy initiatives aimed at fostering the desired conduct. Additionally, implementing effective communication strategies becomes imperative, ensuring that information is disseminated clearly and persuasively to encourage the adoption of these behaviors. This multifaceted approach is essential for instigating positive change and creating a conducive environment for the desired outcomes across various commitments and policy domains.

Several areas for enhancement have been identified, each contributing to the overall improvement of the current system:

- Elder Support: Initiatives focused on providing comprehensive support for the elderly, encompassing healthcare, social services, and community engagement, are crucial for their well-being.
- Digital Expansion: The expansion of digital services and accessibility is recognized as a key improvement area, ensuring that older individuals can actively participate in the digital age, fostering connectivity and reducing potential social isolation.
- Intergenerational Exchange: Encouraging meaningful bidirectional interactions between different age groups is essential for fostering understanding, empathy, and shared experiences within the community.
- Safe and Useful Data Collection: Implementing secure and purposeful data collection methods ensures that information gathered is used responsibly, respecting privacy while contributing to informed decision-making processes.
- Education: Enhancing educational opportunities, especially those tailored to the needs of older individuals, is vital for continuous personal development and adaptation to evolving societal demands.
- Financial Support: Recognizing the importance of financial support mechanisms to alleviate economic challenges faced by older individuals, promoting financial security and stability in their later years.

It's noteworthy that a majority of commitments primarily established guidelines and recommendations, with only a limited subset incorporating concrete plans for future reforms. The emphasis has predominantly been on providing frameworks and suggestions rather than specifying detailed strategies due to difficulties of regional administration.

## 6 Conclusions

Sardinia faces a significant journey ahead, and the Region's influence may have limited power in making substantial changes.

Throughout this essay, numerous positive aspects emerged, shedding light on the demographic landscape and delving into the intriguing phenomenon of the Blue Zone. Discovering previously unknown initiatives supporting healthy aging was surprising and a comprehensive examination of age-friendly city parameters revealed that, for certain aspects, Sardinia is not positioned so bad.

While acknowledging the challenges ahead, it's essential to recognize that positive steps have been taken in the right direction, partly attributed to the support of the European Union.

In my perspective, as a young individual, a good approach is to prioritize self-care and strive to age as healthily as possible. Essentially, adhering to the principles of the Blue Zone during our youth and maintaining these practices as we age is key. An old Sardinian proverb states:

*Sos males de sa iuventude bessint in sa bezzea.*

The mistakes of youth appear in old age.

Whether Sardinia achieves the status of an age-friendly city remains uncertain, but personally, I find its appeal compelling enough to consider it a future retirement destination.