



universität
wien

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

Anton Amann,
Vienna University

SIZE – Final Workshop
Conference Day
Brussels, March 23rd, 2006

life quality
of senior citizens

size

in relation to
mobility conditions



universität
wien

size

State of the Art

In a research project the “state of the art” is a representation or an outline of the **given stage of development** in a defined research field. Therefore, it requires the search for theories/concepts, methods, and empirical findings, and it needs a description as coherent as possible. Accordingly, the materials the state-of-the-art-report is centred around have been gathered by the leading research question:

"What is the current state of scientific discussion about mobility, life quality, and ageing in the relevant countries?"

State of the Art

The internal systematics of gathering the materials and presenting the results were developed according to the main topics which have been laid down in the research proposal ("Technical Annex"):

- How do people cope with the limitations of old age?
- What are the positive sides of today's situation, from their own point of view? What should be kept as it is?
- Which measures have the potential, and which measures are necessary, to improve their situation?
- Would these measures be feasible and realistic?
- What prevents measures that, at least in words, are considered useful either by senior citizens, or by decision makers and experts, or by both groups, from being implemented?

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

State of the Art

However, "Life Quality of Senior Citizens in Relation to Mobility Conditions" marks a research field of considerable heterogeneity.

These differences are due

- to competing concepts and theories of life quality and mobility stemming from psychology, sociology, or engineering sciences,
 - to quite different degrees of empirical representation of the concepts
- as well as
- to different scientific traditions of looking at the problems under discussion.

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

State of the Art

Such limitations are common within international (comparative) research and do not constitute a special setting which puts SIZE into a peculiar situation.

However, **linking quality of life and mobility to old age** does it.

As a matter of fact many of the general concepts, which have been developed in mobility and life quality research, are not well adapted to questions of ageing.

As a consequence, the report is mirroring **quite distinctive levels and different ranges of relevant research in the different countries**, testifying, thereby, that in some countries the empirical evidence on the research question is rather weak. That situation can be traced back to several conditions:

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

State of the Art

- **Disciplinary research** on Ageing shows remarkable differences between the countries; in some of them technical and science research dominate, in others social sciences, for instance psychology, or urban planning have gained more importance.
- The **lack of a political-economical perspective** is a general one leaving the researchers with rather poor knowledge about the relations between living conditions of the older adults, social policies, and economic development.
- Research of the **development of personal identity in relation to life quality and mobility** does practically not exist.

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

State of the Art

Seen from that point of view the state-of-the-art-report is itself a testimony for the necessity to carry out projects of the character SIZE has been given from the very beginning.

Frame of Reference

The **Frame of Reference** is a means to circumscribe systematically

- the **basic dimensions** and **categories**
- and the **relations between them** inherent in the materials of the project.

It is, in that understanding, **not a summary of the main results** but

- a **frame** within which most of the topics can be placed
- and **related to each other** systematically for purposes of interpretation.

Frame of Reference

Therefore, it is of an abstract character, on a so called **meta-level**.

Since some research areas are investigated to a fuller extent (e.g. the perception and behaviour of older adults) than others (e.g. the role and functioning of organisations and institutions dealing with traffic affairs)

it has been necessary to follow a **twofold strategy**:

- Where **sufficient knowledge** has been at hand it was possible to define categories and to suggest their usage in treating problems.
- Where **knowledge has been scattered or even lacking** only factors or dimensions for further reflection could be formulated.

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference

The function of the frame of reference is

- to **guide the interpretation** of the whole research material,
- to **help formulating hypotheses**, and, thereby,
- to reach a little bit **more of codification of knowledge** in the field.

Its function has not been to give advice to single research activities within the project SIZE.

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference

The methodology developed here should have three major functions:

- It should support us in the **systematic organisation of our existing knowledge**. It can do so by supporting the formulation of hypotheses about existing facts and insights.
- It should be a **general guide to the ongoing research**. If research questions are formulated in terms of the main categories of the methodology the resulting propositions can in turn contribute toward a fuller and revised formulation of what is known already.
- The methodology is a **point of departure for specialised investigation** in the field under observation.

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference

In this frame the point of reference of all elaborations is **the relation between the individual and the social and physical environment**.

- The **individual** is an acting unit who can be looked at either as an individual actor or as a collective of actors.
- The **social environment** is represented in the form of socio-cultural institutions and societal structures.
- The **physical environment** is represented in material and technical conditions inherent to a scientific-technical civilization.

Thus, each individual and each collective (group) has to be seen within its actual and longed-for relations with other actors or groups, institutions, and material-technical conditions.

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference**A. The Side of the Individual**

On the side of the individual there are basic categories to be taken into consideration when

- existing knowledge has to be organized,
- research procedures are to be developed,
- and specialized investigations have to be designed.

State of the Art & Frame of Reference.

Frame of Reference**A. The Side of the Individual - Basic categories:**

- Orientations of individuals
- Competences
- Needs
- Communication
- Understanding
- Mobility
- Well-being
- Fear and anxiety
- Learning and compensation

State of the Art & Frame of Reference.

Frame of Reference

B. The Side of the Environment

The side of the environment is to be conceived in a twofold way: either it is a **material-technical** or a **social environment**.

The difference is crucial because only the social environment can **act, have intentions or can change conditions**, the material-technical environment is only **subject to human action**.

In order to understand the complex processes of mobility, within which these "objects" are only elements of a system, it is necessary to **combine** the material-technical conditions and the perception and behaviour of people. That combination leads to different "**mobility-strategies**" which could be coined:

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference

Mobility-Strategies (1/2)

Safety: is understood as safeguard from traffic accidents and security in the use of public space

Accessibility: the full reach and use of places, services, facilities, and modes of means of motion

Comfort: is a combination of *physical well-being* related to the conditions in immediate reach which are relevant for sensual experience, and *psychic well-being* related to the quality of the mobility processes

State of the Art & Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference

Mobility-Strategies (2/2)

Attractiveness: the extent and quality of appeal of outdoor spaces, related on the one side to their capability of hosting or starting activities, and on the other side to social involvement.

Intermodality: the integration and interchangeability of different modes and means of mobility and transport.

Technological Fit: the adaptation of the material-technical environment to standards of new and successful developments including the provision of real time information. (Technological advances have meant that it is now possible to relay real time information via the Internet, SMS and WAP telephones.)