

THE LETS-CARE DISSEMINATION APPOINTMENTS

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[ESPAnet Austria 7. Forschungskonferenz Sozialpolitik](#), University of Innsbruck (Austria), 24-25 April 2025

Bernhard Weicht (UIBK), Lisa Waldenburger (UIBK): **“AI and the ‘Problem’ of Ageing – addressing or shaping problem constructions?”**

Austria, as most governments and policy makers in Europe, has for some time debated the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the context of ageing and long-term care (LTC). While the potential of AI in the context of LTC has been praised in political contexts, by developers or in public media, it often remains unclear which problems should actually be addressed. The issues have often been discussed in terms of how AI could turn LTC into a less labour-intensive sector, namely as a sector in which some human labour can be replaced by AI, thereby reducing the sector’s dependency on high-intensity labour and reduce costs. Additionally, questions of safety, support, communication, surveillance and even comfort have been addressed in proposals and imaginations for the inclusion of AI in care practices. AI in its various manifestations, however, is often framed as a problem-solution to unidentified problems. This paper adopts a ‘problem framing’ approach (utilising Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to Be” approach) in order to investigate how those problems are framed, constructed and shaped, for which AI could be a solution. The WPR approach is utilised with a document analysis of key texts. These involve policy proposals, national research initiatives, public policy texts, and other materials that advertise the implementation of AI solutions to questions of ageing and care. In this context, the paper explores how different key actors represent the problem of ageing, long-term care and the possible inclusion of AI in the sector. It is argued that scrutinising how and by whom the ‘problem’ of ‘ageing’ and ‘AI’ is represented sheds important light on what kind of solution is envisaged. The main aim lies in understanding the ways different key actors, such as policymakers, AI innovators and other participants in public discourses frame the ‘problem’ of ageing and AI’s role in addressing these challenges.

Lisa Waldenburger (UIBK), Bernhard Weicht (UIBK): **“The mediation of foreign live-in carers in Austria - can a state-funded, non-profit agency improve the very precarious working conditions?”**

The care crisis and the high social value placed on care at home also encourage the employment of migrant workers in private households in Austria. In total, more than 60,000 people work as 24-hour caregivers in private households, mainly from Romania and Slovakia. Approximately 900 registered agencies in Austria act as organisational intermediaries between caring families and carers; most of these intermediaries can be classified as profit-oriented. These agencies are repeatedly criticised for their lack of competence in the matching process and for exploiting the care workers. In this regard, the federal state of Vorarlberg has assumed a special role by establishing a state placement agency (in 2007), which is established as a non-profit organization and also acts as a contact point for the caregivers and assumes a central information and training function. This model, which is often positively highlighted throughout Austria, covers around 45% of the demand for 24-hour care in Vorarlberg and is optimally linked to the mobile care and assistance services. The aim is not only to improve the quality of care, but also to better define the tasks and rights of caregivers. The contribution focuses on the situation of 24-hour caregivers in Austria and the “care pool” as a model project of state support for organisational mediation. On the basis of existing ethnographic research, we want to show their practical work and discuss possible improvements for the precarious situation of live-in caregivers in Austria.

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[2025 RSA Annual Conference: Navigating Regional Transformation,](#)

University of Porto (Portugal), 5 May 2025

Sabya van Elswijk (University of Amsterdam): **“Ageing in a community-oriented setting: who takes care of who? An ethnographic approach on regional collaboration”**

This study explores the dynamics of aging in place within the small-scale community of Warmenhuizen, focusing on the ‘Beautiful Life’ community project. This initiative, part of the regional ‘From Aging to Renewal’ network, aims to create an environment where community members can live longer, healthier, and more enjoyable lives. The research employs ethnographic methods, including interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, to understand the community experiences of both residents and professionals involved in the project. The Beautiful Life project is a collaborative effort involving local community residents, the Village Council, and various organizations such as housing corporations, municipalities, welfare services, and healthcare providers. This community collaboration aims to address the challenges of aging in place by integrating formal and informal care, promoting autonomy, and supporting aging at home within the community. The study investigates the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by the community project, the problems it aims to solve, and the factors contributing to its success. The research also examines the role of regional collaboration in shaping the community project's outcomes. By attending community meetings and analyzing policy documents, the study provides insights into how subregional networks guide and support local community initiatives. The findings highlight the importance of cooperation between different community participants and the impact of participatory research in translating observations into practical community solutions. This ethnographic approach offers a comprehensive understanding of how small-scale communities can effectively support aging in place through regional collaboration. The study's insights contribute to the broader discourse on long-term care and provide valuable lessons for policymakers and practitioners aiming to enhance the well-being of older adults in similar community contexts across Europe.

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[7th Transforming Care Conference](#), University of Helsinki (Finland), 25-27 June 2025

The LeTs-Care Symposia

Bernhard Weicht (UIBK)

Multiple voices call for developing integrated, empowering and inclusive LTC policies and interventions to secure the right to affordable and good quality LTC services for all persons, as stated in Principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The recent EU Care Strategy establishes furthermore the aim that high-quality care services should benefit the wellbeing, health and social inclusion of people in need of care and in/formal caregivers, while providing good employment opportunities and making the care system more efficient and sustainable through increased fiscal revenues and social contributions. These aims and principles are fostering new debates within national LTC systems with ideas travelling and practices diffusing in search of promising ways to tackle the main challenges while safeguarding and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. Yet, the formulation of EU policies and guidelines is broad and might be open to diverse interpretations and definitions of LTC-related rights.

Diversity of trajectories and timing of policy developments are likely to amend otherwise consensually agreed terms and ideas. This can be challenging for meeting policy goals under a common EU strategy. Therefore, we start from the polysemic nature of policy ideas and terms and discuss the meanings of taken-for-granted LTC concepts that frame how different stakeholders deal with LTC challenges. We take a comparative, cross-national approach and investigate how these variations and differentiations might relate to the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The proposed symposia will share work developed by the Horizon Europe Consortium LeTs-Care – Learning from Long-Term care practices for the EU Care strategy – and present the results of research carried out in seven countries (Italy, Denmark, The Netherlands, Austria, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain) on five different thematic areas related to meanings of needs and quality of care, care work and quality of care work, (in)equalities in LTC, and sustainability of LTC. The symposium will gather five presentations, each tackling one of the afore-mentioned thematic areas of meanings. Research findings are based on extensive literature reviews, policy analyses and interviews with key-stakeholders held in all seven countries, following a common methodological framework. The discussion will not only highlight the relevance of understanding what ideas mean for different stakeholders and in different contexts, but it will also reflect on how different meanings involve different levels of integration of a human-rights based approach to LTC provision.

Papers:

- *“‘Good care’ and good care jobs. A comparison of 7 EU countries”, Kristine Krause and Jeanette Pols, University of Amsterdam, Barbara Da Roit, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice (UNIVE)*
- *“Priorities in LTC needs assessment in different European countries”, Virginija Poskūte, University of Management and Economics (ISM)*
- *“Human rights and the sustainability of LTC: an analysis of (conflictive) meanings and challenges in seven EU countries”, Roberta Perna, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC)*
- *“Inequalities in LTC in seven EU countries: does human rights’ approach make a difference? Alexandra Lopes, University of Porto (UPORTO)*

Discussant: Bent Greve, Roskilde University (RUC)

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Barbara Da Roit (UNIVE), Pamela Pasion (UNIVE), (with) Iris Boot; Sebastian Schmidt; Alisa Bader; Eckhard Nagel; Bert Vrijhoef: **“Integrated, person-centred and innovative long-term care: the questions we need to answer”**

This paper is the result of the joint work of the three HORIZON Europe projects financed under the cluster “Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society”

Across European countries, long-term care (LTC) is generally constituted by a complex set of measures and interventions that cut across diverse policy with different regulations, resources and organisation. Separate need assessment rules and procedures, funding, modes and places of delivery imply that people in need of care often need to identify, reach out to and combine different sources of support. These complexities may contribute to overlapping as well as unmet needs, inequalities, inefficient use of resources, and lower-than-desired quality of care and wellbeing. International organisations and expert networks have pointed to the need to develop “integrated” and “persons-centred” LTC models, to increase care accessibility and quality, users’ autonomy and self-determination, and formal and informal caregivers’ quality of (working) life. Yet, how these models work out in practice remains uncertain, because they originate from different policy fields and disciplinary approaches, and their concrete design, implementation, and evaluation is context specific. This paper, stemming from the collaboration among three large Horizon Europe-funded projects (BUILD, Laurel, LeTs-Care) discusses the translations and applications of “integrated” and “persons-centred” LTC in diverse individual circumstance and institutional, disciplinary and policy contexts as a necessary step to understand their potential.

Based on the analysis of policy documents, grey and scientific literature, surveys and interviews, the paper first traces the founding ideas, history, multi-disciplinary debates and policy expectations around “integrated” and “persons-centred” models. Subsequently, it reviews and discusses what is known about their design and implementation, the questions that remain open, and the methodological challenges ahead.

Lisa Waldenburger (UIBK), Bernhard Weicht (UIBK): **“The mediation of foreign live-in carers in Austria - can a state-funded, non-profit agency improve the very precarious working conditions?”**

The care crisis and the high social value placed on care at home also encourage the employment of migrant workers in private households in Austria. In total, more than 60,000 people work as 24-hour caregivers in private households, mainly from Romania and Slovakia.

Approximately 900 registered agencies in Austria act as organisational intermediaries between caring families and carers; most of these intermediaries can be classified as profit-oriented. These agencies are repeatedly criticised for their lack of competence in the matching process and for exploiting the care workers. In this regard, the federal state of Vorarlberg has assumed a special role by establishing a state placement agency (in 2007), which is established as a non-profit organization and also acts as a contact point for the caregivers and assumes a central information and training function. This model, which is often positively highlighted throughout Austria, covers around 45% of the demand for 24-hour care in Vorarlberg and is optimally linked to the mobile care and assistance services. The aim is not only to improve the quality of care, but also to better define the tasks and rights of caregivers.

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Bernhard Weicht (UIBK), Lisa Waldenburger (UIBK): **“The “problem” of ageing – addressing or shaping problem constructions?”**

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[5th International Sociological Association Forum of Sociology](#), Rabat (Morocco), 6-11 July 2025

Barbara Da Roit (UNIVE), Bernhard Weicht (UIBK): **“The Cheaper Option: How, Why and for Whom? The Politics of Deinstitutionalization in the Field of Long-Term Care”**

Since the 1990s, and even more so after the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a growing policy emphasis on the deinstitutionalization of older people with long-term care (LTC) needs, i.e. the reduction of services supplied in residential settings as opposed to those provided in the community or in the home of older people. This trend is backed by a set of converging ideas: the need to ensure social inclusion, the preferences of older people themselves and their family members, lower costs of home and community care as opposed to residential care services. The higher cost of residential care has been a particularly powerful argument in supporting cutbacks in the number of beds in nursing homes or in preventing their expansion across countries, also in relation to the overall need to contain public expenditure within LTC policies. Yet, social policy scholars have seriously challenged the idea that home care services are cheaper than residential care services on different grounds.

Based on a review and analysis of the literature, of policy documents, of research output and policy briefs across seven EU countries, the paper highlights the standpoint on the topic across different sets of actors –e.g. researchers, expert communities, policy makers at the European, national and regional level, representative of older people and their family members, representative of care provider organizations and of employees’ organizations – its knowledge basis and its modes of circulation. In doing so, the paper offers multiple contributions. It provides a complex understanding of the meaning of costs and whether different options are “cheaper” in relation to LTC and beyond. It sheds light on the prevailing views and the factors that helped them emerging as dominant and on the possible reasons for the marginalization of alternative views. Finally, it problematizes the relationship between policy-oriented research and policy discourses and policy making.

Barbara Da Roit (UNIVE), Pamela Pasion (UNIVE): **“The politics of institutional ethnography of long-term care practices. Methodological reflections based on a multi-sited European study”**

The paper reflects on the tensions between the goals, epistemology and methodology of institutional ethnography of long-term care practices and the politically-loaded field of long-term care itself, in a context where research is increasingly oriented by policy-driven projects and funding.

Institutional ethnography is well suited to understand how practices, policies, organizations within the field of long-term care for older people operate, function, reflect and produce tensions, inequalities and (re)arrangements of the social organization of care. Namely, the approach “examines and explores society and the social from where people are in the local actualities” and “can bring them to light and make them available to people” (Smith, p.41).

At the same time, the discovery work of institutional ethnography is not neutral with respect to the actual people that are part of it, the very participants, the stakeholders of the very power relations and that are being unveiled – e.g. persons with chronic illness, paid and unpaid care workers, managers of care organizations, policy makers at different territorial levels. This is particularly the case within a field that is strongly affected by often hidden or non-recognised power relations, interests and struggles over resources. And it is even more important in a field where research funding is increasingly distributed based on policy-oriented projects, which are expected to produce policy recommendations.

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The paper's methodological discussion and contribution is based on the first steps and findings of cross-national EU-funded research project - LeTs-Care – which encompasses a multi-sited cross-national ethnography of practices of long-term care for older people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. It discussed the tensions emerging from the selection of the fields and its opening, the relationship between the researchers and the actors within and beyond as well, the communication of the objectives and methods of inquiry, the exchanges on the results.

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[XIII Portuguese Congress of Sociology: Democracies on trial: risks and uncertainties](#), University of Azores (Portugal), 8-11 July 2025

Alexandra Lopes (UPORTO), Rute Lemos (UPORTO): **“What is quality in social care for older people? Dualities and fragments of a fuzzy concept”**

Based on the work carried out as part of the LeTs-Care project - Learning from long-Term Care practices for the European care strategy, this communication reflects on the meanings of quality in the social care sector for older people in situations of dependency in Portugal. The discussion is based on mapping these meanings in scientific literature, legislation and the discourses of stakeholders operating in the sector. We analyzed 158 references published in the last 10 years, all the legislation that regulates the care sector and the discourses obtained from 15 interviews with various stakeholders. The analysis of the empirical evidence allows us to identify some structuring dualities in the way the concept of quality is understood: technical quality vs. experienced quality; quality as a result vs. quality as satisfaction. In addition, there are fragmented elements that contribute to a vague definition without materiality, especially the association of quality with concepts such as person-centered care or freedom of choice. In addition to presenting the map of meanings identified in association with the concept of quality, the paper will also discuss the implications of these meanings for responding to the challenge of quality in the social care sector for older people in Portugal.

Participants from the LeTs-Care Consortium: **Alexandra Lopes** (UPORTO), **Rute Lemos** (UPORTO) and **Hélder Monteiro** (SCMP)

Contribution: **“Telecare as a strategy to prevent social exclusion in old age: the case of the Chave de Afetos program”**

As part of the public approach to the challenges of an ageing population, the social isolation of older people is a growing concern. The breakdown of social networks and interactions observed in certain life trajectories in old age results in experiences of exclusion from life in society. Consequently, this phenomenon not only has a negative impact on the physical and psychological well-being of this social group, but also accentuates conditions of social vulnerability. It is therefore important to think about policy response strategies that can combat social isolation, its effects and promote a more dignified and connected life in old age. Based on a telecare programme, the aim is to

discuss the scope of intervention models for isolated and socially vulnerable elderly people that do not involve institutionalization and which have great potential for “connecting” people to the community and its support systems. The “Chave de Afetos” telecare program promoted by Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto, and implemented in some municipalities in the Porto Metropolitan Area (Paredes, Espinho, Gaia, Gondomar, Porto, Matosinhos, Valongo, Vila do Conde and Maia) has 1032 active beneficiaries. This system, based on remote communication technologies, offers continuous support to older adults, facilitating contact with family members, volunteers, support technicians, caregivers and emergency services. Based on an analysis of the data on the programme's beneficiaries contained in the service's database, which includes a sociodemographic profile and answers to impact assessment and satisfaction questionnaires, we will discuss, in particular, the coexistence of anticipated material impacts on the quality of life of the service's users and, specifically, on maintaining their autonomy and independence, with largely unanticipated externalities which translate into improvements in the emotional and social ties developed between the beneficiaries and their carers, family members and the community.