Summary of the project

Aging and international migration pose enormous challenges to Europe. Healthy and active aging, in other words aging well, depends on individual, network, sociocultural, economic, and contextual factors. Results on the determinants of aging well for non-migrants cannot be easily transferred to individuals with migration experience. Therefore, this project addresses the question of what it means for different groups of migrants in Europe to be old and age well, specifically for first-generation retired labor migrants from Italy and Turkey living in Germany and the Netherlands and for retirement migrants from Germany and the Netherlands living in Italy and Turkey. By considering these diverse groups of migrants we are able to examine variations in the relationship of aging well and social networks due to origin, destination, and temporal differences in the personal migration history. We adopt the life course perspective and analyze change over time through the biographies and social relationships of older migrants.

Our mixed methods research design is highly innovative in that it not only integrates quantitative and qualitative methods with a sequential approach, but also develops an intervention to enhance aging well among migrants and uses visual sociology methods to document the project. We have four main objectives. First, we investigate the relationship between individual well-being and personal networks among older migrants across Europe from a quantitative perspective using multilevel and longitudinal analyses of existing surveys (SHARE, SOEP, LISS, GPRIS). Here, we focus on the social and structural determinants and consequences of aging for different migrants in Europe and cross–national, inter- and intracultural variation in the social network–well-being nexus. Second, we study the subjective meanings of aging and aging well from the perspective of older mobile Europeans using qualitative research methods. We will conduct walking interviews with eight different migrant groups in order to identify migrants' needs, resources, and strategies to cope with disadvantages, and how this is related to social inequalities. With a sequential combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, we are able to discover not only how migrants' social networks and well-being are interrelated, but also the subjective meanings of these processes. Third, to foster healthy and active aging, we will design a culturally sensitive intervention, which we will pilot with a group of Turkish labor migrants of advanced age in Germany, specifically the Mannheim-Ludwigshafen region. A health intervention targeting this population will be the first of its kind. Fourth, we will produce short video documentaries that depict the aging experiences of all eight migrant groups in the four country contexts to raise awareness of aging among the academic and non-academic public.

The main expected outcome is an in-depth understanding and a comparative perspective of the macro-level socio structural determinants of aging well of migrants, the micro-level meanings, and the associated inequalities in Europe. Our project will make an important contribution to the scientific understanding of aging well with respect to health, personal networks, and physical environments of different groups of older migrants and will generate knowledge and practical tools for decision-makers and experts at different policy levels in Europe who are concerned with the provision of welfare and (health) care for older migrants in their countries and communities.