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LATER LIFE IN THE VILLAGE  
Services for the Elderly on Farms  
**VivAge**<sub>[VIVeS]</sub>

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## Summary

The need of elder people especially in small villages might be covered by offering services on farms creating profits on both sides: the opportunity for an additional income for farmers, and a lively surrounding including certain effects of horticultural or animal-assisted therapies for the elderly. As part of the project VivAge an explorative study was conducted to get a first overview on possibilities and obstacles in the connection of these two separated branches. Results show that especially housing offers are demanded and economical while there are certain difficulties and different solutions to establish those on farms. The quality of services for the elderly, however, seems to depend less on an agricultural environment than on integration in everyday life and the kind of social contacts. Nevertheless, farms have good chances to offer these aspects. Moreover, especially animals seem to be useful in interactions with dementia patients.

## Keywords

Rural Sociology, Elderly, Green Care, Diversification

## 1 Introduction

The need for social contacts and help in everyday life often increases with age (cf. Amann 2014), yet appropriate services for the elderly are found less in small villages while family help due to modernism is decreasing and concepts of responsibility are changing (cf. Böger et al. 2017; Baumgärtner et al. 2013; BMFSFJ 2002). On the other hand some farms search for innovative diversification models (cf. Rutz et al. 2016). Senior services on farms could be a way to create profits on both sides, as shown in some European countries (cf. Wiesinger et al. 2013; De Bruin et al. 2010): the opportunity for an additional income for farmers (cf. Rutz et al. 2016), and a lively surrounding for the rural elderly, in best case close to home. These services offer the chance to include certain effects of horticultural or animal-assisted therapies especially for those suffering from mental illnesses or dementia (cf. Wood 2016; Pedersen et al. 2011; De Bruin et al. 2010; Nieuwenhuizen/Blom 2009). But in Germany, the legislation, education, and funding for work with old people are totally segregated from agriculture - due to their historical development - which might make it difficult to establish services in practice (cf. Hassink et al. 2016).

## 2 Empirical Research Methods and Analytical Framework

The aim of *VivAge* is to develop concepts to connect agriculture and services for the elderly. In the first part of the project, data of German farms that offer a service for the elderly of any kind (e.g. apartments, leisure opportunities, guided tours for dementia patients) are collected. The lack of any further conditions is due to the very low number of German farms that offer services for the elderly at all. In addition, the situation in other European countries shall be analyzed using print and online information to find differences in settings and paradigms. Eight of the German farms shall be used for further analyses.

The main question of the survey is whether offers on farms cover the needs of seniors in villages. Further questions are which obstacles currently have to be overcome, which support is needed to establish such offers, how a high level of quality might be assured for clients, and how services might become economically viable for farmers. A final question is whether the connection to agriculture gives the services a certain quality that cannot be reached by other branches or in other places.

### 2.1 Choice of Methods

Guided interviews were conducted on eight German farms. Of all 32 interviewed persons seven are farmers, one is a therapist, one a caretaker, and the other 23 are senior clients. Visits to farms were also used for participant observation. Both data were analyzed according to the content analysis of expert interviews (Gläser/Laudel 2010).

### 3 (Preliminary) Results

The comparison of countries showed an increasing interest in services for the elderly on farms while it also revealed differences of responsibilities for prevention and care (e.g. municipality, family, society). In countries like the Netherlands or Austria, where the most social offers on farms were found, the government supports these concepts in public, yet more through appreciation than financial support. In both countries, concepts of social offers on farms are well known and there are different ways for counselling and training.

The interviewed farmers and key persons mostly offer apartments partly with household services or in cooperation with nursing services, which seems presently to be the only way to break even. They were often surprised by the high demand for these apartments even in small villages. Most of them seem to have a certain kind of pioneering spirit or highly developed entrepreneurial knowledge that helped them to overcome obstacles and to find useful information autodidactically. They often experience uncertainty and different reactions from authorities esp. with the laws of building, planning, home supervision, hygiene regulations, and low-threshold services. Moreover, it is noticeable that all of them had a private motive for establishing the service, yet without neglecting economic aspects.

The assessment of services from the senior perspective depends less on spatial conditions than on guaranteeing participation and appreciation. The offering persons and the structures of communication have more influence on the quality of living than agriculture itself. Involvement in everyday life is another important aspect of contentment, but is not automatically guaranteed by placing a service on a farm. Its environment esp. animal husbandry can nevertheless be useful in interactions with dementia patients. Guided tours, where the latter only spend some hours on a farm, are problematic, however, since changes of room often evoke fears.

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