

Camilla Winter

Citizenship
Belgium

Can you briefly introduce yourself and how you got to where you are today?

I grew up in Sweden and after graduating from upper secondary school, I moved to Hamburg, Germany, where I worked as an au pair before studying German literature, history, and linguistics at the University of Hamburg. After completing my master's degree, I returned to Sweden, and from 1995 I worked as an international coordinator in two different municipalities and in one sub-region. In 2022, I turned 68 — the age at which permanent employment is no longer possible in Sweden — so I decided to establish my own educational consultancy organisation. I retired on the 30th of April and launched my organisation on the 1st of May. I strongly believe it is important to stay active in retirement, and next month I will turn 72, but I intend to keep working as long as I can contribute something to others. Also in 2022, I applied for associate membership in the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EALALL), as my former municipality had been an associated member. The application was approved by the board and the General Assembly, which I was very pleased about, as the association is primarily for municipalities and regions.

Are you familiar with the Ikigai principles, and how do you think older adults can find or rediscover their purpose through active citizenship?

Yes, I am familiar with it — and interestingly, my daughter-in-law is from Tokyo, so I look forward to discussing it with her next time we meet. I think it is very important for people to feel needed and to be able to contribute to others, not only to themselves. A sudden, complete change of lifestyle at retirement is not healthy. In Sweden in 2025, 21% of people between 65 and 74 are still working — compared to only 10% in 2001, so there has been a significant increase. Among those aged 55 to 64, the figure is 78%, compared to 60–65% in the European Union generally. One reason for this in Sweden is that pensions can be relatively modest, so many people prefer to remain in working life. But beyond financial reasons, continuing to work is one of the best ways to stay active. Older people can also serve as mentors for younger colleagues — given the skills gaps in many sectors, experienced workers have much to offer, and mentoring makes transitions easier for those following in their footsteps. Volunteering and involvement in community organisations are other valuable avenues. Personally, I am still working full-time, but I plan to gradually reduce to

70–75% next year, then ease into retirement over several years. I believe that is far healthier than stopping abruptly.

Do you find a project like SmartAgeCare useful in this context?

Yes, very much so. What is particularly interesting is the number of countries involved — this allows the project to gather a wide range of perspectives. Systems differ significantly between countries, so collecting experiences across contexts is valuable. Lifelong learning and life-wide learning in different settings are essential for personal development.

How can the Ikigai concept be integrated into community or citizenship programmes to support older adults?

I think it requires strong cooperation between municipalities and civil society organisations — there must be no silos. Co-design and collaboration across these levels is essential, and crucially, older adults themselves must be involved. The goal should be to do things with them, not for them.

What are your thoughts on the European Union's current policies for older adults?

The EU promotes active ageing — encouraging participation in society, volunteering, community support, continued engagement in learning and work, and intergenerational knowledge sharing. However, at the policy level there are no strict binding directives in this area, as elder care falls under each member state's competence. There are many recommendations and initiatives, though. Erasmus+ is a good example — participation is open regardless of age, even for those who are 100 years old. The Commission also launched the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations back in 2012. I think the EU's role is best understood as one of inspiration — recommendations and initiatives that countries can draw upon and then implement in their own contexts. In Sweden, for example, elder care policy ultimately sits with each individual municipality, even though national-level policy sets the framework.

Can you name any Swedish initiatives that could serve as models for other European countries?

The Swedish government has a strategy for a more age-friendly society, built around three main principles: dignity and self-determination; good health and

social care; and opportunities for an active and meaningful life. That said, implementation varies considerably from municipality to municipality. One concrete example from my own municipality, Borås: residents aged 75 or over can apply to receive a tablet computer from the municipality. It is first-come, first-served, and applicants must be registered in Borås. Importantly, recipients also receive an introduction and ongoing support throughout the three-year loan period — either by visiting the town hall or through a civil servant who comes to their home. This addresses digital literacy and inclusion in a very practical way. The application process is deliberately accessible: people can apply either via an online form or simply by making a phone call. My personal dream is for Borås to become a member of the UNESCO Learning Cities initiative. I had the opportunity to hear from Cork in Ireland, which is a learning city, and they truly involve older people across all their activities. It is an inspiring model.

Many older adults feel underrepresented or that their opinions are not taken into account. How can we ensure their voices matter?

In Borås, we have two pensioners' councils. The Central Pensioners Council is connected to the Municipal Executive Board and discusses overall strategic matters. There is also a Local Pensioners Council within the care and elderly committee, which gathers direct input from seniors. The challenge is that awareness of these structures is largely limited to those already engaged in NGOs and older people's organisations. Those outside those networks often have no idea these possibilities exist. I knew about the councils because I worked in the town hall — but most people do not have that advantage. One approach that has worked is inviting representatives from these councils to speak at NGO events, explaining what the councils do and how people can get involved. But there will always be people who remain outside these circles. For them, the answer may be to go to where older people already meet — activity houses, coffee mornings, social gatherings — and bring the information directly to them. In some cases, that means going to people's homes. Ultimately, I think each municipality needs to map all available initiatives and then develop a deliberate strategy for how to reach those who are not yet connected. It is genuinely difficult, but necessary.

What are the major considerations when thinking about citizenship not just for older adults, but for ageing throughout life?

Older people's participation in society is important across all stages of later life, not only after formal retirement. Increasing participation in decision-making processes is key. The learning cities model is a strong example here — it brings together people of all ages to co-create, and that kind of intergenerational

collaboration is the best model for inclusive civic life. Digital inclusion is also critical. In Sweden, cashless payments are now standard — many shops do not accept cash at all — so if someone has low digital literacy, they are effectively excluded from everyday life. I help friends and acquaintances regularly with digital questions, and there is clearly a very significant need for accessible digital training for adults.

A lot of older adults face social or physical isolation. How can communities encourage them to engage more actively?

Meeting places for seniors are central — social gatherings and coffee meet-ups, exercise and health activities, hobbies and creative pursuits, and digital support and courses. Volunteers visiting older people at home is also very valuable. From my own municipality: we have an activity house where retired residents can go to listen to music, join book discussions, and take part in a wide range of activities. It is an excellent place both for social connection and for sharing information about civic opportunities, because many people already attend regularly. For those who cannot or do not come to such spaces, outreach is necessary — including home visits and small informal gatherings, like inviting groups of ten people for coffee each month.

What actions could be taken to ensure public spaces and infrastructure are accessible for seniors?

Borås has been awarded by the European Commission twice for accessibility. In Sweden, standard accessibility measures include ramps at public buildings, low thresholds, step-free entrances, dropped kerbs, and well-lit public spaces in the evening. For wheelchair users, access — whether via ramp or elevator — is a legal requirement, so in most buildings some form of accessible entry is available.

How can urban planning for seniors help them stay connected?

First, you need to find the seniors — some are easy to reach, others are not. A clear strategy is required if the goal is genuine inclusion. I believe co-creation and service design are the right frameworks: inviting people into discussions about urban planning, because every person has experiences, ideas, and perspectives to contribute. In my municipality, there are formal mechanisms for public input, but awareness remains low — the same people tend to participate repeatedly. This is not unique to elder care; it is true across communities generally. The challenge is always to reach beyond the already-engaged.

What should be considered when improving public transport for older adults?

Buses should be easy to board — steps should not be too high — and reserved seating for seniors should be available near the doors. More broadly, the principle remains the same: do not design transport for older people without involving them in the process. Co-creation leads to better outcomes and greater buy-in.

Additional Examples from Borås

During the interview, Camilla shared several additional concrete initiatives from Borås Municipality:

GPS Alarms: Older residents living at home can be issued a GPS alarm device. When activated, the city of Borås responds within ten minutes. This increases safety and supports people with cognitive conditions in remaining at home for longer — in line with the municipality's broader aim of enabling independent living.

Municipal Pharmacists: The Pensioners Council has discussed the introduction of municipal pharmacists to support safe medication management. This remains a proposal under consideration.

Nursing Home Planning: The Pensioners Council is actively involved in discussions about the planning, renovation, and development of nursing homes and care facilities, including elderly housing projects across the city.

Camilla's closing reflection: "A great deal has been done, but much still remains to do. Whether people are satisfied depends greatly on the individual you ask. But the guiding principle across everything should be the same: not to do things for people, but with them. That is when you can be most successful."