

Context

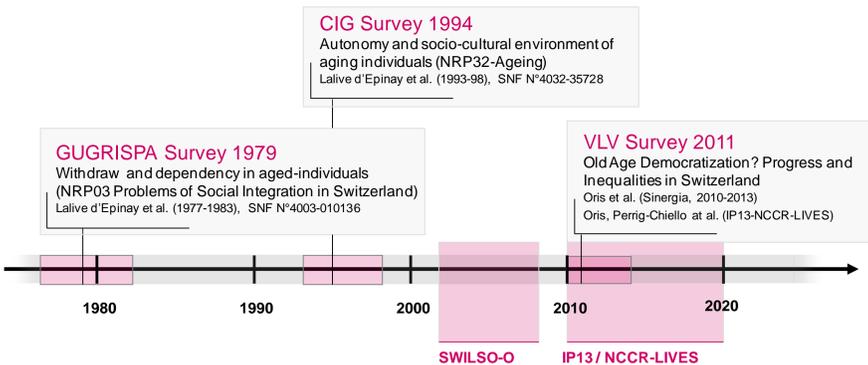
- Over the last century, Switzerland has witnessed an **increase in life expectancy at birth by over 30 years**, a threefold increase in the proportion of people aged 65 and older, and an eightfold increase in the percentage of persons aged 80 years and older.
- These demographic changes let emerge a **growing gap between the “young-old”**, the **“old-old”** and **“oldest-old”**, with the negative aspects of aging being postponed from the so-called “third” to the “fourth age”.
- Still, advancing age is not the only factor accounting for differences in life conditions, functional health and well-being among aging older adults. Indeed **some categories of aging individuals appear more fragile and vulnerable than others**, among them women, immigrants, and individuals belonging to lower socio-economical classes
- These changes have carried along **important issues about the opportunities of the aging process**, that is, the possibilities for political participation, productivity, and social integration of aging adults.
- Societies coping with an increasingly old population need an **updated description of the life conditions of aging individuals**, not only to understand its evolution in the past, but also to estimate its trends for the future, in the aim to best maintaining the health, autonomy, and well-being of aging adults.

VLV aims at addressing the actual life and health conditions of individuals aged 65 and above living in Switzerland, with a special focus on:

- the changes that occurred across the last three decades
- heterogeneity, diversity and vulnerability in aging

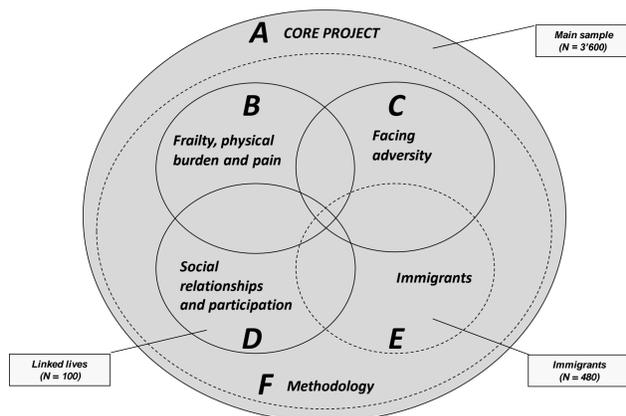
Continuity with previous surveys

“Vivre / Leben / Vivere” (VLV) is the third transversal wave of a survey launched in 1979 and replicated in 1994/5, which allows a 30-years depth comparison of the life and health conditions of the aged population in the areas under investigation



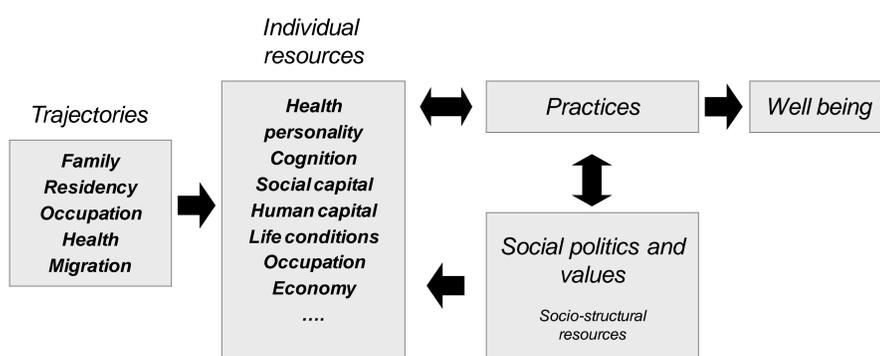
Organizational diagram of VLV

VLV embeds interconnected sub-projects which specifically target physical (B) and psychological (C) health, as well as social relations and participations (D). An additional focus is placed on immigrant populations (E) and on methodological issues (F).



Conceptual framework

The overall framework calls upon the interdisciplinary concept of “resources”. The current available resources are meant to be accumulated over life trajectories, and used to manage life conditions. Trajectories, resources, practices, social politics and values participate to qualify individual well being.



Sample

VLV is conducted in five different areas, targeting the three linguistic parts of Switzerland. A total of 3'600 individuals is included in the main sample (i.e. 720 in each area). An over-samples of 100 linked-lives (i.e. partners) in GE, and 480 immigrants (from Spain and Portugal in GE; from Italy and Ex-Yugoslavia in BS/BL; N=120, each, aged 65 to 79).



Cantonal sample, stratified by age and gender randomly selected in administrations' records

	65-70	70-75	75-80	80-85	85-90	>90
Women	60	60	60	60	60	60
Men	60	60	60	60	60	60

■ Regions assessed in 1979 and 1994/5
■ Regions newly assessed in VLV

The regions were selected on the basis of: a) reproducibility of the 1979 and 1994 surveys, b) heterogeneity, including different linguistic (German, French, and Italian) and geographical (urban, rural, alpine) areas and c) their potential to capture the effects of different social policy systems regarding the elderly in the complex Swiss Federal State

Method

- The sample was randomly selected in the cantonal and federal Swiss administrations' records.
- The survey is anchored in Geneva, but local survey centers are established in each canton and run by bilingual on-site field coordinators.
- Data are collected through:
 - A self-assessed Questionnaire (QAA) and a face-to-face Questionnaire (QFF) administered using the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) method
The QAA and QFF address the dimensions reported in conceptual framework, that is: physical health (e.g. presence of physical diseases, affections, comorbidities, etc.), psychological health (e.g. presence of mental health diseases, cognitive abilities, personality, coping strategies, etc.), social and human relations (e.g. family network, relations to kin, friends, etc.), life conditions (e.g. type of housing, household, etc.), occupation (e.g. labor, activity, retirement, etc.) and economy (e.g. income, assets, financial wealth, etc.). About one third of the content of the questionnaire entails questions already used in the 1979 and 1994/5 surveys, in order to allow comparison; A substantial part of the questionnaire entails existing scales and measures gathered from various disciplines.
 - A self-assessed Life History Calendar (LHC)
The LHC constitutes a retrospective method to allow gathering reasonably valid information on past trajectories and events. The tool consists in a year-based report (from birth to the time of the survey) of important transitions and events in five dimensions of the individual's life: family, residency, health, activities and, if relevant migration. Each respondent receives an individualized calendar starting at his/her year of birth. Ages and years provide cues for replacing events in time, while the contiguity of dimensions serves as cues for recalling contingencies and associations in multiple spheres of life
- The material was initially constructed in French, but was subsequently translated:
 - In German and in Italian, for the data collection in BE/BS/BL, and TI, respectively
 - In Spanish, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian and Albanian for the immigrant over-sample
- Interviews are conducted by local trained interviewers. Bilingual interviewers were recruited in order to offer the opportunity to immigrants take part to the survey in their mother tongue
- A proxy procedure is used for individuals identified as cognitively not able to be interviewed (e.g. demonstrating important memory deficits, or known to suffer from mild or severe dementia).

As a whole, VLV allows :

- ... providing cardinal updated information on the availability and use of the current resources of the aged population; in addition, hints on how the current resources are constituted are grasped through the data collected by means of life calendars
- ... addressing specifically the question of the heterogeneity of aging by identifying the conditions and factors contributing to these variations. The concept of interplaying resources provides a mean to grasp the variability reported in aging conditions.
- ... questioning the future trends of the transformations reported so far, and in particular, whether these will continue or not. A comparison with the data collected in previous surveys and an account taken on different cohort characteristics is of great interest in pursuing this aim.

VLV constitute a great – and even unique in Europe – opportunity to assess the effect of the socio-historical context and the evolution of the aged population over the past 30 years

Acknowledgments

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The survey has been approved by the following ethical committees:

Commission centrale d'éthique de la recherche du Canton de Genève / Commission d'éthique facultaire de la Faculté de psychologie et des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université de Genève / Commission cantonale vaudoise d'éthique médicale / Die Ethikkommission der philosophisch- und humanwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Bern / Comitato etico cantonale del Canton Ticino / Ethikkommission Beider Basel (EKBB)