

Involving older people in local policy

The Belgian Ageing Studies



Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Overview

1. Theories on later life

1.1 Ageism

2. Belgian Ageing Studies (BAS)

2.1 History

2.2 Aim

2.3 Method

2.4 Outcomes

2.5 Future challenges

2.6 Conclusion

1. Theories on later life

- Deficit-model
 - Life course: rise until middle adulthood, subsequently downwards
 - Early exit from the labour force
- Disengagement-theory
 - Ageing = mutually withdraw from society
 - Less active

1. Theories on later life

- Shift on view of old age
 - Productive, healthy and active ageing

1.1 Ageism

- The perception that prevails in society on older adults is mostly negative/ not realistic



Active ageing?

- **WHO (2002)**: “Process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age”
- **EU 2012** = European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations
 - First claim on Labour participation
 - Later: civic participation from broad perspective
 - Social participation in associations
 - Cultural participation
 - Volunteering
 - Neighbourhood participation
 - Informal care
 - Intergenerational solidarity

Active ageing

EU 2012

Objective: Older adults, including frail and disabled individuals, should have the possibility to exert a role as active agents in their life course and participate according to their abilities

Assets: Any person should have the opportunity to participate in activities on

- social
- cultural
- spiritual
- economic
- societal

Active ageing

- Risks:**
- Perceiving older adults that do not participate negatively
 - Older adults CAN participate, but it cannot be a dogma
 - Structural and external barriers

2. Belgian Ageing Studies

2.1 History

- 2002: Flemish law on ‘participation of older people’
 - Against ageist discrimination and social exclusion
 - Involve older people in local policy planning
 - Environmental analysis
- Flemish municipalities: S.O.S.
 - Development of a ‘research–older people–policy’-network at the local level
- 2003: Development of the study with a number of partners
- 2004: Pilot studies in 11 municipalities

2.2 Aim

- Provide an instrument to measure the living conditions and quality of life of older people
- Promote evidence-based policy at the local level by providing input and mobilizing knowledge for planning and inclusive policy programmes
- Support the process of creating age-friendly communities
- Examine trends in particular municipalities by conducting follow-up studies

2.3 Method

Research process = Continuous cooperation between:

- Older volunteers
- Local stakeholders
- Members of local senior organizations
- Local authorities
- Provincial government
- Dept. Adult Educational Sciences Vrije Universiteit Brussel

2.3 Method

Standardized method

- Development Questionnaire (co-design)
- Development of research scenario
- Development of training programmes
- Development of process model of involving older people

2.3 Method

Questionnaire

- Survey
- Range of variables: well-being, housing, health, care, neighbourhood involvement, public space, social/cultural/political participation, voluntary work, loneliness, ageism, feelings of unsafety ...
- Sampling design
 - Home-dwelling older people (60+)
 - Community representative sample (stratified by age & gender) in each municipality

2.3 Method

Peer-research

- Generates a ‘sense of ownership’
- Stimulates political participation and involvement among older citizens
- Visibility of research and involvement of older people at the local level
- +/- 40 older volunteers in each municipality
- Response rate (between 65% - 85% in each city)

2.4 Outcomes

Belgium

- Flanders: 158 municipalities (N>70.000)
- Brussels
- Walloon regions: 2 municipalities
- The Netherlands: 5 municipalities
- Italy: 1 municipality

2.4 Outcomes

Supporting evidence based policy

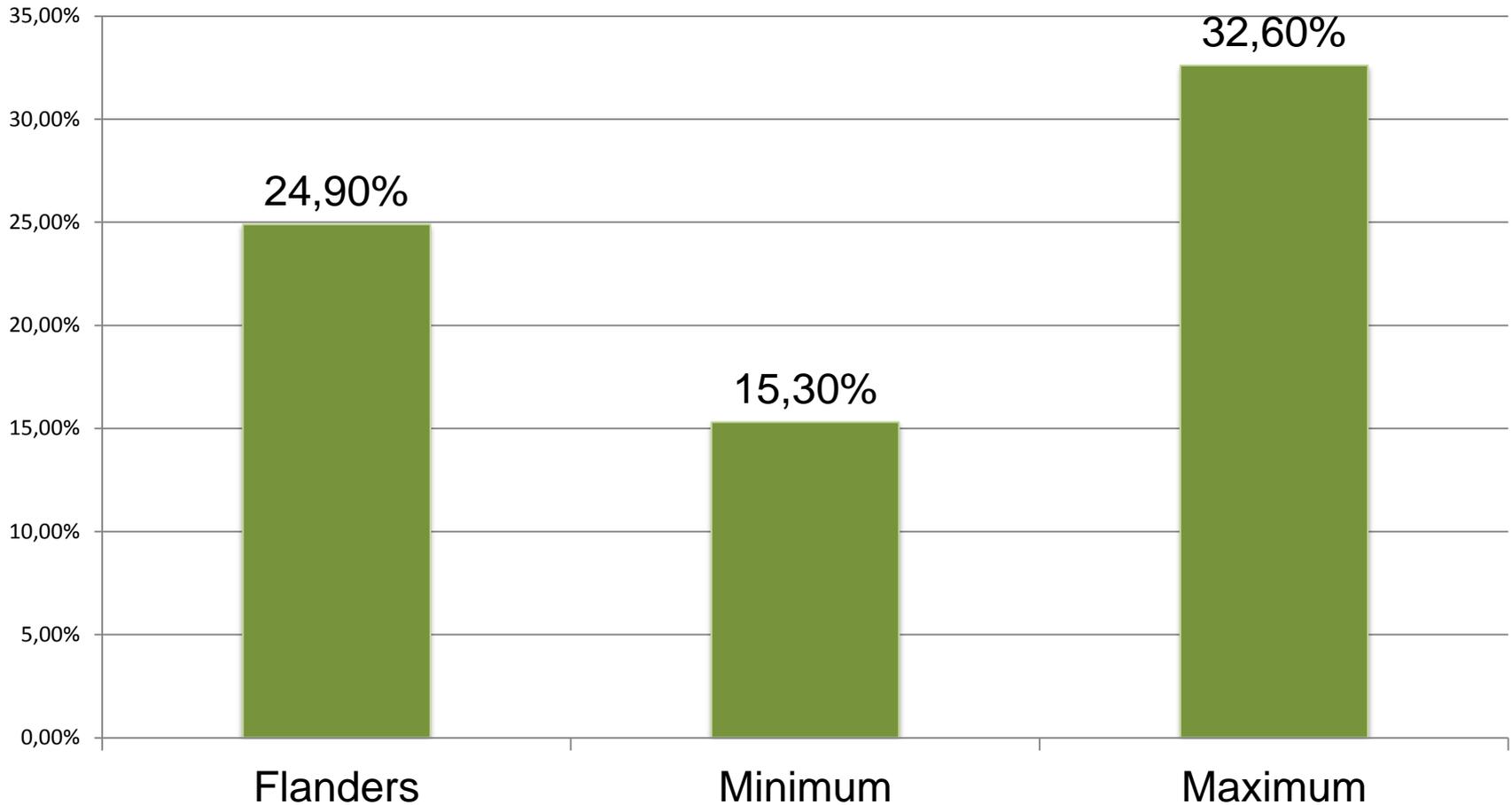
–Follow-up scenario

- Findings of the municipality are discussed in a number of forums which are organized by the stakeholder's network and the older volunteers who were involved in the study (+ new ones)
 - Separate discussion groups for professionals and older people
 - The final meeting = joint meeting
- Give contextualization to the results + search for actions: E.g. swimming pool

–Development of local action plans

2.4 Outcomes

Insufficient opportunities for public participation



2.4 Outcomes

Participation of older people in policy

1.	The policy of social housing companies	20.10%
2.	Local policy	32.60%
3.	Local advisory boards	29.30%
4.	Policy of health care organisations and institutions	37.20%
5.	Policy of home care institutions	42.30%
6.	Policy of associations that organise activities for older people	41.80%
7.	The design of the neighbourhood (e.g. liveability of the neighbourhood)	30.00%
8.	Social policy (OCMW)	53.00%

Older policy

=

local story

- Every municipality has its own profile
- Strong variation among themselves
- Big differences between municipalities

Loneliness

- Serious feeling of loneliness
 - Flanders: 18%
 - Max: 18,5% (East-Flanders)
 - Min: 17,4% (Limburg)
- ➔ Differences between municipalities
 - MIN: 12%
 - MAX: 32,7%

2.4 Outcomes

Trendresearch

- Bruges, Gent, Genk, Hasselt, ...
- After 6 years, a follow-up BAS
- Additional qualitative studies
 - Build on initial quantitative analysis
 - BAS used to guide purposeful selection of the study areas
 - E.g. Select two municipalities with low levels of feelings of unsafety and two municipalities with high levels of feelings of unsafety
 - Qualitative data to capture the contextual nature of feelings of unsafety (amongst others)

Example city of Bruges

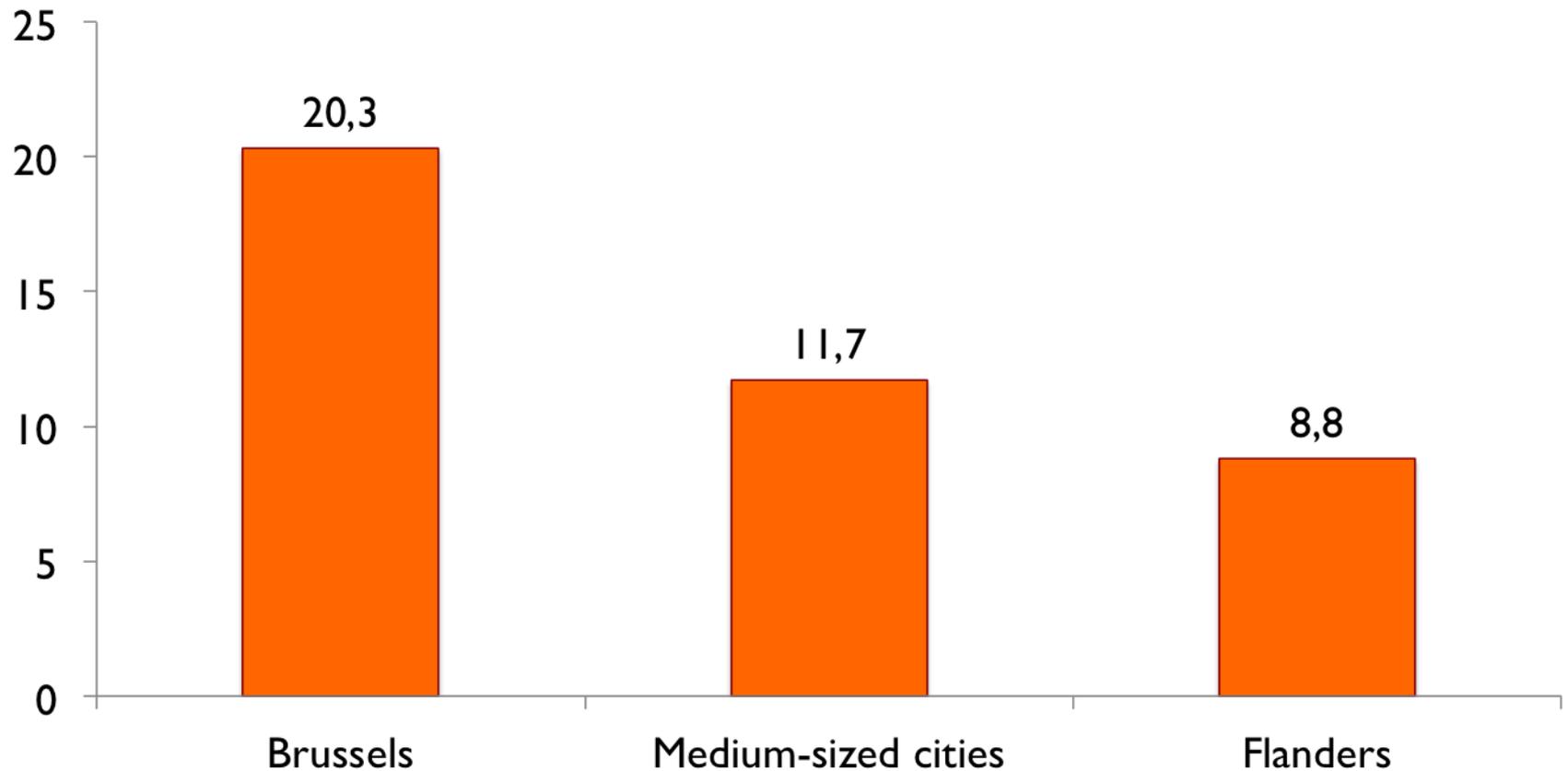
- BAS results 2004:
 - Low neighbourhood involvement
 - Low civic engagement
- These findings were discussed in a number of forums which were organized by the stakeholder's network and the older volunteers who were involved in the study.
- Development of local action plans focusing on initiatives to promote community cohesion
 - The organization of neighbourhood festivals
 - The promotion of accessibility of meeting places for older citizens
 - The organization of introductory internet courses in community centers which resulted in the creation of 'neighbourhood websites'.

Example city of Bruges

- The stakeholder's network as well as older people played a crucial role in influencing social policy
- As a result, local authorities invested in these local community initiatives by providing funding and support
- After 6 years, Bruges has conducted a follow-up BAS in 2010 to examine trends in the municipality
 - The results of this study indicated a significant increase in neighbourhood involvement as well as in civic engagement among older residents in Bruges

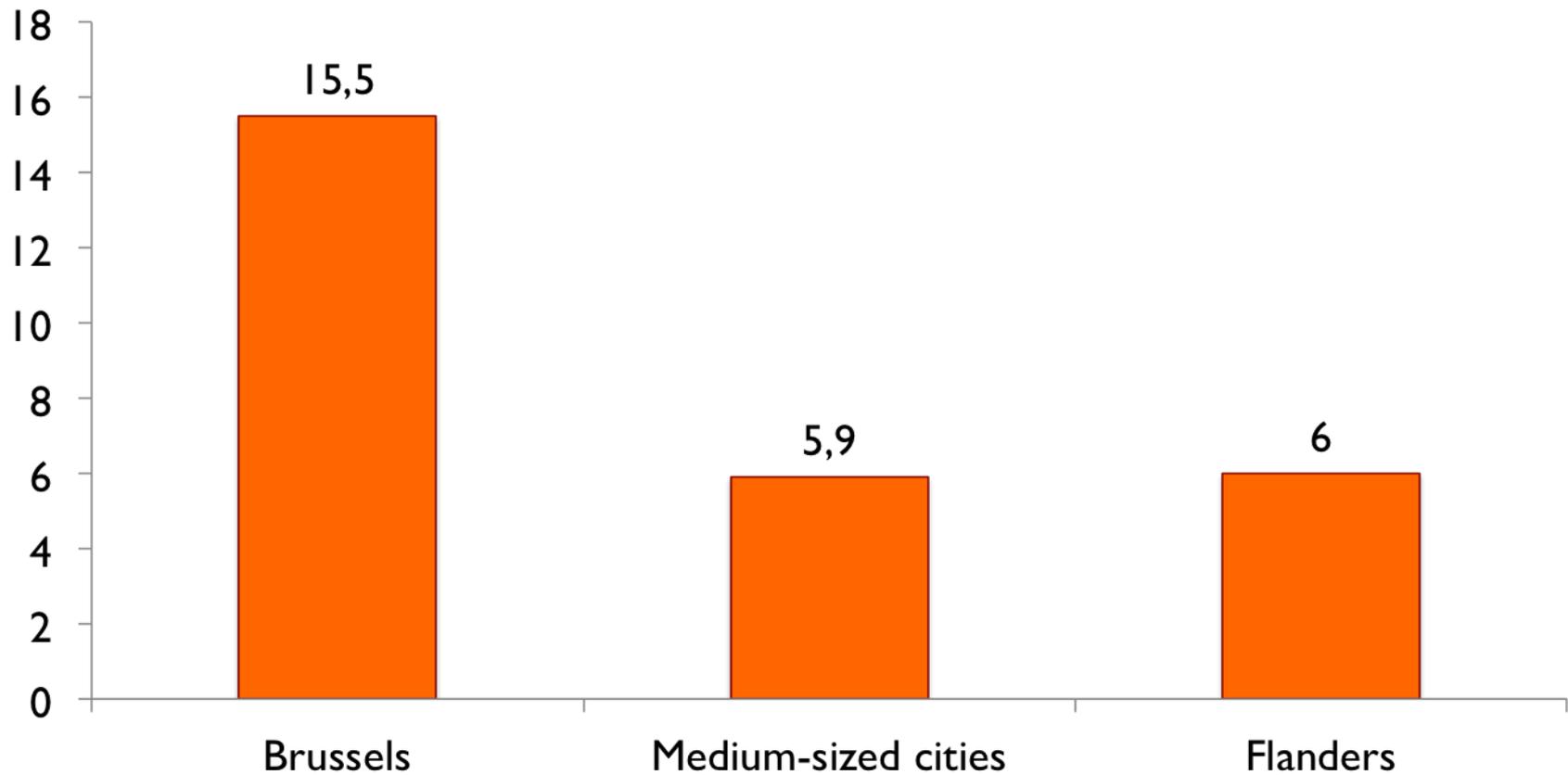
**Supporting age-
friendly &
safe communities**

Having no children?



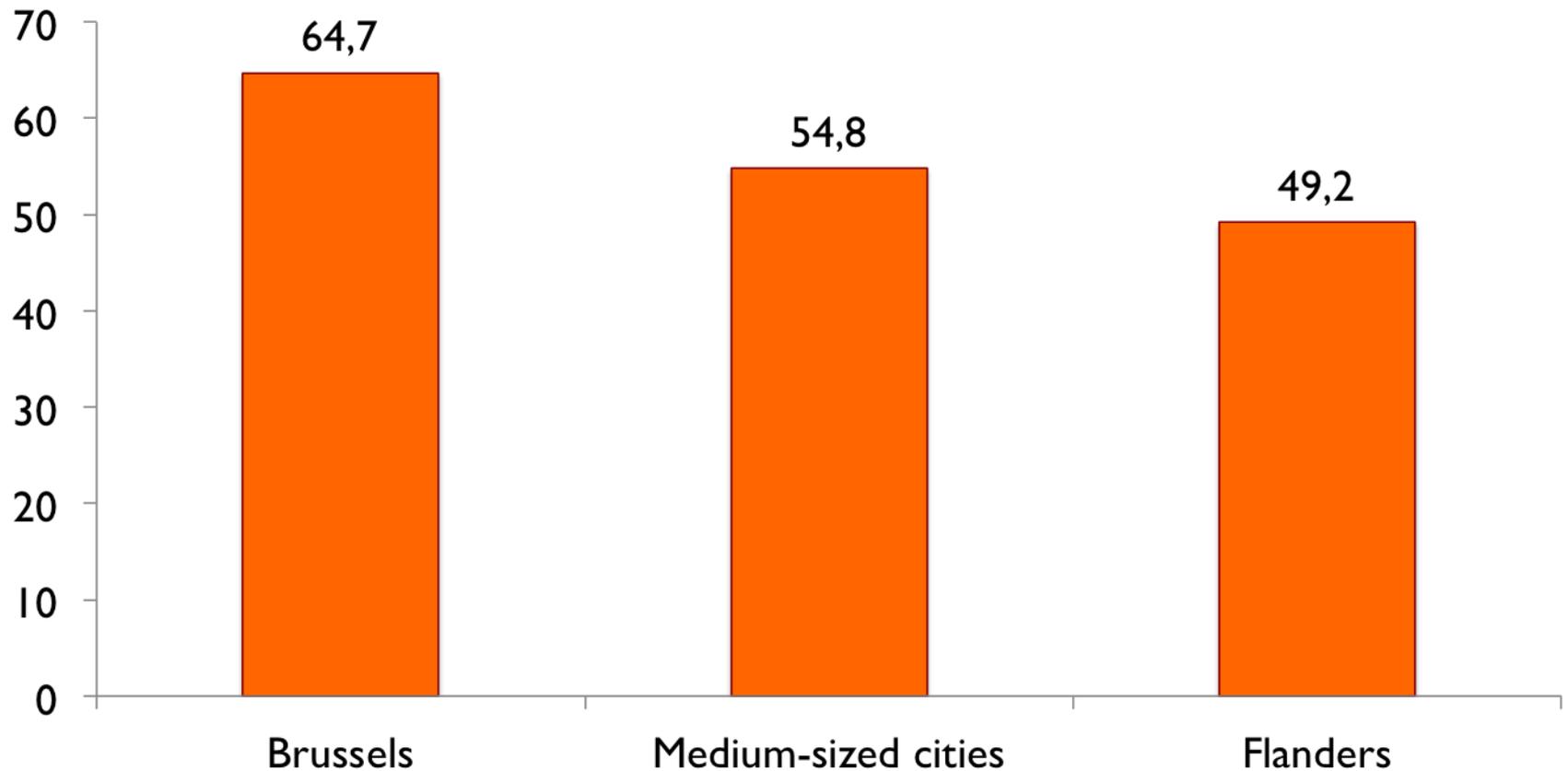
Income

Sever difficulties in managing with income



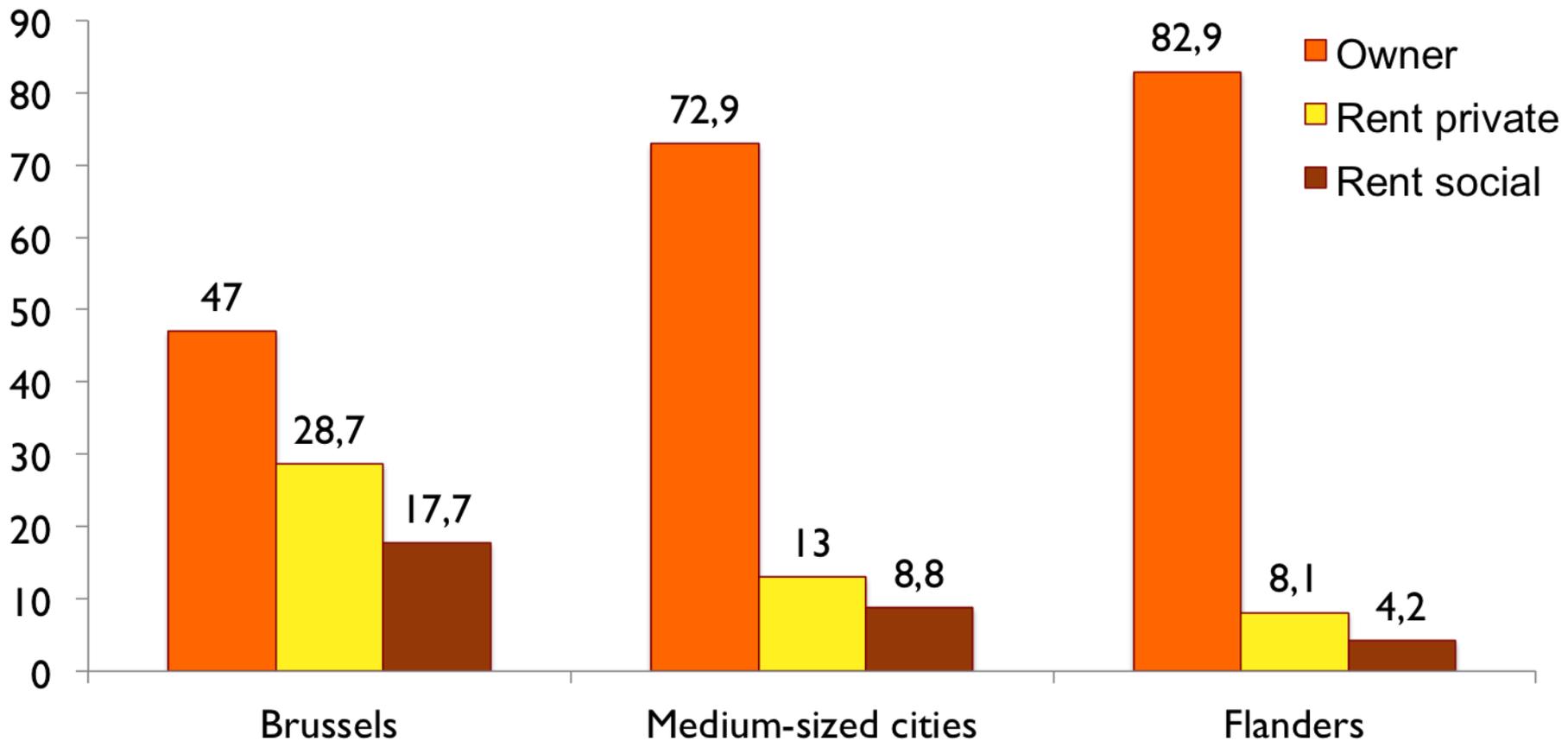
Fear of crime

Feeling unsafe



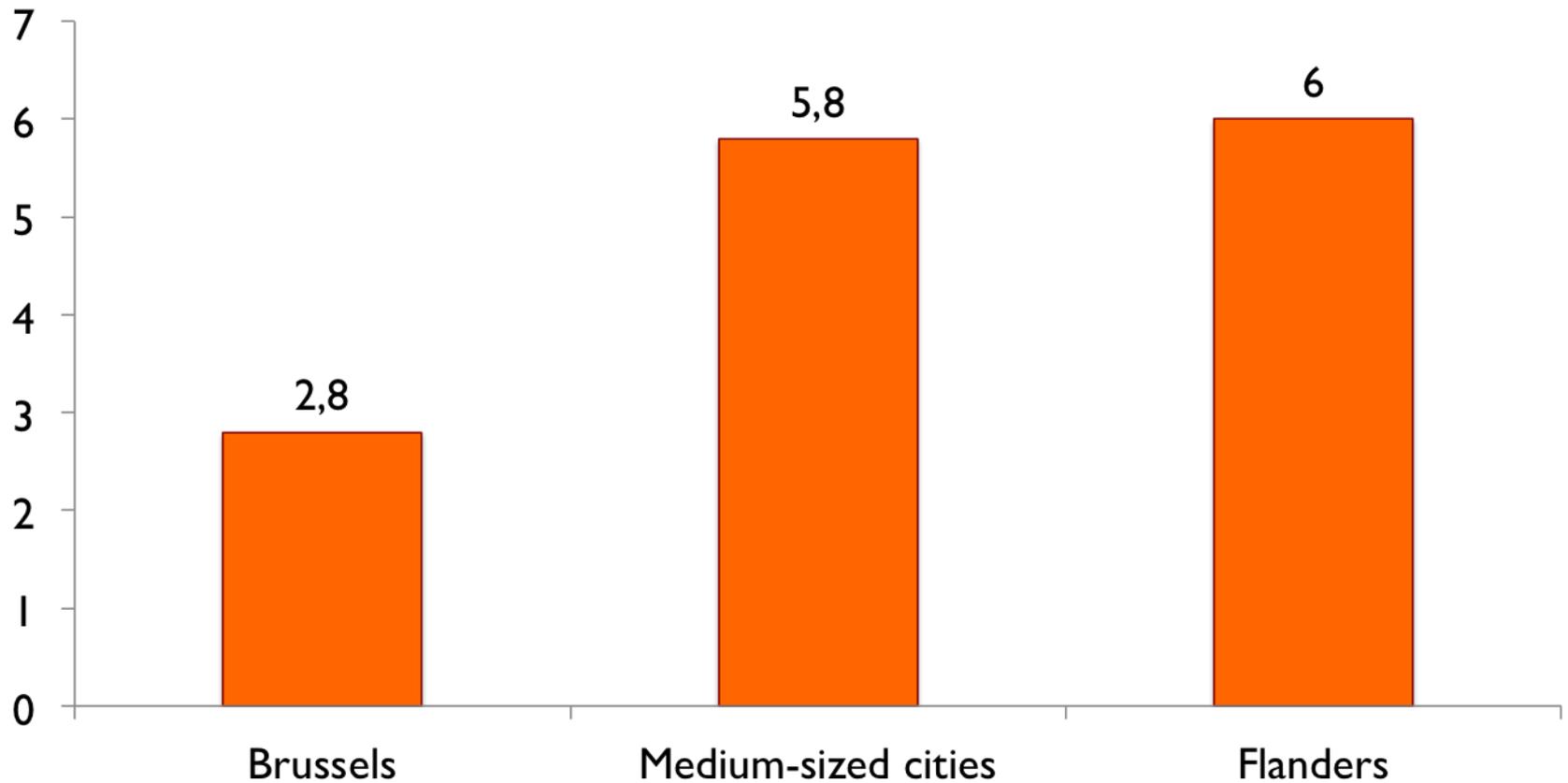
Housing

Home ownership



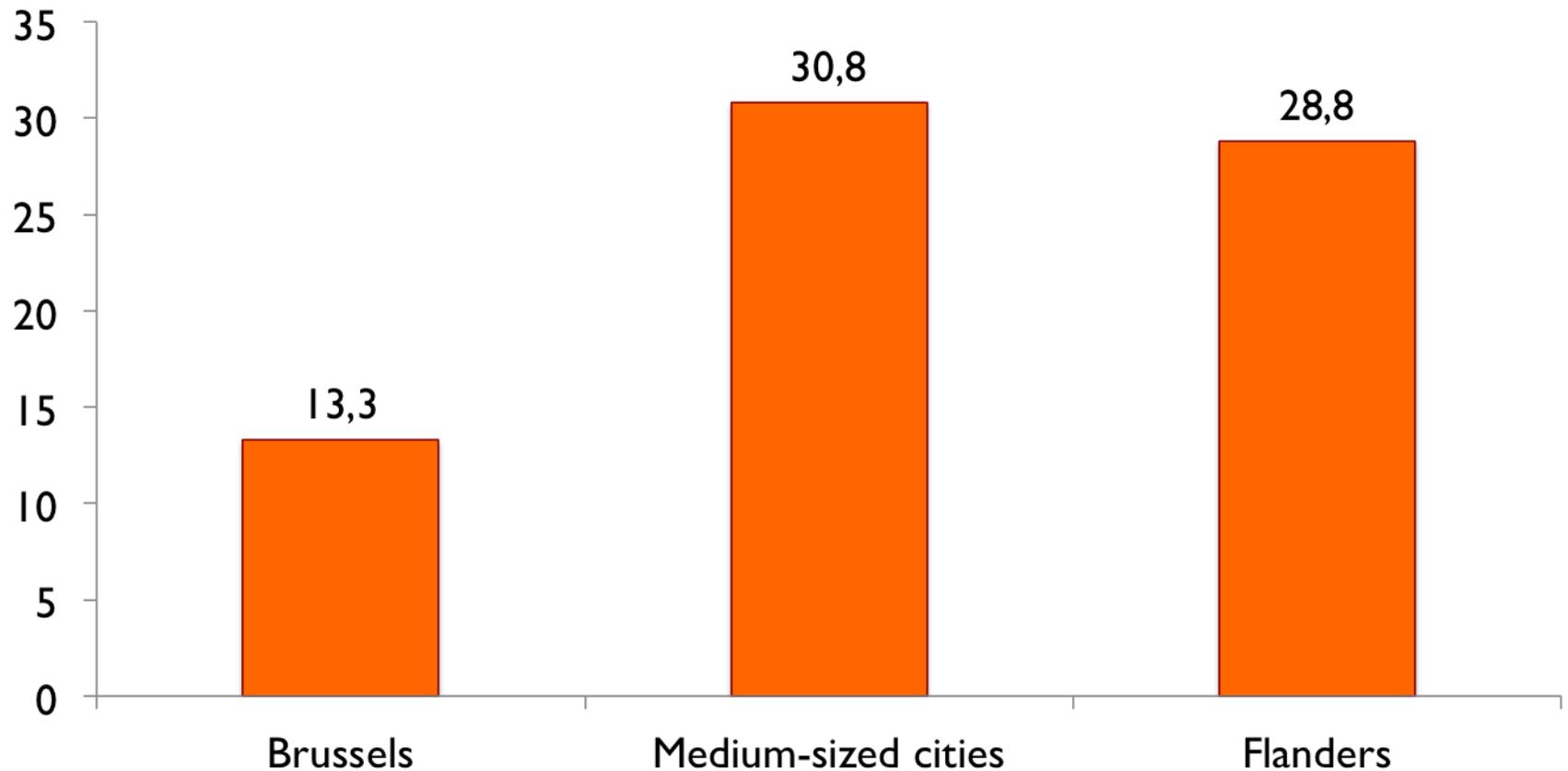
Care

Number of hours a week, receiving care



Home nurses

Receives care from home nurses



City of Brussels: Follow up

- Based on BAS
 - Development of local/policy action plan (policymakers together with older people's advisory board)
 - WHO application
 - Launch of age-friendly Brussels at the international day of older people in October 2010
 - Qualitative research Turkish and Italian population
 - => first generation

Years 1 - 2

Years 3 - 5

1. Planning

- a. involve older people
- b. assesement of age-friendliness
- c. develop an action plan
- d. identify indicators

2. Implementation

- a. implement action plan
- b. monitor indicators

3. Evaluate progress

- a. measure progress
- b. identify successes and remaining gaps
- c. submit progress report

4. Continual improvement

5-year membership cycles

2.5 Future challenges

- Approaching older people as full/valuable citizens
- Agency
- Empowerment  ageism

2.5 Future challenges

- Development of strategies targeted at different groups with the older population
- ➔ For example: involvement in the development & implementation of local (policy) initiatives
- ➔ With awareness of contrasting issues faced by different groups: ethnicity, income, living arrangements, and life chances

2.6 Conclusion

- Practical and policy implications
 - Potential of facilitating social change in the neighbourhood by involving older people in aspects of research, local-policy making and community practice
 - Involving older people from A to Z: empowerment
 - Process model of recruiting, engaging, motivating older volunteers
 - Continuous cooperation between a network of partners

Thank you for your attention!

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