Synthesizing discussion
The Active Ageing Index reported in this paper has been calculated for the 27 EU Member States, with a focus on the current generation of older people (in most cases for those aged 55+), and using the data for the latest year (data correspond to 2010 and 2011 in most instances). Most importantly, it covers diverse aspects of active and healthy ageing, by measuring older people’s potential with respect to not just employment but also to their unpaid familial, social and cultural contributions as well as their independent, healthy and secure living. It also captures how EU countries differ with respect to capacity and enabling environment for active and healthy ageing. It offers the breakdown by gender, to highlight the specific social policy goal of reducing gender disparity in experiences of ageing across EU countries.

The core endeavour of the AAI is to offer to a wide range of users (e.g. policy makers, researchers, students, private businesses) a flexible toolset that helps them understand the challenges of ageing and also what policies and programmes can possibly be utilised to tackle them. The AAI tool is made available in an easy-to-use transparent way, which will allow its users to add new data and indicators, additional countries or regions within the countries, with disaggregation across subgroups. It will also be possible for users to apply different weighting methods (if necessary) to the indicators and domain-specific indices depending upon the situation in the country in question and policy goals.

The project results reported in this paper show advancement over previous work in many ways, particularly in providing internationally comparable evidence on the relative position of EU countries with respect to the untapped potential of older people in various diverse aspects of active and healthy ageing. The AAI offers a start in this respect and future studies must continue to build on this and the earlier work towards measuring active ageing potential. The substantive pieces of additional future research that are identified as a result of the discussions and research during the AAI project address the following research questions:

- What is the link between active ageing and the quality of life of older people?
- How and what forms of active and healthy ageing contribute to improving financial sustainability of public welfare systems?
- How do the active ageing experiences differ by subgroups (such as differences between the high educated and others; between the people with disabilities and others)?
- What various forms of activities and healthy living are preferred by older people, and what factors that help or hinder them? How do such preferences differ by various demographic and socio-economic characteristics?
- What are the social policy contexts in which differences in active and healthy ageing exist and what could be the role of social policies in maintaining or accentuating these differences across countries and subgroups?
- What explanatory factors show the impact of the life course experiences for the purpose of design of better active ageing policies?

Also it can be emphasized that the AAI should not be a static index; instead it should stay up to date with the changing views of active ageing in the future. For the future course of the AAI construction work, the following issues of methodology and scope will assume importance:

- Monitoring of active and healthy ageing outcomes over time, including filling in data gaps, analysing changes over time (possibly with two years intervals) and also showing retrospective trends;
- Making improvements in scope and country coverage of the AAI, in particular expanding the coverage to other non-EU European and OECD countries.

In the longer-term, the extension and adaptation of this index to other global regions can be envisaged. However, before extending it to other countries, the index needs to gain acceptance by key stakeholders at the EU level. It is also important to maintain the continuity of the index, adhering to the currently agreed list of indicators and the aggregation methodology. Additional research is planned within the newly funded FP7 project MOPACT (Mobilising the potential of Active Ageing), which includes a work package on potential for realising active ageing, to be undertaken by researchers based at the University of Sheffield, the European Centre Vienna and the University of Southampton.