
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Researching two Compassionate Cities: Study protocol for a mixed-methods process and outcome evaluation.

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Background/Targeted community: Compassionate Cities are social ecology approaches that apply a set of actions, targeting a broad range of stakeholders, with the intention of renormalising caring, dying and grieving in everyday life. While several initiatives have been described in the literature, a rigorous evaluation of their processes and outcomes is lacking. This paper describes the protocol for a mixed-methods study to evaluate the development process and the outcomes of two Compassionate Cities in Flanders, Belgium.

Involved stakeholders: While the concept of Compassionate Cities is introduced by the researcher to the cities of Bruges and Herzele, the development is realised through the input from involved local stakeholders and the local project leaders. The project leaders are appointed by the cities of Bruges and Herzele. Their primary task revolves around coordinating the project and guarding its cocreational character. The stakeholders can be anyone with an interest in developing the Compassionate Cities. A community facilitator with expertise in change projects guides, with respect to local ownership, the development of both Compassionate Cities.

Methods and analysis, planning: We will use a convergent multi-phase mixed-methods design, in which a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods will be triangulated in the data analysis stage to capture both development processes and outcomes. Our design includes a quasi-experimental component of a quantitative outcome evaluation in both Compassionate Cities and two comparable control cities with no formal Compassionate City programme. A critical realism lens will be applied to understand how and why certain processes manifest themselves.

Discussion: The creation of Compassionate Cities implies high levels of complexity, adaptivity, unpredictability and uncertainty. This requires various data collection methods that can be applied flexibly. A researcher taking on the role of active participant in the project's development has several advantages, such as access to scholarly information. Reflexivity in this role is paramount to questioning where the ownership of the project lies. By applying a critical realism lens, we remain cautious about our interpretations, and we test the homogeneity of our findings through other forms of data collection.

Learning for the international audience: This is the first published study protocol to describe both a process and outcome evaluation of a Compassionate City project. By transparently describing our

aims and data collection methods, we try to maximise information exchange among researchers and to inform others who desire to implement and evaluate their own initiatives.