



**Recommendations
for Decision Makers
to
Promote Active Ageing**



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Recommendations
for
Decision Makers
to
Promote Active Ageing
in a
Society for All Ages

Author of the document:

Dirk Jarré, President of the European Federation of Older Persons, EURAG

Editor:

NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna, Chair: Gertraud Dayé



NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna

Chair: Gertraud Dayé - gertraud.daye@aon.at

Vice Chair: Dr. Ulrike Waginger, MSc - ulrike.waginger@univie.ac.at

Vice Chair: Dirk Jarré - DirkJarre@aol.com

Treasurer: Dr. Gertraud Pichler - gertraud.pichler@tele2.at

Secretary: Mag. Christa Kirchmair - christa.kirchmair@bpw.at

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Foreword

This publication has two distinct particularities that are worth while to emphasize right at the beginning for better understanding of the meaningfulness of this booklet.

In the first place it expresses the opinion of a great number of important international civil society organisations that represent older persons in our society and advocate for their needs or preoccupations. This means that it represents the voice of those directly concerned by right or wrong policies and the practical consequences of decision-making. They take the certainly most justified liberty to give advice to those who shape policies and take decisions in various fields that affect directly or indirectly the life of older persons under the motto *“Nothing on us without us”*.

Secondly, the statements, comments and recommendations in the second section of this publication are evidence-based and carefully argued in view of their political value and their practical implementation possibilities. They are the outcome of intensive research of a scientific project and based on the collection of good (and bad) practice examples according to a pre-established grid of important elements in respect to the present situation of older persons as well as requirements to improve the respect of their dignity, the integration and the participation of older persons in society.

The NGO Committee on Ageing and the author of this booklet are perfectly aware of the fact that politicians and other decision-makers are under high time pressure and cannot afford to read long and complex texts. They need to be guided directly to the issues they are interested in or concerned by. This is why we have organised this brochure in a way that helps to come immediately to the essentials.

Please start by first consulting the table of content on page 5 and find, under Section II, among the 7 different areas of concern, the recommendations you are interested in. Each of the recommendation paragraphs in section II contains a short part in bold letters that highlights the essential of the argument.

Final remark: This publication is not only addressed to decision-makers and their support staff but also to “ordinary” citizens of all ages. They are warmly encouraged to use elements of this booklet to argue their concerns, needs and hopes; it might help them in strongly formulating their own criticism as well as demands to those who decide on them or for them.

Vienna, August 2015, NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna and Dirk Jarré



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Section I: Introduction and background information

1. About the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna

Non-Governmental Committees on Ageing exist currently at three main locations of the United Nations: in New York, in Geneva and in Vienna. They were created within the framework of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations, CoNGO, to represent older persons and voice their concerns within the United Nations system. The organisations constituting these Non-Governmental Committees on Ageing are all accredited to the UN and have consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (*ECOSOC*).

The Committees are active at the governmental and non-governmental level aiming at raising general public awareness about important issues connected with ageing in society worldwide, promoting mainstreaming of ageing and age-specific policies in strategies and programmes of the United Nations and fostering cooperation among UN accredited NGOs concerned by and interested in ageing matters. Each of the three Committees has developed specific priorities for its work, mainly depending on the political issues, the particular action areas and the specialised programmes dealt with by the United Nations and their specialised agencies at the three locations mentioned.

The NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna covers by its activities a very broad range of issues and questions connected with ageing like: demographic change, human rights, gender aspects, health and care, competences of older persons, life long learning, technology and ageing, decent work and volunteering, getting old in urban and rural settings, enabling environments, images of ageing, inter-generational dialogue and cooperation, older refugees, elder abuse, just to mention some important aspects of its work. In general the activities of the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna are based on the concept of life-course approach within “A Society for all Ages”.

The 21 members of the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna represent an impressively large variety of civil society organisations and concerns and thus, most probably, a major portion of the global population. Some of them are dealing directly with problems connected to aspects of the life of older persons or their situation in society, others have a more indirect, life-course oriented approach. In no other institutional setup similar diversity of civil society organisations may be found. Apart from the extensive experience and the profound expertise that these non-governmental organisations provide it is, in particular, the variety of competences and the trans-sectorial cooperation that constitutes their unique value and their



usefulness for policy makers and other decision makers when it comes to ageing issues and the search for innovative solutions with sustainable impact.

A list of the member organisations of the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna figures under Annex 1.

2. About the background of these “Recommendations for Decision Makers”

One of the member organisations of the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna – the European Federation of Older Persons, EURAG – is taking part in a research project named “*Social Innovation on Active and Healthy Ageing for Sustainable Economic Growth*” (SiforAGE Project, www.siforage.eu) that is commissioned and supported by the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme research funding scheme under its section “Science in Society”. It addresses a large variety of issues connected with the promotion of healthy and active living in an ever more ageing European society in order to conceptualise ageing as a great societal achievement with many opportunities rather than as a problem and a burden for society.

The main objective of the SiforAGE Project is to identify and promote alternative, new and effective ways and means that potentially can encourage and support older persons to stay in good health for as long as possible and to go on being active in society for as long as they are able to and want to. The aim is to identify important elements for evidence-based action. The findings can then be used for the conception and formulation of observations and recommendations addressed to decision-makers at different levels – local, regional, national and European – and to actors in various domains such as in the political sphere, in public administration, in science and research, in civil societies or in economic markets.

The project is carried out by 18 highly knowledgeable and experienced partners from a broad and multidisciplinary range of backgrounds including, for example, university departments and research institutions, local and regional authorities, civil society organisations representing or serving older persons, and business oriented consultants. An important feature of the concept is the comparative transnational approach by which different perceptions and reactions to similar issues are addressed. This can lead to a helpful new understanding of problems and solutions through mutual learning processes and, ultimately, trigger off creative imitation. Partners from Turkey and Brazil add very helpful and inspiring external experiences and opinions to the European perspective.



The SlforAGE Project endeavours to involve, within its research, all stakeholders engaged in action related to active and healthy ageing – such as scientists, policy makers, civil society organisations, public administrations, academic communicators, creative companies, as well as the users of goods and services, in particular older persons themselves. This involvement aims to strengthen the communication between the stakeholders and to unify the use of cooperation tools and processes, thereby creating an enabling environment for complementary views and innovative solutions. The data from the SlforAGE Project initiated workshops, tests, experiments, interviews, and good practice collections are analysed in respect of prevailing obstacles as well as concerning concrete opportunities for active and healthy ageing.

3. The role of the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna in the Slfor-AGE Project

In particular, the involvement of older persons themselves is of high relevance in the SlforAGE research project – either through civil society organisations that represent or advocate for them, or by involving individual older persons in the different research approaches, the analysis, the reflection and the interpretation processes. Through these means it is explored how future research and innovation activities and policy-making can be oriented in a way to better respond to real requirements and aspirations of older persons and of society at large - under the motto “as we age in a society of all ages”.

Considering that the European Federation of Older Persons, EURAG, is responsible for the coordination of one of the transversal Knowledge Management Units of the SlforAGE project – the one dealing with the issue of „Older Persons’ Active Participation and Inclusion in Society; Inequalities Associated to Ageing“ – it is logical that EURAG involved the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna in the reflection process of this Knowledge Management Unit in order to benefit from the Committee members’ profound experience and expertise on this subject and related important aspects.

In an extensive brain-storming process that started with a special workshop which most of the members of the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna attended and that was then followed-up by the Delphi method involving all members and their head organisations, it was identified what are present possibilities for older persons to participate in society, what are barriers and obstacles that make participation difficult or impossible and, finally, what are the elements of an enabling, supportive environment for better participation.



The outcome of this brain-storming exercise - a comprehensive list of variables associated with social participation - was then used to conceive a questionnaire with indicative annotations for the collection of practice examples, of concrete projects that involve or require older persons' participation, mainly carried out by civil society organisations and documented by them or by interested researchers.

More than a hundred cases from all over Europe and a few from overseas were submitted – most of them rather successful ones and only a few that did not achieve their objectives. All these practice examples were then categorised, analysed and carefully interpreted by a team of very knowledgeable experts.

On the grounds of the findings a specialist on ageing issues conceived the draft for the present comments and recommendations. The text was then verified and validated by the members of the NGO Committee on Ageing – first separately through a consultation process and finally by all members together during a special workshop with in-depth discussions. Consequently the present document is the product of a common effort that has led to a general agreement of the members of the NGO Committee on Ageing.

4. The target group of the comments and recommendations

The 31 comments and recommendations presented in the following Section II under 7 specific headings are neither accidental nor the product of purely theoretical considerations without prior empirical research carried out by some academics in their ivory towers. Quite to the contrary, they stem from real and very practical experiences and are formulated on the grounds of evidence based findings drawn from the collection of good practice cases and, in particular, from the analysis of identified social innovation.

These recommendations, together with related comments, should help politicians and other decision makers at various levels to conceive policies, strategies, projects and actions that have the potential to improve the conditions and options for healthy and active ageing in society in order to give older persons better opportunities to participate in society and contribute their experience and wisdom to its development and, thus, actively help to promote a sustainable “society for all ages” to the benefit of all living in it.

It is well understood that the term “decision-makers” applies to various categories of key persons that play a decisive role for and in the development of society. They may be active in parliamentary bodies, in governmental structures, in political parties, in public administrations, in enterprises or trade unions, civil society organisations,



and in universities or research institutions – just to name some of the most significant ones. According to the scope of their action area and their responsibilities these decision-makers may act at national level, at local or regional level, or at European level, in the framework of the European Union’s institutions but also in European federations, networks and similar structures.

In addition to these actors in an institutional context, the comments and recommendations presented should also be of interest to the simple “women and men in the street” who are, finally, subjects and objects of all decisions relating to societal development. Such comments and recommendations can certainly help them to better learn and understand what is politically at stake, what the problems are and how they can possibly be addressed. This might encourage them to engage (more) in society and to help them make up their minds and become better informed and, thus, enable them to make decisions about the persons to whom they should give a mandate to represent them or to decide on behalf of them.



Section II: Specific comments and recommendations drawn from practice examples

This chapter contains 31 comments and recommendations in 7 sections. These are destined to be used by decision-makers in various areas and at different levels. They either highlight a variety of issues to be addressed or indicate possible solutions to be taken into consideration. They are presented in rather general terms and may, sometimes, be overlapping or can be considered as belonging to another section.

1. On the experience of older persons

Older persons are a treasure to benefit from

Considering that older persons in European society have accumulated a huge experience over their life, it more than astonishes how little their knowledge and even “wisdom” is recognised and used in various domains of public interest. What older persons have seen during many decades in terms of successes, failures, broken promises, erroneous concepts and the like – be it in power politics, in technologies, in social policies, in economic developments, or other domains – constitutes a still living treasure of mankind that cannot be transmitted simply through recorded documentation. Their collective experiences enable these persons to make a comprehensive judgement on current issues in society and put them into a position of providing a more balanced advice to decision-makers in various key areas of society. The admirable dynamism, the boldness, the trust in technological advance and sometimes the simple and irrational confidence into the future of the young generation can thus be very well balanced and lead to more prudent attitudes - or at least the more experienced can present the imponderables and dangers of specific scenarios without putting obstacles in the way.

An intensive dialogue between the generations may well be of great help for using the advantages of long time experience combined with new drives and, thus, to adequately plan for the future of society.

Promoting new businesses for an ageing society

The professional expertise of older workers, be they employed or self employed, and their desire to continue an active life even after retirement age



should also be used in policies and strategies to create and promote new businesses that match exactly the needs of an ageing population.

These older experts, through their own experience and through their many contacts with the realities of their age peers, know a lot about the capacities, the limitations and the preferences of other older persons. This combination of professional expertise and knowledge about living conditions in older age provides a solid base for the production of meaningful and accepted goods and services in the “silver economy” - ranging from health care to social services, from education to leisure, from communication to information, from transportation to assisted living devices, from housing to healthy food, just to name some simple examples - destined to be purchased and used by ageing consumers.

Appropriate policies and strategies as well as seed financing should focus on these considerable opportunities to boost that segment of the economy.

Older persons to be involved in the development of new technologies

Older people possess a huge, but still very much untapped, purchasing power worth hundreds of billions of euros parked “for a rainy day” in various securities. This resource shapes an important market opportunity for the development of new technologies capable of radical improvement of quality of life for older people. Despite that, older people benefit from the hi-tech boom lesser than people of other age categories, mainly because their needs, opinions, perceptions are not fully appreciated by technology developers and providers.

It is an error to generally judge older persons as neither interested nor competent in new technologies. Quite the contrary seems to be true considering that a large segment of them desire to be up-to-date in the use of modern devices and processes and thus be able to keep up, in a way, with the young. However, what is still essentially lacking is an intelligent involvement of older persons in the creation of goods and services particularly oriented towards the “silver fraction” of society. An approach to simply use them to test such products once they are available and ready for the market is neither sufficient nor satisfactory.

Older persons need to be involved in the process much earlier and over the whole production cycle - which means beginning at the stage where such goods and services are in a conceptual phase, through the design of the prototype of the product until it is given the final touch. This would make decisions on production much more rational, avoid or minimise errors, save investments, provide more satisfaction on the users’ side and thus insure success for the entrepreneur.



Participation of older persons in scientific research concerning them

There is a growing demand and interest in scientific research dealing with the European ageing society, its consequences and how to find appropriate solutions to the ensuing problems and demands. Particularly in the area of medical and care services the need for new solutions is strongly felt under the pressure of fast raising costs of services in institutions and a growing shortage of care personnel. Many, if not most, of the solutions offered are conceived by engineers and other technical professions who use advanced state of the art technologies in their understanding of the problems but very often without having profound knowledge of the exact needs, capacities and limitations of the persons they should serve. Thus, it is often the case that devices and processes installed are not or cannot be used by the patients or users, either because they do not understand or trust them or they simply do not want to become dependent on them.

This can create a lot of mistrust, waste of good intentions and finally lead to counterproductive investment that could be avoided if older persons themselves were sufficiently involved in the orientation, the prioritisation, the design, the implementation and, very importantly, the interpretation of the outcome of scientific research related to their living conditions and needs.

Using life-course experiences in creating age-friendly work places

During the decades of their working life people accumulate an enormous amount of personal professional experience that should not simply be lost when they retire from their jobs or, in a majority of cases, have to cease their salaried activities due to statutory provisions. People need and appreciate strong systems of social security and rights to pensions, it is true, but at the same time many of them would like to continue work after retirement – they would like to go on having a specific, meaningful task to perform, to maintain their capabilities, they desire to be recognised as competent and useful. This is no contradiction. The important assets and advantages of older persons should be much better valued and benefitted from by companies and by the economy at large. Their experience and competence should be used not only for passing them on to the younger workforce but also, and in particular, for the creation and/or improvement of age-friendly work places and working conditions that allow older persons to go on working easily and productively as long as they want to and are able to.



New and flexible concepts for “transitional work” or for “advisory activities” in companies need to be conceived and developed for retirees so that both sides can benefit from this accumulated experience. Companies should be encouraged to creating the necessary conditions by tax incentives and they should be distinguished for their commitment to social progress. The establishment of a kind of “Sustainability Award” might be helpful.

2. On inter-generational relations

Inter-generational relations and learning

Today children and grandparents live together less and less often and, for this reason, the daily opportunities to learn about each other become a more rare experience. This can potentially lead to misunderstandings, misjudgements and create unwelcomed tensions between young and old. Schools have to take over a bridging, compensating role in this area that is important for social cohesion in society.

Consequently formal school curricula should contain components or lessons reserved for inter-generational dialogue in which traditions, values, attitudes, practices, etc. of the older generation are presented and made understood to the young. At the same time school children should get the opportunity to communicate and explain their way of thinking and acting to older persons. Exercises with concrete cases should identify and highlight what different generations have in common and what distinguishes them.

Knowledge about each other will lead to more mutual recognition, understanding and respect. It can promote cooperation and develop attitudes of solidarity in a life course perspective based on the concept of lifelong learning.

It is necessary to have inter-generational media

There are specific youth journals and particular magazines for older people that, in general, have a lot of success. A similar situation prevails in other media such as radio and television. They are even strongly supported by public authorities, by industries, and by respective representative organisations. However, there is a problem connected with these specialised media that needs to be overcome. They not only support age-specific subcultures but, at the same time, tend to promote segre-



gation between generations that can easily lead to non-understanding between age groups and to isolation, in particular of the older generation, that can work against societal cohesion.

In order to promote mutual information, understanding and acceptance between age groups an inter-generational cultural policy should be developed that would initiate and support age-bridging media and promote a strong life course perspective by which the living realities at the various stages of life are presented and made understandable. This should not be done in an abstract, theoretical manner but rather by concrete biographical examples that can promote empathy and acceptance of those of the other generations and thus increase the basis of mutual trust, solidarity and cooperation. In particular public media enterprises should use communication experts of all ages to work together in teams.

Inter-generational and intra-generational caring

The demand for enhanced mobility in European society – e.g. by necessity of schooling, of professional life, of retirement – leads to the fact that traditional family structures fall more and more apart and that family ties become weakened or become eroded. Thus there is a growing need for new forms of “quasi-family relations” that can recreate connectedness of the individual in the private sphere. This could be achieved by innovative concepts of “foster care” where older persons are ready to take over responsibilities for children who are not their own grandchildren – or where older persons not related to each other by family ties care for each other, inside or outside institutions. Wherever older persons are confronted with social problems in the course of these activities they would co-operate closely with professional social work so as to ensure that their endeavours become as effective as possible for individuals and society at large.

To develop such a “culture of care” policies and strategies are needed that carefully evaluate the existing potential, consider the social and economic advantages, assess possible risks and determine appropriate support mechanisms in terms of advice, training and counselling.

Sports as an ideal shared experience between generations with various backgrounds

There is evidence that the approach to sports differs between various societal groups. The socio-economic background correlates significantly with a more active,



well performing attitude on the one hand or a rather passive, consumerist behaviour on the other hand. This applies also to the different generations of each group. Strategies to overcome such differences should be developed. There is need to promote an understanding that sports of various kinds – especially when exercised in groups with or without specific rules – are not only healthy at all ages but also one of the best forms of “togetherness”, mutual encouragement and understanding between people of various origins and with different backgrounds. Also the application of a life course perspective in this domain can prove in a most convincing way how force, agility, perseverance, technique and alike can compensate for each other at various stages of life.

Sports policies and practices designed by public institutions, by civil society organisations, and even by enterprises, should highlight and promote this understanding so that both the young and the old, independently of their origins, would benefit from sportive activities.

3. On participation of older persons in society

Encourage older persons to participate in public affairs

It is often heard that older persons are inactive, not interested in politics and do not want to contribute to the common good. This is, generally speaking, an unjustified and wrong statement. Election statistics in Europe clearly show that the abstention rate of older persons is, in most countries, the lowest of all generations. However it is true that older and very old persons do not engage much in public affairs directly, and this for two main reasons: either their health and mobility is insufficient or they have the feeling that they are generally not adequately welcomed, accepted and recognised in public affairs.

In order to really benefit from their knowledge and experience official authorities at all levels – be it political bodies or administrations - should proactively stimulate the interest and willingness of older persons to participate in public debates and decision making processes.

Example: Even though it might sound strange, personally addressed letters could be sent to senior citizens to invite them to attend budget debates of the local council and present their view there as budget decisions have serious effects on material provisions and services for them.



Enhance participation of organised civil society in policy making

The past impressive extension and still growing life expectancy is not to be considered as a marginal event – sometimes judged as problematic – but has to be accepted as a remarkable phenomenon that intrinsically characterises the present European society. It creates new and even complicated challenges but also considerable new opportunities for older persons as well as for society at large. Thus it needs to be put into the centre of politics, of planning for the future of society and should be considered as a major element of concern in strategic orientations. It would be a fatal error not to involve older persons in the related assessment exercises and decision-making processes. From their living experience older persons and the civil society organisations that represent them or serve them have a profound knowledge about the living conditions of older persons, about their perceptions of the sense of life and of the quality of society that the young ones do not have.

In order to maintain social cohesion in society and to base decision-making in all areas on a life course perspective politicians are well advised, and must feel it as one of their prime responsibilities, to involve older persons and, in particular, their mandated representation in all political processes that deal with ageing and have possible effects on society at large. To constructively plan for a promising future of society the involvement of all ages is needed – to cooperate between them, to potentiate their respective capabilities, to develop solidarity among them and to balance and reconcile the various interests.

Create an enabling environment for volunteering at all ages.

Doing good and receiving recognition for doing so is a basic desire at all ages and, at the same time, one of the strongest glues of social cohesion. Volunteering as a means to make a positive contribution to society has to be considered as a fundamental human right.

Thus it is very important to remove obstacles that make commitment for others and for the common good difficult, and rather create an enabling environment and favourable conditions for volunteering at all stages of life.

Ways and means in this respect need to encompass measures of information and encouragement, legal and structural tools, as well as appropriate administrative and, in particular cases of need, financial support.



Politicians who have responsibilities in deciding on appropriate ways and means should intensely consult with civil society and develop policies and measures in close cooperation with voluntary organisations.

Change views on the importance of finances for participation

Too often financial considerations determine the opportunity as well as the feasibility of projects in which people – in particular older persons – can participate in a meaningful and satisfactory manner. But this is a fundamentally wrong perspective and approach to civil activation that needs to be corrected by public authorities as well as by organised civil society. Projects stimulating activation and participation can be viewed and categorised, from the angle of costs, in three ways: those that involve very low or no costs at all, those that need initial or permanent investment, and those that even save costs in the future.

Financial means cannot and should not be considered as the major factor of success or failure. Other elements like ethical commitment, enthusiasm, the joy of cooperating with others, personal ambitions, the drive to contribute to society, the wish to be recognised and similar elements of motivation have to be taken into consideration much more.

Thus, there is a need to better assess such factors through appropriate research and incorporate them into policies that help to maintain the sustainability of public engagement and volunteering.

Value the contribution of older persons to culture

Progress through innovative thinking is not only a matter of natural sciences and technology. It most frequently happens through a human's capacities to create and to reorient through the arts, including literature, that reflect the past and the present and shape the future. The arts can be excellent meeting points of all generations in society and constitute a natural link between what has been lived, what is actually experienced and how hopes, ambitions and visions may determine the future. This approach to culture includes intercultural exchange and efforts towards mutual understanding between individuals and groups with various backgrounds, taking into account the growing diversity of society and hence also within the older generation. The specific contributions of young, middle-aged and older persons to the arts – and the extraordinary value of this particular capacity of individuals and of society at large – need to be much more recognised.



Culture, as one of the indispensable glues of societies, but mostly undervalued these days, needs to be given much more attention through adequate policies. These should strengthen the understanding that producing and enjoying elements of art can bring about more satisfaction if done together between the generations with their different and common perceptions.

4. On obstacles to be removed

Resolve communication problems between societal groups and generations

Speechlessness, fragmented communication, indoctrination and misunderstandings or misleading interpretation are one of the flaws of our society, despite the intense communication – on a relatively undifferentiated level – by the mass media. Sharp differentiation of language – caused by high professionalization, very different life experiences, political and economic jargon, migration, etc. plays an increasingly segregating role and undermines communication between the various components of society. It makes it more difficult for people to participate in the thinking and in the activities of groups they do not originally belong to or engage in a meaningful manner in various sectors of societal activities as well as in public life in general. This constitutes a major problem in particular for those who have retired from professional life, are no longer intensely occupied by family and home affairs or otherwise have lost their network of reference.

Even though it might be hard to achieve and take a long time, cultural and social policies must recognise and address this problem seriously in order to prevent further fragmentation of society, to contribute to the well-being of people and to benefit from the contribution of all at all ages.

Remove avoidable barriers and use design for all

It is not only persons with a severe physical disability who suffer from architectural or other material obstacles in their daily lives. Most people do have difficult experiences with their physical surroundings or with organisational systems, or technical processes - whether we think of outdoor environment, access to transportation, the handling of service automates, the distribution of important information, etc.. Many arrangements in our public environment are conceived to serve only sections of the population while the rest is bound to struggle with them. However with a greater sense of



understanding and a certain amount of political and administrative willingness it would in many, and perhaps in the majority of cases not be too difficult to overcome the saying “one size does not fit all”. Public infrastructure, facilities and provisions should be safe, independently usable, and easy to access for everyone – and thus be responsive to human diversity. For example, it is not complicated to imagine that transportation, services and automatic machines can be used equally by children, young mothers, persons with disabilities as well as by frail older persons.

Finding appropriate, innovative solutions does not necessarily and in all cases demand lots of financial investment. It requires, in the first place, the will to assess the needs of everyone, to solve problems and to remove obstacles while using the results of research and by applying good planning methods. All that should be done with a high involvement of all those concerned.

Use more preventive and supportive rules and action

Whenever a threat, a danger or a difficulty occurs, European society predominantly reacts by creating legislation that restricts, prohibits or bans something - affecting finally many citizens. This is perceived negatively by many people and leads them to inactivity and disinterest in public issues and in societal matters. However, people have better understanding and give greater support to legislation, regulations and action with a preventive or even positive, encouraging character– as examples such as environment protection, building of safe walking paths, health promotion campaigns, etc. demonstrate. This positive-supportive approach should also be more used in relation to older persons in society – by highlighting their potential, by giving them the opportunity to work beyond retirement age if they wish, by valuating and supporting their voluntary activities in the community and in the family. This would also have a considerable effect on the image that older persons have in society and change to more positive attitudes towards them.

In this respect political and administrative decision-makers as well as media specialists have a high responsibility, which they should assume by associating and consulting older persons systematically when designing policies, strategies or measures directly or indirectly influencing the living conditions of this group.



5. On improving the image of older persons

Promotion of the public recognition of the achievements of older persons

Present living conditions, opportunities and enjoyments in Europe are an immediate result of the achievements of former and today's still living older generations. It should also be taken into consideration that building up one's own pension rights constitutes an investment into the productive sector and that retired persons thus benefit from the return of investment that they have previously made over decades. This understanding seems to be largely repressed in the common awareness and replaced by the allegation that older persons live on the performance and the product of today's professionally active generation.

Public policies have to urgently correct this negative judgement and help to develop a positive perception of the older generation with an explicit recognition of its investments and achievements, also in respect to the chances of the younger ones.

This will then transmit to the following generation the needed sense of responsibility to limit their egoisms and to rather maintain policies of sustainability that safeguard favourable conditions also for the generations still to come.

“Wise senators” to help to improve the image of ageing

Outstanding, successful personalities have always influenced values, attitudes and opinions in society. Their position and status is often used to the benefit of children, the environment, charitable foundations etc. In order to develop a true society for all ages, persons who have achieved a lot during their life, have been visible and become famous, should be encouraged to serve as “Wise Senators” to promote positive images of ageing and of older persons in society. Based on their personal achievements and the public respect given to them they can effectively transmit values, ethics and good principles to all age groups in society – like the respect for human rights, the inclusion of all in society, the necessity of solidarity, the advantages of cooperation, and so on. Such wise senators who have a considerable impact on public opinion can come from science, culture, sports, politics, civil society movements, the economic world, just to name some important areas.



Public authorities at all levels, political parties, non-governmental organisations should use this approach to improve the image of ageing and older persons – as this is already increasingly done by industries in promoting the sales of their products to the elderly.

Take measures against the development of negative self-prejudices

It is a well-known phenomenon that negative stereotypes towards specific groups in society lead to a diminishing self-respect and even to a strong negative self-prejudice of the members of this very group. This typically happens with older persons in our society when they reach the “after retirement” stage and are, all of a sudden, considered to be no longer productive, but old, frail and forgetful, only using passively the social and financial resources of the society. Many know that such judgements are totally wrong and unjustified. In particular it is the politicians who hardly do anything against the perseverance of such negative stereotypes. The effects are disastrous. They exactly contribute to inactivity, loss of initiative, non-participation, dependency and self-neglect of older persons – in the classic dynamic of “self-fulfilling prophecies”.

Thus it is of key importance to change the public discourse on older persons and actively promote positive images through education, the media, political party programmes and other appropriate means. In this context it is also necessary to promote the use of a positive terminology - like diversity, experience, wisdom, openness, etc.

Last but not least it has to be mentioned that this negative stereotype phenomenon and its consequences does apply to various societal groups that suffer from negative public opinion and consequently tend to develop negative prejudices against themselves.

6. On the necessity of a life-course approach

Develop and apply more integrated learning methods

So far there is a strong distinction between the formal educational system with its specific goals and rules and, on the other hand, more informal learning approaches in the framework of the concept of “lifelong learning”. To promote “a society of all ages” it would be appropriate and necessary to identify effective ways and means to



overcome this systematic separation by building bridges between formal and non-formal education and learning. A good example is the so-called “dual system” applied in some countries to combine theoretical learning in school with part-time practical apprenticeship in enterprises.

To introduce significant elements of “experience in societal life” the integration of specific life-oriented projects into school curricula would be one of the ways to go as they could already expose school children to realities of society and familiarise them with new life situations, put them into contact with groups in society they know little about and give them a better chance to develop their own opinion about the extra-school-environment.

This could significantly help to eradicate wrong pre-judgements and prejudices and certainly contribute to a positive attitude towards a life course approach starting at a young age.

Reconciling different aspects of human existence in society

It is interesting to note that the concept of “lifelong learning” has a totally different connotation in different stages of life. Formal schooling aims at teaching children and youth to master the essential cultural techniques and prepare them adequately for future professional life. During the professional phase it mostly means to update and further develop one’s job-oriented knowledge and capacities in order to be updated and go on performing well. In life after retirement the concept becomes more blurred but essentially it claims that older persons should maintain capacities that allow them to “still lead a meaningful life” and to be integrated in society. This kind of fragmentation of learning, almost strictly on the grounds of life phases, definitely demands revision.

A new concept based on a life course perspective that takes into account the complex but comprehensive aspects of human existence in a given society is needed.

This means that many realities are simultaneously interwoven in all stages of life – e.g. youth and learning, family creation and parenthood, a job career and eventually the end of professional life, other functions in the family, time for new activities – just to sketch the complexity of the life course. “Reconciliation of work and family life”, “transition into retirement” or “third-age academies” are some of the current political buzzwords. However, this approach is definitely too narrow-minded.



Decision-makers responsible for the formulation and implementation of educational policies should reconsider, together with the civil society, their objectives and the ways of how to create new, more adequate opportunities to achieve true “lifelong learning”. Thus, it is indispensable to reconceive forms and content of teaching institutions as well as learning methods in such a way that they become accessible and beneficial to all people at any age.

Integrating the different life stages into a continuum

Western culture puts a strong emphasis on age brackets. Specifications according to decades of life, like “teens”, “tweens”, “sexagenarian” or, in a softer expression, “in the eighties”, are commonly used. At certain ages one changes status and function in society – like majority age, age to vote or retirement age. This age segmentation can have problematic effects. It leads to the, certainly unintended but unfortunate, assumption that people abruptly and fundamentally change in various aspects when they cross a specific time line in their lives. Even though this is totally wrong, the public discourse obviously maintains this perception and most often judges and treats people accordingly.

In order to accommodate all persons adequately in society and to benefit from their on-going capabilities and energy, it is required to introduce into many policies an “age-flow” perspective of human life as a “soft” continuum with development and accumulation of competencies but also with reduction and even loss of certain capacities, taking into account the ups and downs as we age from birth to death.

7. On ways and means to be applied

Favour more cooperative structures and methods

In the development of policies, strategies and actions it is highly recommended to opt for an approach that incorporates, right from the start, all those parties concerned – whether they should benefit from a project, might suffer from it, can or should support it, are responsible for the concrete implementation or have related experiences from similar projects. These parties can be politicians, administrators, scientists and researchers, the financing bodies as well as the persons or societal groups that the project is to be built up for. They all can and should contribute to the project’s suc-



cess by their experience, by innovative ideas, by the necessary data, by finances, by human resources, etc.

As a matter of principle such cooperation should take place within a competent political framework with democratic accountability in order to guarantee accessibility, openness, fairness and transparency.

For general orientation of politics the method of the European Parliament to establish the so-called Inter-Groups on hot societal issues seems to be a good way to go, a way that should also be applied at national and at local levels.

Follow the demand “Nothing on us without us”

In a mature democracy it is of paramount importance to abandon all sorts of paternalistic attitudes. It is fundamentally wrong to create politics and human services for those concerned instead of shaping them with those in need. As social services should first and foremost enable the realization of human rights, decision-makers must be aware that the definition and the implementation of helping and supportive policies and services must be designed in a way to increase self-confidence and self-determination of people instead of creating or prolonging dependencies.

The empowerment of persons needing assistance, of clients or patients, must be one of the main objectives of all supportive measures and progressively shift people from a situation of takers or consumers to the status of co-creators through the possibility of real participation, which is more than simple consultation that can be ignored or disregarded.

Democracy and fundamental rights require that people are not to be regarded as objects but rather as involved subjects of policies and that they rightfully claim “Nothing on us without us!”

Use the approach of creative imitation

When new policies, strategies and actions are needed to address problems or to achieve objectives, it is always advisable to do some research work to find out whether good practices have already been tested and successfully implemented to achieve identical or similar results.

We know that in many cases others have developed instruments from which one can effectively learn. The argument often used “We cannot use this approach because our circumstances are different” is certainly not very convincing but often a pretext to



do nothing or not enough. The SiforAGE project provides impressive evidence that the most promising way to go for mutual learning to take place can be summarized as follows: It does not mean to simply imitate others but to carefully examine already successfully used concepts and instruments – even and in particular from different areas and from different times. The decisive elements should be taken from them and applied in a creative manner, i.e. to adapt them intelligently to the own situation that needs to be changed by new initiatives.

When public authorities do so, they should closely involve civil society organisations in order to make sure that such measures are accepted and supported by the people concerned as much as possible.

Use impact assessment

When conceiving new policies, strategies or actions, it is always strongly recommended, if not indispensable, to use the method of “impact assessment”.

This approach, in its proper intention, does not only try to state the final outcome – be it negative, positive or neutral – of the measure but evaluates, in strong cooperation with all the stakeholders, the result of every stage of the development of such a project from the assessment of the problem at stake and the definition of the response, through the conception of the approach, the implementation of the concrete measures, the monitoring of the project until the final stage with a judgement on the intended success. The impact assessment approach which involves all stakeholders from the beginning and at all moments allows one to proceed with corrections and improvements of the process and to rebalance, if necessary, the intentions and the interest of the parties concerned.

Thus it is the best possible way to avoid failures, to insure the effectiveness of material and human investments and to act in the interest of those finally concerned.

Observatories of self-help projects should be created and used

When politicians and public authorities fail to recognise or to address the existing or newly emerging needs in society, or when public provisions are insufficient, people often decide to self-organise in order to resolve or alleviate their problems. This sort of “self-healing energy” of communities is of the highest value in a well-functioning and self-confident society and should not be ignored nor underestimated. However, it is important that politicians and administrators provide room, support, and recogni-



tion of such creative initiatives – without disengaging from the essential and agreed responsibilities of the State at various levels. Private self-help initiatives are an extremely important source of social innovation and as such they should be carefully documented so that the State as well as other individuals and groups can benefit from such experiences for their own purposes.

Independent national and European documentation centres or observatories of general interest, based on public law, should be created with the mission to collect information about such initiatives – in various sorts of domains – to analyse, compare and disseminate information about them.

Good politics encourage social innovation

Social innovation processes, important yeast for effective societal development, rarely happen in a closed, controlled society that has no or only low discussion culture. Social innovation requires an enabling environment and a high degree of positive recognition of alternative options that are not imposed by authorities.

Politics that do not fear change but intend to make society fit to cope with existing or expected new challenges should provide the necessary incentives and conditions for innovatory processes that are carried forward by very different actors, be they civil society organisations, market actors or individual persons. Such supportive conditions may be created by appropriate legislation, by just a minimum of public regulations and control, by providing seed-money or by the opening of doors for unusual cooperation.

The public appreciation of particular, non-mainstream and even exotic knowledge, experience and skills that can surface by individual action and by processes of participatory democracy can be considered among the strongest supporting measures for social innovation.

Establish easy and effective complaint mechanisms for cases of age discrimination

Public disrespect or even crude discrimination towards older persons – for example in the media, on the labour market, in access to health, or in public transport - makes them shy and silent so that such negative attitudes can pass without the authors being particularly blamed for them. This undermines the fundamental rights of senior citizens and promotes breakdown of societal values and, especially, the sense of solidarity. A promising strategy to lower and progressively overcome this danger for



society is to provide for easy to handle and effective complaint mechanisms combined with information campaigns and educational programmes that encourage older persons not to accept discriminatory attitudes or actions but to actively react against the author of such an act. However, such complaint mechanisms must be more than the establishment of the post of an ombudsman with often a rather silent role of a mediator between the persons in conflict.

Systematic and effective implementation of anti-discrimination legislation with adequate power to enforce the abolition of discriminatory behaviour and/or structural discrimination must necessarily be the logical consequences of violation of the dignity and the human rights of a person.

Use image campaigns to fight stereotypes

Advertising is a broadly used method to attract attention, to publicise political party programs and to sell products and services. In all these cases the goal is to spread information and to raise the sympathy for the ideas or the objects to be promoted. If society is serious about the will to improve the image of and the respect for older persons, it becomes a great responsibility of politicians and of the administration to use all appropriate ways and means to achieve this objective. To invest public money in publicity campaigns for this purpose does not involve ethical problems nor violates known rules for good budgetary administration.

Consequently good advertising should quite naturally be used as much as image campaigns are common in other political areas.





Annex I List of Members UN NGO Committee on Ageing, Vienna

(September 2015)

ACUNS – Academic Concil on the United Nations System

Maximilian Edelbacher
Acuns Vienna Liaison Office
Wien Austria

edelmax@aon.at
mobile: +43 664 516 9729

EFOS - European Federation of Older Students

Ingrid Dummer
Kiel Germany

IngridDummerKiel@aol.com
phone: +49 431 69 69 789
mobile: +49 172 830 65 94

Dr. Katarina Grunwald
Bratislava Slovakia

k_grunwald@orangemail.sk
phone: +4212 643 616 55
mobile: +421 904 800 472

EFOS and AIUTA

Dkfm. Horst Leonhard
Herzogenburg Austria

hleonhard@aon.at
phone: +43 2782 82 918
mobile: +43 664 739 69 120

EURAG-EUROPE - *The European Federation of Older Persons*

Dirk Jarré
Kronberg im Taunus
Germany

dirkjarre@aol.com
dirkjarre@hotmail.de
phone: +49 1525 319 6089
mobile: + 43 699 1712 6798

Dkfm. Erika Folkes
EURAG-Österreich
Vienna Austria

eurag@eurag.at
phone: +43 1 489 09 36
mobile: +43 676 520 3230

HelpAge International

vacant

ICJW – International Council of Jewish Women

Gerda Frey
Vienna Austria

r.g.frey@aon.at
phone: +43 1 369 54 48



Deborah Kamil
Vienna Austria

deb_kamil@hotmail.com
mobile: +43 680 233 1526

ICW – International Council of Women

Eleonore Hauer-Róna
Postfach 115
Vienna Austria

boefv.ncwaustria@utanet.at
phone: +43 1 889 53 68

IFA – International Federation on Ageing

Christina Quijano-Caballero
Vienna Austria

cquijano@aon.at
phone: +43 1 7988 624
mobile: +43 699 19200936

IFHE – International Federation for Home Economics

Dr. Gertraud Pichler
Vienna Austria

gertraud.pichler@tele2.at
phone: + 43 1 877 98 85
mobile: +43 664 212 42 44

IFUW – International Federation of University Women

Dkfm. Ilona Graenitz
Vienna Austria

ilona.graenitz@chello.at
phone: +43699 1990 46 07

INPEA – International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

Dr. Ulrike Waginger, MSc
Vienna Austria

ulrike.waginger@univie.ac.at
phone: +43 676 55 70 696

ILC -International Longevity Center / INPEA

Gertraud Dayé
Graz Austria

gertraud.daye@aon.at
phone: +43 316 67 87 24
mobile: +43 650 67 87 240

International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Marlene Parenzan
Vienna Austria

marlene.parenzan@chello.at
phone/fax: +43 1 923 69 10

Mag. Christa Kirchmair
Vienna Austria

christa.kirchmair@bpw.at
phone: +43 1 890 55 05

International Federation of Social Workers

Christine Petioky, MA
Vienna Social Fund
Vienna Austria

christine.petioky@fsw.at
phone: +43 1 4000 66701



International Inner Wheel

Ceja Gregor-Hu
Vienna Austria

ceja@aon.at
phone: +43 1 470 27 85
mobile: +43 676 61 89 775

National Council of German Women's Organizations

Brunhilde Hoffmann
Baden Austria

brunhilde.hoffmann@outlook.de

Karin Rudolph
Vienna Austria

karin.rudolph@chello.at
phone: +43 1 713 26 84
mobile: +43 676 4552044

S.E.R. Foundation for Subjective Experience and Research D-NI

Mag. Eva Florentine Pöcheim
Graz Austria

eva.poecheim@me.com
phone: +43 664 92 04 458

Soroptimist International

Dora Vrdlovec
Vienna Austria

[dora.vrdlovec@
soroptimistinternational.org](mailto:dora.vrdlovec@soroptimistinternational.org)
phone: +43 1 876 42 84

Dr. Martina Gredler
Vienna Austria

[martina.gredler@
soroptimistinternational.org](mailto:martina.gredler@soroptimistinternational.org)
phone: +43 664 204 73 50

Verein zur Förderung der Völkerverständigung

Ing. Gebhard Fidler

gebhard.fidler@chello.at
phone: +43 699 14966 689

Dr. Josephine Papst
Wien Austria

josephine.papst@chello.at
phone +43 699 1705 4034

WFWP "Woman's Federation for World Peace" / ÖFFW

Renate Amesbauer
Vienna Austria

renate.amesb@gmail.com
phone/fax: +43 1 6161 938
Mobile: +43 650 751 40 73

Elisabeth Riedl
Vienna Austria

wfwpieurope@gmail.com
mobile: +43 650 885 19 88

Shantu Watt
Neubau Austria

shantnu@hotmail.com
mobile +43 680 406 90 85



WIZO – Women’s International Zionist Organisation

Dr. Hava Eva Bugajer-Gleitman
Vienna Austria

drbugajer@rhb.co.at
phone/fax: +43 1 367 33 33
mobile: +43 664 340 13 09

Batya Tomann
Vienna Austria

tomann.batya@news.at
phone: +43 650 917 2457

MMM - Make Mothers Matter - OBSERVER

Mag. Irina Pálffy-Daun-Seiler, MA
Vienna Austria

irina.palffy@gmail.com
phone: +43 676 6299679

ZONTA International

Arch. DI Monika Anna Klenovec

klenovec@designforall.at
mobile: +43 699 177 88 9

Dr. Ingeborg Geyer
Vienna Austria

Inge.Geyer@oeaw.ac.at
phone+43 1 515 81 34 92

Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel
European Network of Green Seniors (ENGS)

birgit.meinhardschiebel@gmail.com

Dr. Jacqueline Stark
President of Association Internat. Aphasie
Neuropsycholinguistic Research
Austrian Academy of Sciences
Vienna Austria

Jacqueline.stark@oeaw.ac.at

Jacqueline-ann.stark@univie.ac.at
+43 1 51581 - 2682

Dr Erika Winkler
Sozialministerium
1010 Vienna Austria

Erika.Winkler@sozialministerium.at



Annex II Official UN Documents on Ageing and Websites

2nd World Assembly on Ageing (WAA2), Madrid, Spain, 2002

- Political Declaration
- Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)

http://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Madrid_plan.pdf

UNECE Ministerial Conference, Berlin, Germany, 2002

- Ministerial Declaration on Ageing
- Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS)

UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, Leòn, Spain, 2007

- NGO Forum
- Scientific Forum
- Ministerial Declaration

UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, Vienna, Austria, 2012

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<http://www.unece.org/population/ageing.html>

http://www.aktivaltern2012.at/aa2012/Veranstaltungen/UNECE_Ministerkonferenz



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NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna

Chair: Gertraud Dayé - gertraud.daye@aon.at

Vice Chair: Dr. Ulrike Waginger, MSc - ulrike.waginger@univie.ac.at

Vice Chair: Dirk Jarré - DirkJarre@aol.com

Treasurer: Dr. Gertraud Pichler - gertraud.pichler@tele2.at

Secretary: Mag. Christa Kirchmair - christa.kirchmair@bpw.at

Bank Austria Member of UniCredit, IBAN AT03 1200 0006 9000 7000, BIC BKAUAATWW