

Recommendations guide to increase the involvement of older persons and civil society organizations in research



**Social Innovation on active
and healthy ageing for sus-
tainable economic growth**



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Introduction

(1)

The present document presents the research work done by the partners of the project “Social Innovation on Active and Healthy Ageing for Sustainable Economic Growth” (hereinafter SIforAGE) in the scope of Work Package 3 (hereinafter WP3) entitled “What do we want from science and how we engage”.

The findings from the qualitative research conducted in different European countries and Turkey and Brazil described in this document, and in particular recommendations presented in the finalising section, should help decision makers conceive policies, strategies, projects and actions that have the potential to improve the conditions and options for healthy and active ageing in European society.

It is well understood that the term “decision-makers” applies to various categories of key persons who play a decisive role for and in the development of society. They may be active in parliamentary bodies, governmental structures, political parties, public administrations at various levels, enterprises or trade unions, civil society organisations, universities or research institutions – just to name some of the most significant ones.

The overarching theme of WP3 is active participation of older persons in public life and scientific research, taking into consideration the barriers that prevail, the opportunities to be used and the enabling

environment that needs to be created. These issues were investigated through good practice examples, focus groups, and deliberative workshops involving older persons, decision makers and researchers and through intergenerational interventions. The partners explored the main facilitators/obstacles and the potential benefits associated with the participation of civil society, and in particular older persons, in active and healthy ageing research by using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The findings of the aforementioned studies led to a set of 31 comments and recommendations that were grouped into the following 7 areas:

1. experience of older persons
2. inter-generational relations
3. participation of older persons in public life
4. obstacles to be removed
5. image of older persons
6. life-course approach
7. ways and means to be applied

This analysis could contribute to the awareness of different societal groups that participation in research and development of innovations would promote sustainable growth in Europe, to the benefit of all.

SiforAGE Project in brief

(2)

The “Social Innovation on Active and Healthy Ageing for Sustainable Economic Growth” project – with the acronym SiforAGE – is part of the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union and addresses under the topic “Mobilisation and Mutual Learning” the relevance of science in society, in particular in relation to the issue of “healthy and active ageing”.

The general objective of the SiforAGE project is to expand the cooperation tools and processes between all stakeholders working along the value chain 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. The aim is to improve the European Union’s economic growth and competitiveness through research and innovative technologies and services that promote and support people to live healthier and more active lives.

The more specific objectives of the SiforAGE project are:

- to develop encouraging and supporting ways and means to boost social innovation processes in respect to active and healthy ageing
- to motivate and empower civil society organisations to engage in research on active and healthy ageing, including inter-generational cooperation activities
- to support evidence-based policymaking geared at the orientation and the shaping of research programmes on ageing and related funding
- to raise awareness among the scientific community on the importance of social responsibility and ethics in ageing research and offer practical guidance on how to apply them
- to analyse and improve the existing mechanisms for accessing the market with innovative products and solutions for older persons’ needs
- to actively involve a wide range of stakeholders of the value chain into the projects activities and disseminate knowledge generated during the project duration

The SiforAGE project is carried out by a consortium of 18 diverse and experienced partners including research institutions, universities, local and regional authorities, market oriented consultants and civil society organisations. In order to go beyond the European perspective and to benefit from external experiences and views, partners from Turkey and Brazil have also been included.

The SiforAGE project constitutes a science-corner targeted at the investigation of current and emerging social needs and expectations in ageing European society and the question of how the responses to these needs can constitute new opportunities for the European Union to improve its performance in an ever more globalized economic environment. One of the central issues in this respect is how new technologies, products and services can be designed in line with societal needs and values so they are more readily accepted by society. Consequently SiforAGE explores how future research and innovation activities can be oriented to respond to the real requirements and aspirations of people and of society at large. It does so by testing options of involving and empowering users and stakeholders, through adequate participatory processes, to be able to actively participate in the choice and orientation of future research.

The SiforAGE project investigates the process of research by involving a large variety of relevant stakeholders to identify the prevailing and expected needs for the support and maintenance of active and healthy ageing in the European society. In particular it collects and analyses good practices for social inclusion, non-discrimination of older persons and their enhanced participation in society. It also monitors inter-generational programmes, well designed and useful technologies, promising business plans and helpful scientific data, as well as assessing public policies and research programmes. The outcome of these investigations informs recommendations and suggestions addressed to politicians and decision makers at a European and national level in order to support evidence-based policymaking and thus to contribute to the achievements of the European Union's Agenda objectives.

SiforAGE places a strong emphasis on information and knowledge dissemination reaching a large range of stakeholders through a regular project Newsletter, social media platforms, by presenting results at scientific events, and by offering information to older persons and society at large about the importance of healthy and active living at any age.



Due to financial limitations within the framework of the project it is not possible to perform a holistic pan-European research and data collection that covers all aspects of active and healthy ageing in the European society and thus SiforAGE is not “a typical research project”. It concentrates its efforts, in collaboration between the project partners and the European Commission, on the promotion of an enhanced and more effective involvement of policy makers and civil society in the orientation of research work and support to innovation processes that promote active and healthy ageing. To implement this concept SiforAGE uses a dynamic approach of “conceiving - observing - testing - analysing - readjusting - concluding - recommending” that is sufficiently flexible to explore yet uncharted opportunities (innovation processes). SiforAGE addresses the challenge of promoting social innovation related to healthy and active ageing by applying participatory involvement and knowledge-based decision making processes.

Presentation of Work Package

3

(3)

It is generally understood that older persons have accumulated a huge amount of knowledge, experience and wisdom over the six or more decades of their private, public and professional life. They understand better than any other age group the opportunities, problems, needs, challenges and expectations individuals encounter during the life course. They have also experienced, and are still experiencing, what society can offer and what the ethical, financial, structural and social limitations are. Such personal, individual knowledge can provide, in an accumulated form, a most valuable basis or starting point for further research on these issues, the results of which, in turn, might help to formulate options for political decisions in view of the promotion of a 'society for all ages'.

In the framework of SiforAGE Project, WP3 with the title "What do we want from science and how we engage" focused on innovative possibilities of empowering and engaging civil society in research on Active and Healthy Ageing (AHA). Following an evidence-based scientific procedure, three tasks were developed based on the triangulation of different and complementary methodologies. Each of these three tasks is described in more detail in this section, which gives an overall perspective on the goals of the work performed and the methods followed in WP3.

On the one hand, qualitative methods were used to collect information directly from some of the significant actors in research on AHA: older persons, experts, researchers, decision makers and other relevant stakeholders (i.e. children). These qualitative methods were applied in different countries providing data from a more diverse sample (improving credibility) and collected by different researchers (maximizing the reliability and independence of the study).

In Task 3.1 five focus-groups were conducted across four European countries in order to identify the main opportunities and barriers regarding older persons' participation in society. By allowing older persons to freely express their needs and concerns regarding social participation, this task provided very rich information to inform future actions in this domain. In a similar vein, in Task 3.2 a participatory methodology of moderated workshops was used to involve older persons, researchers and decision makers in active discussion around the issue of older persons' engagement in AHA research activities. As described in more detail below, the use of this methodology allowed for the improvement of knowledge and links between these different groups, thus promoting a more inclusive view of research activities. The interpretation of participants' answers was based on content analysis and followed standard methodological requirements in qualitative techniques.

On the other hand, in Task 3.3 a quantitative approach was used to implement an intervention program called imAGES which aimed to fight ageism among children and promote positive images of older persons. In this regard, a questionnaire was applied before, during and after the intervention program in order to assess children's attitudes regarding older persons. This questionnaire constitutes a uniform and reliable method for measuring attitudes. It is based on a solid theoretical background and uses measures previously tested in the literature. Cross-cultural adaptation of the questionnaire to the five countries involved in Task 3.3 allowed for a proper comparison of the results obtained in the five cases under analyses. These results, obtained from the quantitative questionnaires, were complemented with qualitative data obtained from the open ended questions answered by the children, thus enriching the evaluation procedure. The use of a quantitative method in this task proved to be a very useful procedure, allowing for a comparison of the results obtained not only within the five countries under analyses, but also with other similar procedures in the literature in this field.



Table 1. Summarizes the main goals and the methods followed in WP3.

Work Package 3	Main Goals	Method
Task 3.1 Social Participation of older persons	To identify the main opportunities and barriers regarding older persons' participation in society.	Five focus groups were carried out in Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Turkey. The focus groups were conducted in parallel discussions in 3 age groups with different education level.
Task 3.2 Local intervention programs in communities to engage older persons in research projects	To promote the analysis regarding the benefits and potential participation of different groups in society: older persons, researchers and decision makers in AHA research.	Moderated workshops were carried out in Austria, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain involving different stakeholders: Older persons, researchers and decision makers. These workshops were divided in two parts: (1) moderated discussion and project ideas brainstorming sessions in sub-groups; (2) and the plenary session supported by Metaplan technique.
Task 3.3 Intervention programs with children and young people: analysing cross-cultural universalities in the development of ageist attitudes of children and intergenerational experiences.	To create and test a program to prevent and fight ageism in children and adolescents (11 to 14 years old) from five different cultural backgrounds.	A theoretically based program was developed and applied in 4 European countries (Austria, Lithuania, Portugal, and Spain) and also in Brazil. This program has a quasi-experimental design including one intervention group and one control group who participated in two learning sessions, and one session of intergenerational contact. A questionnaire was used to assess children's attitudes before, during and after the program.

At the start of the project a Knowledge Management Unit 3 (hereinafter KMU 3) was created with the aim to accumulate information from partners with different institutional backgrounds and expertise, to share and exchange transversal knowledge and to boost mutual understanding between the partners. KMU 3, as the central content oriented support mechanism for the whole WP3, focused on fundamental aspects of participation and integration of older persons in European society – including a close look at the obstacles and barriers that might prevent these processes being effective as well as the necessary enabling environment to allow, encourage and support participation and integration of older persons in society.

Based on their knowledge, experience and networks, SiforAGE partners started the research process from a seminar “Towards Improved Integration of Older Persons into Society” with members of the Vienna NGO Committee on Ageing, held in July 2013. Organised civil society, especially in the form of NGOs, acts as a “thermometer”, measuring the state of health of society and detecting illnesses and weaknesses at an early stage – either as organisations representing people or advocating their concerns, needs and desires. They are the direct link to citizens and draw their competence directly from those concerned, from the realities of life and from the effects of policies, strategies

and programmes on people. Sixteen highly experienced representatives attended the seminar and offered their expertise and reflection during the debate, animated by Dirk Jarré, president of the European Federation of Older Persons, EURAG, and chaired by Gertraud Dayé, representative of the International Longevity Centre ILC. Through the Delphi Process different arguments were collected and organized into a strategic document which was commented on and elaborated further in the meetings in September and November 2013. The common reflection concentrated in particular on three questions:

- What are the opportunities that older persons want to have or should have to better participate in and contribute to society?
- What are the barriers or obstacles to improved participation and integration of older persons in society?
- What can be seen as an enabling environment and as supportive measures to favour participation and integration of older persons in society?

A comprehensive list of opportunities, barriers and enabling conditions was developed for further research planned in the tasks of WP3.

Based on this comprehensive list an online template was developed to collect examples of positive as well as negative practice illustrating active participation of older persons in social and community life. Most important in this qualitative research approach were the stakeholders who were a significant source of information about older persons’ needs and problems, about the degree of their participation and integration in society and the various obstacles as well as inequalities associated with ageing.

The comprehensive list of opportunities, barriers and enabling conditions developed by the Vienna NGO Committee on Ageing was further used in designing the script for focus groups with older persons conducted by SiforAGE partners in Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Turkey.

The results of these focus group sessions provided valuable issues to be further discussed in deliberative workshops with older persons, researchers and decision makers held by SiforAGE partners in Austria, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain. The workshops aimed to identify specific issues that need to be further explored

by research in order to better understand the nature and dynamics of older persons’ participation. There was a particular focus on how to engage older persons in research and decision making, to explore how older persons – through a structured dialogue with local decision makers and scientists – could influence research from design through to implementation. Workshop participants also presented ideas for projects illustrating the potential synergies of collaboration among society, researchers and local decision makers.

The focus group sessions and deliberative workshops reaffirmed the findings of numerous surveys about the ageist attitudes present in large parts of society. Such attitude pose significant threats to older persons’ playing an active and participatory role, potentially jeopardizing their well-being and social integration. Following the pilot testing in Portugal and subsequent intervention sessions in Austria, Brazil, Lithuania and Spain, an intervention programme called imAGES was designed to act against negative representations of ageing and older persons among young adolescents.

The activities implemented by SiforAGE project partners within the scope of WP 3 are described in more detail in the following chapters.

Needs, limitations and opportunities for older persons' participation in society (Focus Groups)

(4)

Summary

As part of the SiforAGE Project Work Package 3, five focus groups were conducted in Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Turkey in order to understand how older persons are ageing in their own society, what is their contribution in social and other spheres, what are their needs, and specifically, how to create opportunities and reduce barriers to a far more participative, active and inclusive society for all ages. Qualitative methodology was used to explore older persons' knowledge and experiences and through group interaction to examine not only what they think, feel and need but also what they would like to have in the future.

The recruitment of participants was organized in two ways; some partners chose to select older persons from their own social institutions or from long term care service providers whilst others chose to have a random group of older persons not belonging to any institution (Austria, Lithuania, and Italy). The participants were sampled by age (55 to 75+ years old divided into 3 smaller groups with a 10 year span), gender (women represented a bigger number of the participants confirming the scientific evidence of feminization of ageing), and education levels (as education is widely recognised as having a strong correlation with multiple forms of civic and social engagement).

Six main topics were addressed in the focus groups:

- Needs of older persons
- Contribution to society
- Spheres of active participation
- Barriers hindering active participation
- Measures to promote active participation
- Actors responsible for promoting participation

This choice aimed at better understanding what can be truly significant in enabling older persons to feel well in their own communities, where every single person should be allowed to age with dignity and contribute to society in the best way they can, but are often constrained by obstacles to equal social participation and more vulnerable to exclusion with age. Therefore, this approach was employed in order to understand what policies should be developed, what kind of support should be provided in order to enhance older persons' participation, what services can promote independent living and what different actors can do to promote healthy ageing.

Discussions on the topic "Needs of older persons" revealed five main categories of needs: *recognition and acceptance; services; material security; opportunities; positive approach from authorities; participation in decision making process.*

More generally, the needs of older persons relate to three broader realms: adequate services, acceptance and, finally, material security. The situation for older persons could be improved by fully taking into account the fact of an ageing society that has to be supplied with appropriate services that will, indirectly, provide greater financial security to older persons.

Discussions on the topic "Contribution to society" also revealed five main categories of possible contributions by older persons: *general life experience; professional experience; responsibility towards next generations; wisdom and balanced judgment; political participation.*

The appreciation of the contributions made by older persons to society focuses on what this generation can provide within its professional life experience, which includes the transfer of knowledge to the younger generations, felt as a mission, a legacy and contribution to society. The contributions focused on what they can offer as representatives of the older generation.

Discussions on the topic "Spheres of active participation" revealed six main categories of participation: *social sphere; economic sphere; personal relations; cultural sphere; political sphere; community/ neighbourhood.*

Spheres of active participation are mainly within the framework of social (cultural, political, and community) life and personal relations (friends and family). It is interesting to note that active participation revealed two important dimensions: recognition (both social and family) and willingness to give something to new generations. These dimensions lead to the assumption that older persons feel a lack of social recognition and respect.

Discussions on the topic "Barriers hindering active participation", revealed eight categories: *ageism; insufficient coverage of basic needs; culture of youth/ wrong perception of ageing; lack of proactive attitudes in older persons; low acceptance of their possible contributions; lack of recognition of their capacities; wrong policies and legislation; the physical environment/ health.*

Barriers to better participation are mostly exogenous due to the existing prejudice about old age in large parts of society. These barriers reveal an unprepared society, still not entirely ready to assume a more adequate understanding of ageing. Due to this lack of adaptation to the new profile of population there is lack of services, policies and legislation, as well as an adapted physical environment to the ageing population. External barriers to participation lead to low individual motivation to participate in social life and also generate a feeling of not having sufficient capacity.

Discussions on the topic "Measures to promote active participation" revealed five main categories: *create the society for all ages; change the image of ageing; provide incentives for participation; create positive images of older persons; recognize the value of older persons.*

In three categories measures to promote active participation are associated with images of older persons and the prevailing, mostly negative perception of ageing. These are related to the afore-described barriers. Adapting the society for all ages might be possible through the positive change of attitudes, full acknowledgement of older persons' rights, and the improvement of the physical environment.

Discussions on the topic "Actors responsible for promoting participation" revealed six categories: *policy and decision makers; public administration; education system; market actors; person itself.* These categories illustrate that the focus is mainly placed on external factors and systems, although personal responsibility is also seen as an important factor. The above listed categories correlate with the spheres of active participation (social, economic, cultural, and political) and barriers hindering active participation (low acceptance, lack of recognition, wrong policies, and lack of personal drive).



Brief observations

The findings of the focus groups revealed that needs and opportunities correlate and can be matched through enhanced participation and collaborative actions leading to innovative solutions for a society of all ages.

More active participation of older persons adds value to all spheres of life. Society has to link the life-long experience of older generation with the technological knowledge of younger generation. Considering that older persons are the major consumers of services, the opportunities of business, industry and trade should be strongly addressed.

The unmet needs for recognition, services and material security expressed by focus groups participants reveal that knowledge and experience accumulated by older persons over the life-course are underestimated and that currently offered services create prolonged dependencies instead of increasing self-confidence and self-determination. There is a lack of awareness that the present welfare society is the result of the achievements of former and today's still living older generations. The negative perception of older persons as users of the products of today's professionally active generation has to be changed by means of public policies, mass

media and school curricula. The capacities of older persons as potential contributors to modern societies are well illustrated by the spheres of participation listed by focus group participants and the things they are ready to offer to society.

The identified reasons for the low level of direct civic engagement of older persons were low acceptance and recognition, the culture of youth, poor health and limited mobility, and obstacles in the physical environment. The interest and willingness of older persons to participate in public debates and decision making processes should be stimulated by public authorities at all levels.

People of different ages have difficult experiences with their physical surroundings or with organisational systems, or technical processes – whether this is an outdoor environment, access to transportation, the handling of service automates, the distribution of important information and so on. Public infrastructure, facilities and provisions should be safe, independently usable and easy to access for everyone – and thus be responsive to human diversity.



General aspects of older persons' participation in society (Good practice examples)

(5)

Summary

A substantial number of good (and some bad) practice examples from European Union member states on active participation and inclusion of older persons was collected in the scope of WP3. The collection of more than 120 cases from 18 countries by 16 SiforAGE partners demonstrates the potential of older persons for more active participation in social life and for independent living, shows various ways and means to overcome common barriers to inclusion and sheds light on enabling environments and supportive measures for participation and integration of older persons in society.

Good practice examples come from different socio-cultural backgrounds and regions of Europe and demonstrate a large variety of real life situations and experiences. They present local, regional and in some cases national or even international experiences and are initiated by a variety of actors (public, non-governmental and private initiatives). The majority of examples were self-assessed as successful, the success of about one-quarter of initiatives is not yet known and only 4 cases were regarded as failures; one case of malpractice and three failures due to lack of support for implementation. The

cases collected by project partners from their stakeholders and entered into the online form developed in the framework of SiforAGE project allow a sufficiently accurate assessment of the values, needs, aspirations, achievements and difficulties faced by older persons in the European society of today. The main findings from the case analysis are introduced along with the areas of intervention, types of activities and common elements in terms of success.

Two most frequent areas of intervention were *communication of older persons with children or youth and social gatherings of older persons*. Less frequent, but not less important, were the topics related with *technology use, health issues, volunteering, networking, lifelong learning, implementation of policies or influencing the quality of policies*. Very few activities were related to enhancing participation of older persons in the labour market. In many cases the activities covered more than one equally important areas such as inter-generational communication and technology; inter-generational communication and lifelong learning; mobility and volunteering; care and volunteering and so on.

By types of activity, most activities related to *communication of older persons with children or youth* were of local scale and impact, helping to overcome generational divides. An important topic here is inter-generational communication and knowledge transfer between generations. The family is no longer the environment in which children and young people can learn a range of traditional skills (for example cooking, craftsmanship or gardening), or meet and communicate with their grandparents every day; thus older persons cannot predominantly transmit their skills and knowledge to grandchildren. Therefore, new ways for inter-generational communication outside the family circle are being developed and illustrated in good practice examples. Most examples demonstrate the transfer of knowledge from older generation to the younger, but there are also activities where knowledge is generated together, exchanged between two generations, or transferred from young generation to the old (usually related to the use of IT). The innovative practice example to be highlighted is the strengthening of relationships between grandchildren and grandparents in joint learning activities. Joint actions seem to work well for building relationships in contemporary society. Examples included activities such as older persons playing games with children or simply communicating in various social settings.

The activities in the area *social gatherings of older persons* are more traditional rather than innovative. Examples of activities include: gathering at coffee shops; exercising in groups; learning to paint, learning to knit, biographical writing and other skills building. However, these traditional activities have two important aspects for active and healthy ageing. Firstly, they maintain and enhance participation through attractive content and bring the benefits of socializing. Secondly, they can be implemented with very little funding and are affordable to old people with limited financial resources.

The activities in the area *older persons and technology* include the use of technology in health care (improving cognitive skills; remote monitoring of patients with heart-diseases etc.); technologies for inclusion in society (teaching older persons IT skills; training older persons to use modern technologies in public transport); technologies to improve services (remote cognitive stimulation and psychosocial support); technologies to improve the quality of life and independent living (adjusting technologies to older persons' needs and cognitive abilities). These activities are the most expensive and usually require significant investments from technology developers or from other resources such as health services or insurance.

Volunteering and networking are two cross-cutting and significant areas. Volunteering is represented in local, regional and even national multi-agent projects of various focuses; older persons taking care of children in after-school centres; older persons supporting other older persons; younger generation volunteers supporting or providing services to older persons; volunteers collecting information for national and local authorities on older persons' needs etc. Very different projects of mutual care and social responsibility are included here. Some are designed to help local authorities to cover a wider range of needs, others aim to help older persons to integrate and feel they can be helpful to others. Usually closely linked with volunteering are networking activities, which can be implemented by municipalities, NGOs or professional organizations specialising in ageing issues. All activities illustrate the importance of sharing information with older person groups in the most effective way.

The outcomes and elements defining the success of activities are diverse. In the case of small scale activities with local impact, the main factor of success was often the enthusiasm and perseverance of the activity leader. In many cases, even with limited or no financial resources but with a small amount of support from local authorities, NGOs or private companies (offering a space

for activities, assisting with information and dissemination etc.), and volunteers, the activities can be long-term and empowering.

In case of large scale activities of regional and national impact the main factors of success were the support of public bodies, organizational skills of the leaders, broad networks and full involvement of various actors, sufficient financial support and intensive volunteering. Almost all large scale activities were multi-actor (public bodies, NGOs, professionals) and resource consuming (time, financial and human).

Brief observations

The analysis of good practice examples revealed the availability and impressive variety of positive practices that encourage the participation of older persons in social life. Some of them are common or even 'old-fashioned' (social gatherings), while some are quite innovative and a response to the latest developments in our life (learning to use technologies in public transport). All examples show the need for the collaboration among various actors, strong leadership and networking. Most of the examples can be replicated, adjusted and transferred to other communities, regions or even countries by means of creative imitation. The SiforAGE project set up a repository of good practice examples that is now available at <http://siforage.eu/partnerpage> (All examples). Keeping this repository sustainable and regularly updated at an EU level is highly recommended.



Cooperation in research and decision-making processes on the issues affecting older persons (Deliberative workshops)

(6)

Summary

With the aim to investigate the prospects of involving and empowering society and civil society organizations in research on Active and Healthy Ageing, SiforAGE partners conducted deliberative workshops in Austria, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain. Building on the findings of Focus Groups with older persons, the workshops explored how older persons, through a structured dialogue with representatives from the world of science and local decisions makers, could influence the orientation and design of age related research projects and accompany their possible implementation and the interpretation of the results.

The deliberative workshops gave a unique opportunity for three important stakeholder groups – older persons, researchers and local decision-makers – to meet face-to-face and express their concerns about research and innovations. In total 72 people between the ages of 35 and 86 years took part in deliberative workshops in four EU countries. The total sample was composed of 36 older persons, 22 researchers (representing the following research areas: social sciences, health science, technologies and architecture) and 14 local decision-makers (including 4 representatives of associations). All three stakeholder groups agreed on the importance of involving older persons in research projects.

Conceptual and institutional barriers, as well as benefits of active participation of older persons in research projects were identified. Conceptual barriers mentioned by the workshop participants were:

- low motivation
- little experience or lack of interest
- limited access to information
- not perceived benefit or added value
- economic and social insecurity

The most common institutional barriers were:

- physical and geographic constraints
- inter-generational tension and conflict
- mismatch of needs and proposed solutions
- lack of institutional funding
- poor communication between the general public, researchers and local decision makers
- the uncertain value of scientific studies

These factors hinder active participation in general and also participation of older persons in research and innovation.

The identified intrinsic benefits were:

- personal development
- better health
- higher life satisfaction

Among the instrumental benefits of more active participation in research by society, the following should be noted:

- improved communication between various groups of society
- objectivity of evidence to decision making
- higher quality of life

Workshop participants also deliberated on the factors that would enhance the engagement of older persons in research and innovation process. The importance of involving older persons in the early stage of research and showing the benefits and advantages of their participation was strongly noted. Society needs to clearly understand the purpose of research, the practical outcome and the added value. The joint efforts of researchers and specialists who work daily with older persons can help to identify the research topics. On the other hand, age-related topics in research and in politics should not concentrate only on pure age-friendliness. In many cases age-friendly developments are beneficial to all – young people with children, people with restricted mobility or other limitations. A promising approach would be to involve “research savvy” older persons as important stakeholders into multidisciplinary groups so that they can participate in the research study designing processes, in the interpretation of research results and afterwards in assessing the impact of research findings on individuals, specific groups and on society at large.

Generally, it has to be recognized that trends in academic research are determined by the interests and concerns of the research community and not by the subjects of research. Frequently, research topics depend on the strategic research areas of

the university or research institution that the researchers work for and it is often focused on the issues that the research group investigates, or the needs of research sponsors. Furthermore, research covering the aspects of the 4th age are often related to medication, care and nursing and it is generally done ‘about’ older persons and not ‘with’ older persons. On the one hand, ageing is not a trendy topic in research and is subject to the strong personal interest of individual researchers. On the other hand, existing research on ageing and related topics are not well-connected. Knowledge, experience, vision and connectedness of elderly scholars is also under-valued and under-used.

The workshop participants found that research topics in the social sciences, health sciences and new ambient living assistance technologies, architecture and urbanism were the most interesting. One of the issues that must be taken into consideration is that older persons are not a homogenous group and should not be treated as such.

Regarding assistive technologies, the participants noted that solutions for older persons are mainly developed without taking into account their full understanding and acceptance of technologies. Nevertheless, the importance of technological solutions in nursing and private homes, in healthcare and in urban planning was highlighted by all participants.

Brief observations

The results obtained from the debates held between researchers, older persons and, in most cases, local public decision-makers during the workshops were varied and rich. Even if many of the issues raised are country-specific in their detail, clear general patterns appear so that there is also a strong trans-national, European interest to identify new ways and means to address persistent problems.

The challenges of an ageing society bring about diverse opportunities for adaption and the creation of new societal options with enormous potential for socio-economic change. Societal changes can be achieved by involving different generations and different actors, by shifting power in research and decision making processes, not only by exploring and reflecting the views, concerns, and experiences of older persons but empowering and engaging them in the design, conduct and evaluation of research studies. In that way many more persons would be able to age in security and with dignity, and be in a position to contribute to society in a meaningful way.



Opinions and attitudes of children regarding ageing and older persons (intervention with children)

(7)

In the scope of Work Package 3 the “imAGES” program was created in order to prevent and fight ageism among children and adolescents (11 to 14 years old) in five different cultural environments: Austria, Brazil, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain. It is a theoretically based program with fundamentals on social psychological evidences regarding prejudice reduction techniques.

This program is composed of three sessions across two weeks. In Week 1, young people participated in two learning sessions where they were presented with several positive and real profiles of active older persons. The goal was to deconstruct the negative stereotypes towards this age group, promoting perspective taking and empathy. In Week 2, younger and older persons worked together to promote a positive and direct inter-group contact and the creation of affective ties between the two age groups. By doing a task with a common goal (e.g., “ways to improve your city”), younger persons learned about the diversity of older persons in the group.

The pilot program conducted in Portugal had a quasi-experimental design, including an intervention and a control group that followed a similar procedure. The intervention group focused on activities regarding ageing, whereas the control group focused on a topic unrelated to ageism (the

environment). Both the intervention and the control group were submitted to three different stages of evaluation: before the intervention, after two learning sessions and after the contact session. The goal was to assess whether any change in the stereotyping of older persons was indeed due to the learning and/or contact sessions, or due to possible external/uncontrolled factors not directly related to the content of this program. The results obtained showed a significant change in the representation of ageing in the intervention group both after the two learning sessions and after the contact session. More specifically, after the learning session older persons were perceived as more capable and competent. These differences were specific to the intervention group, thus showing that the effect is related to the specific content of the activities developed. Before this intervention program, participants reported a much higher degree of admiration than pity towards older persons and this emotion did not change after the intervention.

This program was also replicated in 3 other European countries (Austria, Lithuania and Spain) and also in Brazil with some methodological adaptations. A special e-publication with more details on this program is available at:

http://www.siforage.eu/new_fr.php?id=63

The “imAGES” program applied in Lithuania followed the standard design mentioned above: one intervention group and one control group. In this case, the results showed a change in the perception of ageing only after the contact session: older persons were perceived as more capable, friendlier, trustworthier and more sincere. In fact, there was a significant increase both in the competence and warmth dimensions. Opposite results were found in the control condition. In this case, after the learning and the contact sessions, older persons were perceived as less friendly. The improvement in representations and emotions towards older persons were specific to the intervention group thus showing that this is due to the specific content of these sessions.

The intervention program conducted in Austria included two groups. One group followed the same structure of activities as the intervention group in Portugal; two learning sessions about ageing and one contact session based on an intergenerational activity. The other group participated in two learning sessions about environmental projects and in one session based on an intergenerational activity (this group is named “just contact group”). The results obtained revealed a positive change in the perception of older persons in the intervention group after the learning session. Older persons were perceived as more trustworthy and especially, after the contact session, older persons were rated as even more trustworthy and also confident. In the

“just contact” group, older persons were perceived as more friendly after the contact session.

The intervention program conducted in Spain included just one group who participated in the contact session with older persons. This intervention program did not include a control group. The results obtained did not show a significant overall improvement in older persons’ representations. In fact, in the end of the contact activity, older persons were just considered more sincere. The same pattern of results was found for emotions, since there were no changes before and after the intervention. Based on the results obtained we can conclude that the “imAGES” program did not prove to be so efficacious in this context than in the standard design.

In the Brazilian adaptation of the “imAGES” program, the study followed the same design as the intervention group of the pilot study. There was no control group. The opinions of participants were obtained in just two stages: before and after the whole intervention. In the Brazilian intervention, preliminary analysis revealed that the pattern of results of the evaluations regarding older persons changed in accordance to whether younger persons rated their previous experiences with older persons as better or as worse. More specifically, those who had good positive experiences with older persons, had better overall evaluations of older persons, considering them more capable, skilled,

trustworthy and sincere. However, the “images” program only had one effect; in the end of the intervention, the group who perceived the better regular contact with older persons, rated them as more friendly.

Brief observations

Overall, the “imAGES” program has the potential to be an important program to change young people’s perceptions and emotions regarding older persons.

Based on the results obtained in five different cultural, political and economic backgrounds, we can conclude that it is preferable to apply the whole intervention program including both the two learning sessions and the contact session. In fact, this was the modality that yielded more positive results (Austria, Lithuania and Portugal). The replication of this program in other countries would be very important in order to evaluate its impact across different contexts.

The application of the “imAGES” program should follow the procedures described in the e-book. Trainers should follow the procedure and the evaluation methods proposed in this manual.



In line with research in the field of prejudice development, the fight against ageism should start at early ages. Consequently, a future adaptation of the “imAGES” program to younger ages would be a promising avenue to pursue in this domain.

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.

Recommendations and suggestions

(8)

The target group of the comments and recommendations

The following 31 comments and recommendations under seven 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. On 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 even at European level, in particular 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 the subjects and objects of all decisions relating to societal development. Such comments and recommendations can help them to better learn and understand what is at stake politically, 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, 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.

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 amount of experience over their life, it is astonishing how little their knowledge and even “wisdom” is recognised and used in various domains of public interest. What older persons have seen and experienced 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 humanity that cannot be transmitted simply through recorded documentation. Their collective experience enable these persons to make a comprehensive judgement on current

issues in society and puts them into a position of providing more balanced advice to decision-makers in various key areas of society. The dynamism, boldness, the trust in technological advance and sometimes the simple and irrational confidence in the future of the young generation can thus be very well balanced and lead to more prudent attitudes. At the very least the more experienced can present the dangers and risks 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 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 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.” These range 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, that are 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.



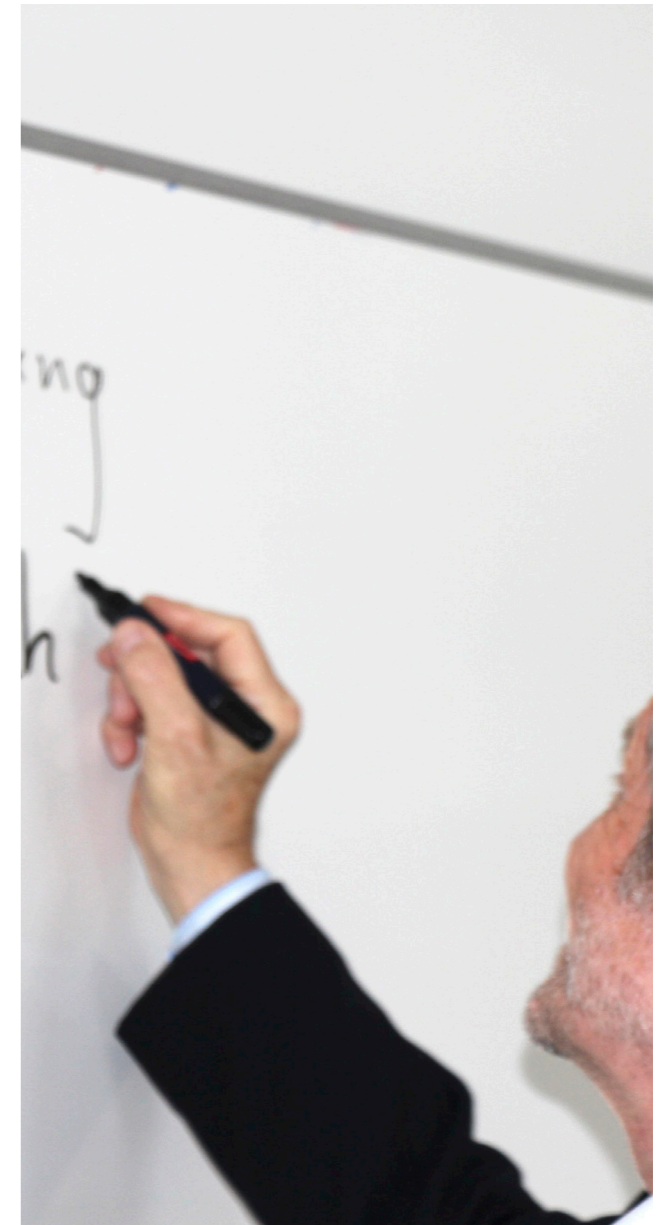
Older persons to be involved in the development of new technologies

Older persons possess a huge, but still very much untapped, purchasing power worth hundreds of billions of Euros parked “for a rainy day” in various savings and securities. This resource shapes an important market opportunity for the development of new technologies capable of radical improvements in the quality of life of older persons. Despite this, older persons benefit from the hi-tech boom less than persons in other age categories, mainly because their needs, opinions and 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 when the contrary seems to be true given that a large segment 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 ensure success for the entrepreneur.

Participation of older persons in scientific research concerning them

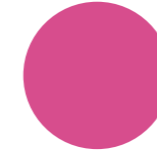
There is a growing demand and interest in scientific research dealing with the European ageing society, its consequences and how to find appropriate solutions to the ensuing problems and demands. Particularly in the area of medical and care services, the need for new solutions is strongly felt under 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

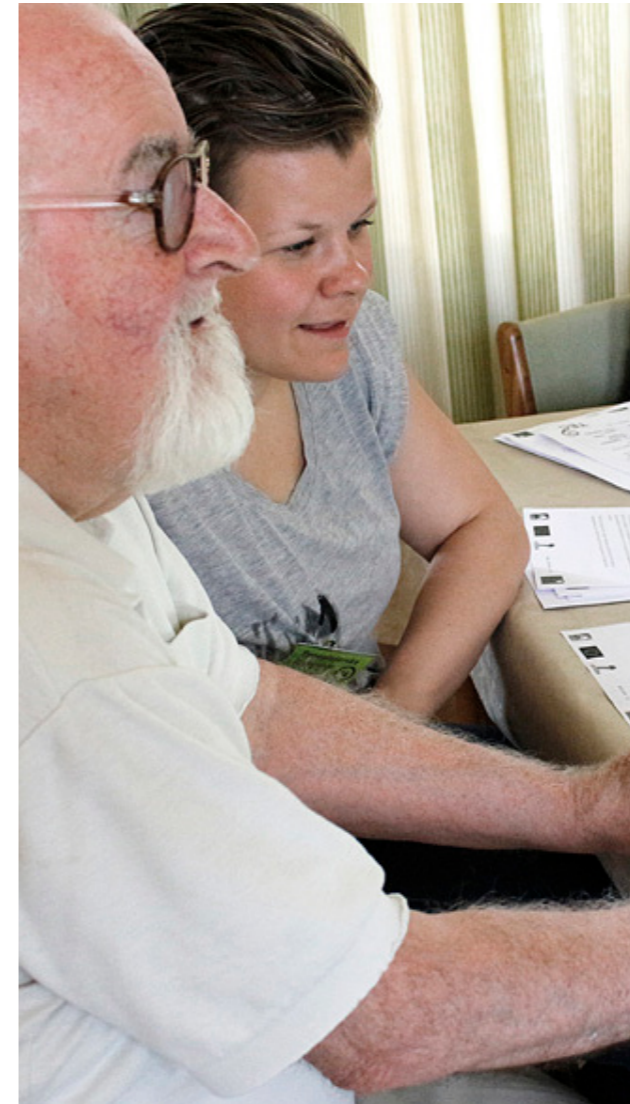
During the decades of their working life people accumulate an enormous amount of personal and professional experience that should not simply be lost when they retire from their jobs or, in the majority of cases, have to cease their salaried activities due to statutory provisions. People need and appreciate strong systems of social security and rights to pensions but at the same time many of them would like to continue working after retirement – they would like to go on having a specific, meaningful task to perform, to maintain their capabilities and because 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 create 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” for ageing in employment might be helpful.



2. On inter-generational relations

Inter-generational relations and learning



Today children and grandparents live together less often than in the past and for this reason the daily opportunities to learn about each other become an increasingly rare experience. This can potentially lead to misunderstandings, misjudgements and create unwelcome 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 and practices 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.

Inter-generational media

There are specific youth journals and particular magazines for older persons 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 sub-cultures but at the same time, tend to promote segregation between generations that can easily lead to a lack of 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, for example 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. 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 and a rather passive consumerist behaviour on the other. 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.

2. On inter-generational relations

Inter-generational relations and learning

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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 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 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. For example, personally addressed letters could be sent to senior citizens to invite them to attend budget debates of the local council and present their view as budget decisions have serious effects on material provisions and services for them.



Enhance participation of organised civil society in policy making

The impressive extension of 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 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 an 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 younger population does 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 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 for society, the involvement of all ages is needed – to cooperate between them, to utilise their respective capabilities, to develop solidarity among them and to balance and reconcile 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 instead 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 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 flawed 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, and 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 the human capacity to create and reorient through the arts, including literature that reflect the past and the present and shapes the future. The arts can be an excellent meeting point for all generations in society and constitutes 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 more recognised. Culture, as one of the indispensable glues of society, 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, different life experiences, political and economic jargon and migration 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 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 in their daily life from architectural or other material obstacles. Most people have difficult experiences with their physical surroundings or with organisational systems, or technical processes – whether we think of outdoor environments, access to transportation, the automated services or, the distribution of important information. Many arrangements in our public environment are conceived to serve only sections of the population while the rest are 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 cases be relatively easy 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 a large amount 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 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 and health promotion campaigns demonstrate. This positive and supportive approach should also be used more in relation to older persons in society, by highlighting their potential, by giving them the opportunity to work beyond retirement age if they wish and by valuing 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 great 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

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

Promotion of the public recognition of the achievements of older persons

Present living conditions and opportunities in Europe are an immediate result of the achievements of former and 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.

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 or charitable foundations. 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, and 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 diminished 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, as old, frail and forgetful, only passively using 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 and the effects are disastrous. They 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 and openness. Last but not least it has to be mentioned that this negative stereotyping 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.

Preventing ageism from an early age

The imAGES programme developed and tested in the framework of SiforAGE project is a tested programme with a scientific basis and may constitute a significant contribution to changing children’s perceptions regarding ageing. It is important to create appropriate legislation promoting the introduction of this type of intervention programme in schools. The imAGES programme was created to be applied in school settings and other educational contexts. Educators should apply this programme (with possible adaptations) and involve families and communities as they can act as agents of change, helping children understand and follow a new vision of ageing.



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 “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 the 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 mistaken pre-judgements and prejudices and certainly contribute to a positive attitude towards a life course approach to learning and age 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 to 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, for example youth and learning, family creation and parenthood, a job/career and eventually the end of professional life, other functions in the family and time for new activities in order to sketch the complexity of the life course. “Reconciliation of work and family life”, “transition into retirement” or “third-age academies” are 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”.

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 a certain age 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 unintended and 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 highly desirable 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 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 and those persons or societal groups that the project is to be built up for. They all can and should contribute to the project’s success by their experience, innovative ideas, necessary data, finances, human resources and so on. 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 progress and should also be applied at national and local levels.

Follow the demand “Nothing about 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 dependency. 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 about us without us!”

Use creative imitation approach

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 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, to adapt them intelligently to the prevailing 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. The stakeholders should be involved from the assessment of the problem 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 times, allows one to proceed with corrections and improvements of the process and to rebalance, if necessary, the intentions and the interests of the parties interested and concerned. Thus it is the best possible way to avoid failures, to ensure the effectiveness of material and human investments and to act in the interest of all those 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 recognition 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

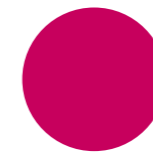
Social innovation processes, important yeast for effective societal development, rarely happen in a closed, controlled society. Social innovation requires an enabling environment and a high degree of positive recognition of alternative options that are not imposed by authorities. Politics that do not 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

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 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, to adapt them intelligently to the prevailing 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 image campaigns to fight stereotypes

Advertising is a broadly used method to attract attention, to publicise political party programmes 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.



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