

Cultural Engagement Instead of Social Isolation

Creative Ageing

Project Summary

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City of Munich
Department of
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Special Coordinator
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Outlined below are the findings of the Creative Ageing strategic partnership, an Erasmus+ project which ran from September 2019 to May 2022.¹ They were produced by the project coordinators, who work in city administrations in Ostend, Leeuwarden, Gothenburg, Brighton & Hove, Munich, and Berlin. The partnership addressed creative ageing and outreach strategies for people who struggle with health or finance, who live in isolation, or who have had only limited access to cultural activities in their lives so far.

BACKGROUND

- All human beings have a lifelong right to cultural participation, as stated in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²
- Culture and cultural education are an integral part of general education and lifelong learning. They provide artistic literacy as a precondition for cultural participation.
- Cultural and social participation contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³ including ensuring good health and wellbeing (No. 3) and quality education (No. 4), reducing inequalities (No. 10), and making cities and communities sustainable (No. 11).
- Cultural participation has a positive impact on health, wellbeing, and quality of life - as shown by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in over 3,000 evidence-based studies.⁴
- In a survey conducted among Eurocities⁵ network members, city administrations identified the following as the greatest barriers to participation for older adults: social isolation, poverty, and a lack of digital literacy. Yet many other barriers play a role including age-related

“Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”
Art. 27, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The SDGs, also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

¹ See: <https://stadt.muenchen.de/creativeageing> (24.04.2022)

² See: <https://ec.europa.eu/universal-declaration-human-rights> (24.04.2022)

³ See: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (24.04.2022)

⁴ World Health Organisation, regional office for Europe, Daisy Fancourt, Saoirse Finn: HEALTH EVIDENCE NETWORK SYNTHESIS REPORT 67: *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review.* See <https://www.euro.who/publications>

⁵ See: <https://eurocities.eu/>; <https://www.berlin.de/sen/kultur/kulturpolitik/europa/creative-ageing-1160974.php> (24.04.2022)

impairments, education, language barriers, and a lack of self-confidence.

- Older adults are a very diverse population, and their post-professional life passes through many different stages that can be experienced in very different ways. Senior citizens have different determinants regarding cultural education processes than children and young people. This may be because they connect new inputs with their lifelong experiences or that they need to appreciate the usefulness or quality of the learning process to be motivated. Learning processes are one concern of the relatively young discipline of cultural geragogy.⁶
- By 2050, the proportion of people aged 65+ in Europe is expected to rise to about 30%.⁷ In light of this demographic change and ageing populations in the European Union, the promotion of creative ageing, including both education for elderly people and their participation in cultural events, is essential in fostering active ageing in Europe.⁸

For example, in Germany, training in cultural geragogy is offered at the Centre of Competence for Creative Ageing and Inclusive Arts.

In her Political Guidelines for the next European Commission, President von der Leyen referred to demography as one of the mega-trends – alongside climate change and digitalisation – that are transforming European societies. In her mission letter to Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, the President tasked her with presenting a Green Paper on ageing, and with launching a debate on long-term impacts, notably on care and pensions, and on how to foster active ageing.

More interest in the project?

Contact us!

www.muenchen.de/creativeageing

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6 See: <https://ibk-kubia.de>

7 See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/impact-demographic-change-europe_en#demographic_trends (24.04.2022)

8 See European Commission: Green paper on ageing

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Recommendations for policymakers

Diversity in age, art, and culture

It is important to recognise that older adults are a highly diverse population whose personal circumstances may change dramatically over the course of their retirement. Their different biographies and profiles mean they will also have different cultural needs that might change over time. Crucially, a diverse range of cultural activities should be provided and made accessible to senior citizens. It is important not to overlook older adults facing financial, health, biographical or social barriers to cultural engagement who might need help.

Inclusive and accessible cultural facilities and activities

Cultural facilities and cultural education providers should be encouraged to take strategic measures to ensure accessibility for older adults, especially those who do not regularly engage in cultural activities. Cultural facilities and activities should be carefully assessed for their accessibility and support should be provided to remove any barriers relating to admission prices, outreach strategies, PR, communication, etc.

Shifts in age dynamics

It is important to remember that the older demographic group undergoes generational changes just like any other age bracket. Those who retire today will probably like different things to people who retired 25 years ago. Cultural activities, venues, and outreach strategies should be regularly assessed to see whether they are keeping pace with generational changes.

Visibility of creative ageing

The creativity of both professional and amateur older adults should be celebrated. Exhibitions, shows, and concerts in established cultural institutions, public spaces, or community cultural facilities can be used to showcase their work. A good way of raising awareness would be to organise a creative ageing festival like the Luminare Festival in Scotland, the

Bealtaine Festival in Ireland, or the Ageing Well Festival in England.¹

Intergenerational exchange

It is important to promote activities that bring different generations together. Many children and young people have very little contact with older adults these days, and vice versa. Family members may live in different parts of the country or different generations may no longer meet in public spaces as often as they used to or share the same leisure pursuits. This weakens social cohesion and potentially creates prejudice. Intergenerational exchange is important in addressing demographic and social change. The Creative Ageing project has shown that most cities can see the need for a further development of intergenerational projects.

Digital engagement

Older adults need to be helped to use technology in accordance with their needs. Digital cultural activities introduced successfully during the pandemic should be continued, not least because they have proven to be a valuable way of allowing people with mobility challenges to participate from their own home or care facility. Not only has the coronavirus pandemic highlighted the importance of digital skills to social and cultural inclusion, it has drawn attention to the number of people, especially above the age of 70, who do not go online.²

While the overall number of people with Internet access in Europe is growing, there has been a marked decline in the number of over-70s with Internet access as a percentage of the population as a whole. Education is a key factor – better educated older adults are around twice as likely to adopt digital technology as less well educated older adults.

Research

Support should be provided to research, and the evaluation of, age-friendly pilot projects. There should be collaboration with universities to ensure that the level of knowledge in the field of creative ageing is on a par with that of research into cultural education for children and young people.³

The City of Gothenburg, for example, collaborates with the University of Gothenburg's Age Cap Centre for Ageing and Health.

Information sharing with national, European and global stakeholders

Experience, strategies, and best practices should be shared with other cities and local authorities. The Creative Ageing project has demonstrated the value of involving both city administrations and practitioners in the field. The EURO CITIES⁴ network could be a good first point of contact in Europe.

¹ See: <https://luminatescotland.org/>; <https://bealtaine.ie/>; <https://ageingwellfestival.org>

² Cf: *Eighth Government Report on Older People of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth*: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/159708/ed36ad230d6038b9f0a439fb03ddf35b/achter-altersbericht-kurzfassung-englisch-data.pdf> (24.04.2022)

³ See: <https://www.gu.se/en/agecap> (24.04.2022)

⁴ See: <https://eurocities.eu/>

Cross-sectoral cooperation

Cooperation should be promoted between professionals from the cultural, social welfare, education and health sectors. Collaborative working and learning should be better structured so that different sectors can develop a shared understanding of creative ageing and the benefits it provides in terms of cultural and social inclusion, health, wellbeing, and social cohesion.

Upskilling

Support should be provided to care and social facilities to help them embed creative ageing in their work by, for example, including cultural education in their staff training programmes. Professional artists who are keen to work with older adults should also receive training and given access to upskilling programmes in cultural gerontology.⁵ The actors involved in cultural education should be supported in developing innovative approaches to creative ageing and novel strategies.

Cultural prescriptions

It should be made easier to combine health and social care with artistic and cultural activities by making these available on prescription. In many European cities and countries, doctors are already able to prescribe cultural activities such as dance, museum visits, etc.⁶

Cross-sectoral funding

It should be possible to co-finance creative-ageing programmes through the culture, healthcare, and social welfare budgets. Ensure that structures are sufficiently flexible for applicants not to have to specify which part of a particular project falls under a particular heading (culture, social or healthcare). Creative ageing can potentially cover all three.

Inclusion as a long-term investment

Inclusive projects for those who have considerable barriers to participation are both time-consuming and cost-intensive and call for a long-term approach. Creative-ageing initiatives must either be provided free of charge or at least be easily affordable. This requires a good level of support from the public sector. If they are to be successful, they must be funded on a sustainable basis. Interventions that involve

One example in Germany is the *Centre of Competence for Creative Ageing and Inclusive Arts – kubia*

One UK study found that over a third of all GP consultations are for non-medical reasons. These patients tend to make appointments with their doctor because they want human contact, care, and attention. As a result, many cities and countries have launched initiatives to make social and cultural activities available on prescription. While approaches may vary from country to country and city to city, the results are consistently positive. In Gloucestershire, for example, it is estimated that the provision of culture on prescription has led to a 37% drop in GP consultation rates and a 27% reduction in hospital admissions

The Speldags programme in Gothenburg, for example, takes performing artists to retirement homes and community centres. It is co-funded by the cultural department (80%) and the healthcare department (20%).

One example is the Age Friendly Cultural Cities programme in the Netherlands, which includes cities such as Leeuwarden. The programme is co-financed by local, regional and central government.

⁵ See: <https://ibk-kubia.de/>

⁶ The Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance provides a useful overview of culture on prescription in the UK at <https://culturehealthandwellbeing.org/social-prescribing>

municipal, regional, and national levels can be particularly effective.⁷

Policy guidelines

It is important to develop guidelines promoting cultural engagement among older adults and to incorporate them into the relevant strategic documents for social affairs, culture, education, and healthcare. The Erasmus+ project has shown that creative-ageing programmes thrive best in regions and cities that have included these age-friendly guidelines in their policy objectives.

In Sweden, for example, the City of Gothenburg joined the World Health Organization's *Age-Friendly Cities (AfC)* initiative and has included relevant strategic issues in its policy agenda since as long ago as 2010

⁷ See: <https://cultuurparticipatie.nl/subsidie-aanvragen/20/age-friendly-cultural-cities> (24.04.2022)

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Overall Project Findings

Cultural education works

Cultural education can be an effective healthcare treatment and provide rehabilitation. Many hospitals provide cultural education activities as part of their treatments for all age groups (i.e. singing in a choir to help with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease¹). The WHO has compiled over 3,000 evidence-based studies to demonstrate the impact of cultural education on health promotion. This approach is currently enjoying considerable growth across Europe with the Scandinavian countries leading the way.

Cultural prescriptions

More than a third of all appointments with general physicians in the UK are classed as non-medical. These patients tend to see doctors because they need human contact, care, and attention, rather than medical treatment. This has led many cities and countries to introduce initiatives to provide cultural prescriptions. Health care insurances will cover the costs of participation in cultural or artistic projects.²

A therapy-free space of freedom

Creative ageing provides an opportunity for people to meet and express their creativity. An open space to have fun and explore both own skills and wider social questions. It focuses on people's potential rather than their problems. Creative ageing offers leisure not therapy, and yet has a potential for improving health.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

It is essential that there is cooperation between the cultural, health and social welfare sectors to be able to reach out to the target group of vulnerable seniors. Cities are crucial actors in building a relationship between these sectors which can foster the wellbeing of their citizens.

¹ Weltgesundheitsorganisation (WHO), Regionalbüro für Europa, Daisy Fancourt, Saoirse Finn: HEALTH EVIDENCE NETWORK SYNTHESIS REPORT 67: *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. Siehe: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/publications> (24.04.2022)

² Eine gute Übersicht über Kultur auf Rezept in Großbritannien bietet die Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance: <https://culturehealthandwellbeing.org/social-prescribing> (24.04.2022)

Policies

Creative ageing projects thrive best in cities which have developed their own age-friendly guidelines which, in turn, require cross-sectoral cooperation.

Strong local players

It takes local artists, cultural mediators, social workers, committed volunteers and caregivers to embed culture in the quality of life of older adults. They require support from cross sectoral structures, strategies, networks, finance and access to knowledge and high-level know-how.

Broad-based funding programmes

It is time-consuming and cost intensive to implement inclusive projects for people facing significant participation barriers and it is essential to adopt a long-term perspective. Projects must be free of charge or at least affordable. This requires a good level of support from the public sector. If projects and programmes are to be successful, they need to be funded on a sustainable basis. When interventions receive support at municipal, regional and national levels this can be particularly beneficial.

Digital engagement

The overall proportion of people who have access to the internet is increasing in all European countries. However, it dips significantly above the age of 70. Here, the education level of older people is very significant. Senior citizens with a high level of education are about twice as likely to have access to the internet as those with a low level.³ The coronavirus pandemic has shown just how important digital skills can be for social and cultural participation. Therefore, they need to be promoted in an age-appropriate way. It is important not to lose opportunities for online creative engagement within care settings and communities after the pandemic is over.

International exchange

International exchange and cooperation have proven to be a very good tool in developing knowledge, strategies, and best practice in this area.

³ Cf: *Achter Altersbericht des Bundesministeriums für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend* [Eighth Age Report]: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/ministerium/berichte-der-bundesregierung/achter-altersbericht> (24.04.2022)

Good Practice

Concept Development

Get to know people's needs

Conduct surveys, evaluations, and research within your target group to identify the appropriate concept and content for your project. Peer-to-peer surveys are a very good tool. Seniors can ask other seniors. It is important that they are well prepared in advance.

For example, care workers in Helsinki documented the interests and cultural wishes of residents to be able to provide appropriate activities.

Empower your participants

Develop your projects in cooperation with older adults and be prepared for concepts to be radically modified to meet needs.

Involve your staff members

Target group participation can also provide internal staff development in cultural institutions. Staff can be encouraged to be open to inclusion and diversity.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

Involve social, cultural and health institutions from the target group's living environment and set up projects on a cooperative basis.

Ensure quality

Older adults, because of their lifelong experiences, can be demanding in terms of quality. Design high-quality public relations, engage workshop leaders with experience or specific expertise, and provide attractive venues.

Consider life circumstances

Run your project both mornings and afternoons. Avoid evenings, as many older people do not like to walk in the dark and have less energy than during the day.

Outreach lessons

Think local

Offer projects in the target group's close living environment so that they are easily accessible.

Build trust

Direct personal contact is essential to attract volunteer involvement and participation. It is not enough to rely only on newspaper ads or flyers. Engage trusted ambassadors such as caregivers, doctors, pharmacists, family members to recommend your project.

Communicate a lot

Plan for effort-intensive communications. Call participants and remind them of appointments, proactively seek out people who live in isolation or seem to be suffering from depression, and gently persuade them to come along to the project.

Reach out

Cultural institutions such as museums, theatres, libraries, orchestras and creative ageing projects should go to where the people are; for example, care homes, apartment blocks, doctors' surgeries, etc. Alternatively, seniors can be taken to external activities in museums by care workers. In both cases, it is important to ensure that there is a mutual understanding of the other's area of expertise.

Be as flexible as possible

Ideally there should be no monthly subscriptions or long-term commitments. People do not like to commit in advance and would like to be able stay at home when they want, if, for example, they are not in the right frame of mind on a particular day. Allow short-term registrations.

Manage transport

Offer pick-up and drop-off services from the application phase (rickshaws, project helpers, taxi services) or make sure that activities are within walking distance or close to public transport.

Allocate sufficient resources

Reaching out to the target group often takes as long as the project implementation itself and must be an integral part of it, and consequently also financed.

Support digital activities

During the coronavirus pandemic digital creative ageing projects have been proven to be acceptable to older adults. If there is sufficient technical support, they can be effective in reaching people with reduced mobility in their homes.

Sustainability

Plan for the future

Once people living in isolation have decided to participate in a project, it is important that relationships that have been built up do not collapse again and that loneliness does not become greater afterwards than it was before. This requires long-term planning.

Ensure visibility

Showcase creative ageing projects in public, in festivals, create calls for competition entries, and awards for creative ageing projects.

Build stable partnerships

Establish long-term, cross-sectoral partnerships that can build a mutual understanding of the benefits of creative ageing in the three sectors of culture, health, and social welfare. This could be through job shadowing in nursing homes or providing cultural workshops for caregivers. Allocate senior advisors or support groups to the creative ageing project. Ensure high levels of participation.

Attract political support

Involve political decision-makers as closely as possible in the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

Produce policy recommendations

Use your project evaluations to produce city council recommendations and to leverage financial resources.

Watch as a video

A selection of recommendations for practice and also recordings of the *Creative Ageing* conference in Munich 2022 can be found on the YouTube channel [Kulturreferat München](https://www.youtube.com/user/kult089)⁴.

⁴ See: <https://www.youtube.com/user/kult089>