



Everybody has something to give and contribute to his or her networks and communities - regardless of his or her age. It is just the matter of being given the opportunity to do so.

ABOUT THIS FACT SHEET

This fact sheet addresses organisations and stakeholders that are interested in the social participation of older people. It was developed within the Erasmus+ project **invisible talents**. It was developed within the Erasmus+ project **invisible talents**, which aims to promote the participation of older men and women (especially 80+) and to make their talents, experience and contributions to their communities visible. In this project we cooperate closely with health and social service providers in residential and/or community settings as well as citizens' initiatives working with very old people.

The fact sheet provides information on the issue of social participation of older

people and on the **invisible talents** project.

As we would like to inspire organisations and stakeholders in promoting the active participation of their target groups and making talents and contributions visible, this fact sheet presents innovative ideas and approaches that contribute successfully to the social participation of older people.

To compile this fact sheet, we have carried out desk research and interviews with older people, experts, practitioners and stakeholders in all partner countries.

Therefore, our special thanks go to everyone involved: Many thanks for sharing your knowledge, ideas and experiences with us!

“To participate means to feel alive, to experience to feel needed, to experience the meaning of life.” Student of the University of third age Kaunas (83 years), Lithuania



Social participation of older people: What does it mean?

Social participation is viewed as an important dimension of growing old well, although across the literature there is no standardised definition.

Within the **invisible talents** project, we understand social participation as the possibility to participate in and contribute meaningfully – with your interests, experiences and talents – to your community.



“Certain people want to continue using certain talents, but a lot of people say ‘I have done that for a long time and now it is enough or now it is time for something new that fits my age.’ ”
Experiential expert (85 years), Netherlands

When talking about social participation of older people, we have to keep two issues in mind: the heterogeneity of this population group and the individuality of social participation. Similar to other age groups, older people are characterised by diverse identities, life experiences and socioeconomic and health status. Due to these diverse individual backgrounds, older people also have different approaches to social participation. Experts and practitioners observe that social participation of older people is highly dependent on biographical factors. People who were active in their younger days are more willing to continue this lifestyle in old age. By contrast, seniors who are not used to bringing their voices, views and talents, are less likely to participate in activities and thus

to experience learning, engagement and recognition.

Furthermore, social participation does not mean the same to everyone. Some (older) people are interested in getting involved in community life, interpersonal relationships and sports or cultural activities whereas others are interested in religious activities and spirituality or political issues. Some like to take an active role and responsibility, e.g. as a volunteer, others prefer to participate in an activity. Everyone has to figure out for him/herself what he/she wants to do or not do (anymore) and what he/she wants to get out of life. We think our interview partners are right: It is important to combine a person's possibilities with his/her wishes and dreams at an individual level.

“Our age group keeps growing. We have a lot to give to our young people.” *Publishing company editor (80+ years), Italy*



Why is a project such as *invisible talents* important?

Enabling and supporting older people to participate in social life and make their contributions visible is not only a proper answer to the demographic change.

By doing so, we take seriously the concept of active and healthy ageing as well as the human pursuit of meaningfulness and appreciation.



“If everyone can contribute, do things they like and are good at, living together in society is more fun and better for everybody, I think. If some groups are excluded, it also influences the quality of life for those included.” *Associate professor in Department of Applied Gerontology, Windesheim, Netherlands*

Demographic change

The European Union is facing a longevity revolution with a remarkable increase in life expectancy and a growing number of older citizens. According to recent data, the share of those aged 80 years or above in the population of the European Union is projected to more than double between 2017 and 2080, from 5.5 % to 12.7 % (Eurostat, 2018). Aging is therefore not only an individual but also a societal and political challenge. We should be prepared for it in time and in various ways.

Positive images of ageing

Besides poverty, poor health and low educational levels, negative stereotyping and ageism are potential obstacles to an equal social participation of older and very old persons. Instead of considering ageing as an opportunity and appreciating older people's contributions, older people are often seen as a burden, their views and contributions are neglected.

We are convinced that it is very important to reflect and make visible the diversity of

lifestyles and talents. Many older and very old persons are valuable members of their families and communities and play important social roles: They support their families, take on care responsibilities, do household chores, assist younger persons with their knowledge and competencies and work as volunteers in their communities.

Health and wellbeing

A number of studies have shown that older persons who contribute actively to and who are integrated into society have a higher quality of life and have longer and healthier lives. Furthermore, learning and social participation in later life are crucial for one's self-esteem, mental agility, and the demands one feels up to. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe states that “the wellbeing and health condition of persons is not only an individual luxury, but has an individual societal dimension” (UNECE, 2012, p. 2). We are convinced that everybody has something to contribute to his or her networks and communities – regardless of age. It is just a matter of being given the opportunity to do so.

invisible talents: What is the project about?

The overall objective of the ***invisible talents*** project is to support the participation of older people and to make their talents visible.

“A society needs the talents of all.” *Practitioner
with and for senior citizens, Germany*



What do we mean by “talents”?

The word “talents” is very important in our project. We have a very broad understanding of the term and use it as a synonym of experiences, knowledge, competencies and interests. “Talents” – as we understand them – are more than “gifts”: Talents can be developed, (re-)detected and shared with people around.

We support health and social service providers in residential and/or community settings as well as citizens’ initiatives working with older people to reflect the status quo of participation and engagement opportunities in their organisation and to develop concrete actions that promote the engagement of their target groups and make their talents visible.

Health and social service providers as well as citizens’ initiatives have widespread experience in working with and for older people in residential and community settings. Nevertheless, due to scarce resources and supposed higher potentials of younger and fitter seniors, talents of very old people, in particular those with health problems, are invisible and need to be re-detected.

Do we acknowledge the contributions of older people and if so, in what way? How can we support older people in (further) developing and contributing their talents? How can we increase the visibility of their contributions, interests and experiences?

The **invisible talents** partnership encourages organisations to think about these questions and to find their specific and innovative answers.

“I like the idea. It is a change of thinking. It is not about doing something for older people but doing something together”.
Adult educator, Austria



How will the *invisible talents* project be implemented?

The Erasmus+ project started in October 2018 and runs until September 2020. We, the partners in five EU countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands), are responsible for the following:

We support organisations

We develop tools that support organisations to reflect their activities in promoting the active involvement of older people and making their contributions visible. *invisible talents* partners accompany this reflection process and help organisations to develop

concrete activities. An online reflection tool will be available for all organisations interested.

We collect and show the experiences gained: The brochure “Everybody has something to give” will draw on the experiences of organisations and older people that participate in the project. An E-Presentation will provide background information, inspirational examples and practical tools to increase the visibility of older people’s talents in their communities and in organisations.

Who is *invisible talents* for?

We mainly address staff and volunteers working with health and social service providers in residential and/or community settings as well as citizens’ initiatives working with older people. These are the key persons for the encouragement of older people. We want to inspire them to focus on

the talents of their target groups and support them to develop ideas on how to promote the visibility of their contributions.

The *invisible talents* project is interesting for:



DAY AND RESIDENTIAL SETTINGS

- RESIDENTIAL HOMES
- GENERATION HOUSES
- DAY-CARE CENTRES

COMMUNITY SETTINGS

- CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS AT COMMUNITY LEVEL
- SENIOR CENTRES
- ADULT EDUCATION PROVIDERS
- SENIORS ASSOCIATIONS & REPRESENTATIVES
- SOCIAL SERVICES, WELFARE AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING ORGANISATIONS
- CROSS-SECTORAL WORK (CARE, WELFARE SECTOR AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS)
- MUNICIPALITIES
- PUBLIC INITIATIVES
- (3RD AGE) UNIVERSITIES





“It is important to give people a stage where they can act, talk about themselves and also ask questions. Then they are also recognised for their personality and the appreciation in the group increases. And older people become more self-confident.” *Geragogy expert, Austria*

SOME INSPIRATIONS – INTERESTING PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

It is not always necessary to invent new settings where older people feel invited to contribute and bring in their interests, knowledge and talents. Sometimes it just needs some inspiration to become aware of the issue and change perspective or develop innovative ideas. Some of our interview partners felt an awareness-raising ‘little push’ by reflecting upon the issues of **invisible talents** and were encouraged to think about possible initiatives to promote and recognise the contributions of older people. →

We know that there are many more ideas of possible activities. Similar to individuals who need to figure out what they want or do not want any more, organisations also need to discover what fits their culture and what can be done with the resources available. It does not always have to be a big change or a comprehensive project. Very often “small” things make a big difference.

With this in mind, we now present some examples of good practice as inspiration and encouragement to take a broader view. We hope that among these examples there are ideas that spark interest and are the starting point of a rethinking process.

At talents marketplaces or talents tracks, for instance, different interests and contributions of people involved in an association or living in a residential home could be presented. Also, story-telling cafés or craft cafés might inspire other (older) people to discover new talents or rediscover long-forgotten interests.

What if? Associations and clubs could change their perspective and organise their routines differently. For example, organising the next excursion together with the target group or making use of internal communication tools for making talents visible (e.g. talent of the month at the notice board or in the internal newspaper or newsletter). An interview partner realised that in his/her organisation, the focus is more often on barriers and the clients’ weaknesses instead of resources. Due to the **invisible talents project the staff feel inspired to change perspective.**



Promoting contributions and making use of talents

The following examples show various possibilities of how to promote the social participation of older people and enable them to bring in their interests, resources and

talents. The projects and initiatives collected range from handicraft and cultural creativity to co-organising events and bringing people together.



Promoting individual Talents in a Day Centre of Seniors

The Seniors Day Centre at Kaunas Centre of Social Services (Lithuania) is a place where individual talents are promoted. For instance, one visitor likes to paint mandalas. Her works were shown at an exhibition at the centre and on Facebook: www.facebook.com/kaunospc.lt/photos/a.2157908911103080/2196412123919425/?type=3

Holiday without Suitcase



On the 4th Tuesday of every month, very old people in particular, are invited on a half-day trip to the surrounding area with short access routes and a small sightseeing program. No one has to walk, but everyone is allowed to if they wish. In particular, people with mobility or sight restrictions are invited to spend an afternoon outside their own four walls. In each case, a destination within a radius of a maximum of 100 kilometres is chosen, where there is a lot to see, but that is not too much of a physical challenge. Rollators and wheelchairs can be used, and those who are not mobile, will be picked up from their home.

Midst of Life Group



The Midst of Life Group, run by the Catholic Education Service Carinthia (Austria), focuses on a combination of memory and physical exercises. However, the group leaders (volunteers, mainly women) try to find out about and promote participants' talents and interests. This is how a theatre group started more than ten years ago. The ladies stage the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale "Rumpelstiltskin" and enchant young and older audiences with their lovely stage design and their enjoyment of acting. The oldest theatre company member is 93-years-old and used to act the part of Rumpelstiltskin until just two years ago. Please find more information here: www.kath-kirche-kaernten.at/dioezese/detail/C2738/seniorinnenbildung (German only)

Modestraat



Modestraat is a neighbourhood centre in Amsterdam (Netherlands) that wants to make the life of people more colourful and make dreams come true. This is done through bringing people (including older people) in contact with art, culture, creativity and with one another. Modestraat works to make the everyday more beautiful and to establish a connection between the neighbourhood and creativity through the combined effort of entrepreneurs, volunteers and neighbourhood residents. www.broedstraten.nl/modestraat (Dutch)



Active older People



This initiative comprises workshops, conferences and dialogue between local authorities and older persons to foster a community with the active participation of senior citizens in the role of experts and quality-of-life entrepreneurs. The activities include the sharing of talents based on the lives and experiences of old and very old participants, nutrition travelling, gentle physical training, visibility in media as well

as collecting ideas and proposals for local age-friendly public policies. The initiative is supported by the Emilia-Romagna Regional Government, the Bologna Province and local older people and social policy NGOs.

Find more information on this initiative in Italian here: www.anzianiattivi.it/Engine/RAServePG.php/P/25221ANZ0609/T/Il-progetto



Increasing visibility

When talking with older people, experts and practitioners we saw that there are already many initiatives in all partner countries. Very often, however, the contributions of older and very old people are hardly or not at all visible. The following examples show creative ideas on how to draw public attention to older people and their talents, interests and personalities:



Special Award for the Voluntary Commitment of very old People



The voluntary commitment of an 89-year-old woman was highlighted in October 2018 by a special prize and awarded at a presentation of awards for volunteering by the city of Maintal. The jury said: “She is inextricably linked with the Maintaler Tanztee (a dance course). She succeeds in encouraging older people to exercise and socialise.” But the deciding factor for the jury was that even older have great vitality and a high degree of commitment. For detailed information on the award please have a look at (German): www.maintal.de/seite/332642/engagiert!-2018-maintal-sagt-danke-für-soziales..html

Photography: Project Zenna



Zenna is an ongoing project in the Netherlands that offers free professional photo shoots to people over the age of 70. This project is led by Zenna Aydin from Deventer and the resulting photos shed a light on the beauty and strength in ageing, providing powerful images of older people. Professional photographers organise these photo shoots throughout the Netherlands and the photos are shown in various exhibitions. Interested in the project and the photos taken? Please have a look at Facebook www.facebook.com/projectzenna/ or the following video: www.facebook.com/zennure.tug/videos/10219023105755112/



Welcome to Pasta Grannies



A “must see” for all pasta lovers: On their YouTube channel Italian “nonne” teach viewers how to make traditional pasta dishes once a week. Get a taste on the following YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/pastagrannies

Film “And Every Life is Different”



The documentary “And Every Life is Different” (“Und a jeds Leben is anders“) by Janina Wegscheider and Martin Lasinger, funded by the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection, illustrates the diversity of lives by portraying five 85-year-old women and men. It highlights how and to what extent care-givers can help people with health impairments to live a meaningful, healthy and dignified life. Film screenings and discussions on “Active Ageing” have been held in all federal provinces since 2010. Find a short description in English on the website of “Crossing Europe”, the Film Festival Linz (Archive): www.crossingeurope.at/archiv/filme-2010/film/und-a-jeds-leben-is-anders.html

Within the *invisible talents* project, we are committed to sharing innovative ideas. If you are interested in a regular update on our project activities and for further inspiration, please have a look at our website: www.invisible-talents.eu

Short film “Blessing of Ageing”



This very touching short film about life in a retirement home (directed by Jenny Schweitzer) shows unforgettable faces, inspiring words and snapshots of lives being lived to the full until the very end.

The video is available at: www.vimeo.com/306408994

Public Performance “Spring”



The project “Dance Laboratory” was carried out throughout 2013 in Kaunas, Lithuania. As part of the initiative, the performance “Spring” was presented; it was created by Kaunas Generation House seniors and professional dancers. Activities were promoted publicly on the organisation’s Facebook page. Photos and a video of the performance are available here:

www.menasgerovei.lt/pavasaris.html





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- Van der Pas, S., Galenkamp, H. (2015): Health and social participation of older people in Europe. Stichting Geron.

Links

- AGE Platform Europe www.age-platform.eu
- Erasmus+ project Active 80+: Valuing and valorizing the knowledge and skills of people 80+ www.act-80plus.eu

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