



Europäisches Jahr der Freiwilligentätigkeit 2011



Engagement Motivates Generations



Documentation of the regional conference organised on the occasion of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 to enhance active citizenship

19-20 May 2011, Hamburg, Germany

In cooperation with



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Dear readers,

The conference “Engagement motivates generations”, whose outcome is presented in this document, took place in Hamburg, Germany, in May 2011 in the context of the European Year of Volunteering. The German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organizations (BAGSO), the German National Association for Senior Citizens' Agencies and the Koerber Foundation joined efforts to organise the conference. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the European Commission and the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth for the funds they provided for the conference and this brochure.

Please let me clarify the approach to “old age” that we have adopted at the Koerber Foundation. With the aim of making a practical contribution to shaping old age in society, our founder, Kurt Koerber, arranged for the development of a concept for an exemplary centre for senior citizens as early as the 1970s. Thanks also to the conceptual responsibility assumed by the subsequent Minister for Family Affairs and current BAGSO President Ursula Lehr, this resulted in the establishment of the Koerber Foundation's House in the Park in Hamburg-Bergedorf, a centre that is still highly innovative to date. With around 100 active volunteers, the centre thrives on the energy and impetus brought to it by senior citizens.

Taking this practical work as the starting point, we launched a new project entitled “Potentials of old age” in 2010 in conjunction with the Heidelberg Institute of Gerontology. At annual symposiums, we present international model projects describing how other societies make the most of the experience and skills of their senior citizens.



We have no doubt that societies can benefit from the potentials of senior citizens. However, there is more at stake than senior citizens assuming responsibility to compensate for the lack of young people that results from demographic changes. It is essential that we value the civic engagement shown by senior citizens as they are frequently driven by a very special motivation: a motivation that gerontologists refer to as “generativity” – senior citizens wanting to take part in society because they aspire to leaving something permanent and making their skills available for future generations. With their social commitment, senior citizens thus combine, perhaps in an exemplary manner, societal change and long-term responsibility.

*Karin Haist
Head of Department Civil Society,
Koerber Foundation*



Pens, post-it notes, headsets: the conference begins.



A stimulating round-table discussion.

Partners change, but the discussion continues.



Welcome to the World Café

A photographic invitation

Bringing people together, making use of everybody's knowledge and benefiting from each other's expertise – a "World Café" can deliver all of these.

In street cafés or coffee houses, people frequently find themselves sharing a table with strangers or people they hardly know. But it often happens they start talking to one another. The method of a World Café builds on the relaxed and creative atmosphere of such chance encounters and makes use of it in a professional context.

Sitting at tables furnished with coloured pens and (paper) tablecloths as a convenient writing pad for comments, drafts and sketches, participants can share their ideas and experiences with a small group within a short space of time. Results are documented on coloured post-it notes. The composition of the groups changes repeatedly, so that inspiring conversations can be broadened and the knowledge and ideas of the participants are passed on straight away. The World Café is a means of constructive net-

working: It brings together actors that work for similar goals in different places but who often lack a suitable forum for communication and constructive exchange.

In Hamburg, groups of four to five people shared each table to discuss:

- how participation in society succeeds through active involvement,
- what municipalities and organizations should do to facilitate participation,
- how future society can be shaped by the active involvement of the generations.

This brochure brings together the contributions made by the speakers and the 120 conference participants: They are impulses for successfully supporting civic engagement.



Lighthouses of engagement as "talking staffs" to support the culture of conversation.



Listening, respect, articulation form the basic pillars of dialogue.

"Graphic recording" – the conference is illustrated as it progresses.



Volunteer! Make a difference.

Welcoming speech

Dieter Hackler, head of department „Elderly people, welfare work and Civic Engagement“ at the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

Engagement motivates generations” is the title of this first conference in a series of eight major regional conferences organised on the occasion of the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

I am particularly pleased that this conference today is taking place at the KörberForum in Hamburg. The Körber Foundation has a long tradition and can look back on a large range of activities in the field of “old age” and senior citizens’ participation in society. Many among you will be familiar with the USable Transatlantic Idea Competition, which was established over ten years ago, and with the “Forum Engagementförderung” (Forum for the Promotion of Civic Engagement), which was set up by the Körber Foundation in conjunction with the Federal Association of German Foundations to put the exchange among foundations in the field of civic engagement on a professional basis. Furthermore, the Körber Foundation’s “Potentials of old age” project presents international experiences and examples of senior citizens participating and helping shape society.

The Federal government is doing its share by including the promotion of civic engagement in its range of government responsibilities. It is our aim to provide stronger support to citizens who engage in voluntary activities and contribute to shaping society. We intend to establish a social commitment policy as a separate policy area.

In this context, my central concern is the interaction between all generations in society. Or, to quote Kurt Körber: “I want to raise people’s



awareness of the fact that it is down to each and everyone of us to help preserve our community.” (Kurt Körber, 1992)

European Year of Volunteering 2011

This is a further reason why we have given the promotion of cross-generational civic engagement a central role in our national programme under the European Year of Volunteering in 2011. The European Year provides many opportunities to boost and recognise the social commitment shown, in particular, by senior citizens. Activities at the level of the individual member states, the European associations and the European Commission pay tribute to a wide range of voluntary activities, support volunteer organisations and promote mutual learning through regular exchange with other member states.

We advocate regular sustainable dialogue between the member states on the subject of civic engagement at the European level. In

close coordination with all relevant players, we have furthermore interpreted and adapted the EU aims to the special challenges we face here in Germany.

Developments in Germany: National Strategy on the Promotion of Volunteering

A lot has happened in Germany since the European Council established the above aims for the 2011 Year of Volunteering in November 2009. Last October, the government passed the National Strategy on the Promotion of Volunteering. The strategy was formulated in consultation with civil society players in the context of a comprehensive and structured process. The intensity and seriousness brought to this process by numerous citizens showed that they both welcomed this form of participation and made good use of it.



The Federal government’s strategy represents the cornerstone of an approach to the promotion of volunteering in Germany, an approach that is based on close coordination between government, the economy and civil society. The National Strategy on the Promotion of Volunteering highlights the fact that civic engagement is rated highly in Germany and that numerous national structures are already in place that promote and recognise voluntary activities. The strategy is intended to further improve the framework conditions for civic engagement and establish the issue as an important long-term policy area across all departments.

We aim to further harmonise the current infrastructure at all federal levels. The results and discussions arising from the European Year of Volunteering 2011 will be integrated into the Federal government’s National Strategy on the Promotion of Volunteering.

Voluntary activities of senior citizens

The European Year of Volunteering crucially depends on the support of civic players and their activities. The older generations in particular are already making a difference! Senior citizens take the time to assume responsibility, be it in the form of voluntary activities or within their families.

The “German Ageing Survey” shows that in the 50 to 65-year-olds, for example, close to 38% are active within their families and 37% in the voluntary sector, with some involved in both areas.

Initiatives set up by the Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth Affairs

With its “Creating something new in old age” initiative and the Federal Voluntary Service,

the Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth Affairs has provided a further impulse for the promotion of engagement by senior citizens. Older people volunteer to fulfil tasks of outstanding social and non-material value:

Firstly, elderly volunteers provide valuable examples of positive ageing. Such examples are needed to dispel distorted images of ageing that still persist in our society despite the fact that being old primarily means that one has a lot to offer! No other stage in life is as diverse as old age. The Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth Affairs has created the “Images of old age” programme to promote a new, more realistic view of this stage in life.

Secondly, the civic engagement of senior citizens furthers solidarity among the generations as young and old stand to benefit from mutual interaction in all areas. Young people need the experience provided by older people while senior citizens are kept “up to date” by the younger generations. Due to older people’s experience of life, they act as important navigators for the young. In his latest book “Ageing is not for Cowards”, Joachim Fuchsberger describes how nice it would be on occasion to advise young people to “turn around right here, if you can.”

Engagement across borders

The seminal function of cross-generational engagement certainly doesn’t stop at national borders. Under the umbrella of the European Year of Volunteering, further cross-border activities are taking place, such as the “Seven Bridges that connect – European commitment in Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Den-

mark and Germany” event or measures promoting the recognition of voluntary work, such as the Civic Commitment Week or the German Prize for Civic Engagement. At the European level, the year-long EYV tour involving all 27 EU member states facilitates meetings and exchanges of experience and provides an opportunity to present successful work and projects. It also provides citizens with information on the European dimension of civic engagement.

Long-term effect of the European Year

It is very important to us that the European Year of Volunteering 2011 will have a long-term effect. We want to play our part in making sure that the planned activities will continue to provide an impetus beyond the Year of Volunteering. Furthermore, we want to create a link to the European Year 2012 which will focus on the subjects of active ageing and solidarity among generations.

Old age should not be seen through the lens of the potential deficits that old people may acquire but rather as a stage in life in which people benefit from their experience and additional skills. It is in this spirit that I wish all of us a successful European Year of Volunteering 2011 and beyond – and hope that our combined activities in the voluntary field will really make that difference.

Engagement feels good – engagement does good

Civic engagement – a challenge in times of demographic change

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Ursula Lehr

Life in times of demographic change

Demographic change and its consequences cannot be addressed without the elderly. Elderly people are not only needed as private citizens and family members, or market participants and voters, but increasingly also to actively shape society.” These words introduce the chapter “Images of Age and Role Models in Civil Society” in the Sixth Commission Report on the Situation of the Elderly.

Today’s world is an ageing world. More and more people are now reaching an increasingly older age – a fact we should be pleased about. From 1889 to 2008 the life expectancy of women and men increased by 42 and 40 years to 82.4 and 77.2 years, respectively. Moreover, the share of “healthy” years (“disability free life expectancy”) that are spent in independence and self-reliance has sharply increased in recent decades and will continue to do so (“Compression of Morbidity,” FRIES 2005). At the same time, however, fewer and fewer children come into the world here; the declining birth rate should give us pause.

In Germany, entire regions are suffering from depopulation, and many still close their eyes to the consequences: Savings banks and post offices have to close, schools have to be merged, the public transportation system is reduced, shops and medical practices “are no longer worthwhile”, declining water con-



sumption increases the price of waste water disposal; one speaks of “retreating” or the “retrogression” of entire regions. The still “growing regions” particularly in the south and southwest and the metropolitan regions contrast with shrinking regions predominantly in the east and northeast of our country. Young people migrate to economically favored regions, primarily Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, while older people stay behind, often for years and decades. Some are dependent on persons who lend them assistance.

Everyone is talking about demographic change. What can be done, what challenges will it present to each individual, to society, our cities and municipalities? We should encourage civic engagement, our society needs the commitment of the elderly! Their life experience, their competence, knowledge, and special expertise – as well as the time and patience that



elderly people are prepared to contribute – can be an opportunity and driving force for social change.

The principle of “Active Ageing”

Just fifty years ago retirement at 65 years of age was considered to be the “beginning of the end” and feared by most. Today it is seen as the beginning of a new active phase in life and practically longed for with great expectancy. Images of old age are changing. Even if the group of the truly aged or those enjoying longevity – those over eighty years of age – is set to increase significantly worldwide in the next few years, it is problematic to speak in terms of the customary divisions of “the young elderly” and, starting from 80/85, the “old elderly”. Some people are “old elderly” already at 55 or 60 years of age, while others are still “young elderly” at the age of ninety. What counts is the “functional age”, the functioning of various physical and mental faculties. In no way is this functioning tied to chronological age.

It is also determined by biological and social factors that exert an influence during an entire lifetime. In this case it is education, vocational training, lifestyle and responses to stress that are decisive.

Ageing as a deficit model in general should be put into question, as it has been disproved by numerous studies. Ageing does not need to mean the deterioration and loss of abilities and talents. The older we become, the less does our age say anything about our abilities, talents, behavior and experience. Ageing is always the result of a lifelong process with one’s very own experiences. Instead of standards of ageing there are forms of ageing. (LEHR 2007). Thus age has many faces: There is the older person who at an advanced age is still able to cope successfully with everyday challenges, and then there are the sick, infirm persons requiring assistance and support.

Longevity carries an obligation to age healthily and to take on self-responsibility and shared

responsibility. Physical and mental activity, healthy nutrition and social activity are essential prerequisites for healthy and competent ageing. Functions that are not used wither away: If you don’t use it you lose it.

Today active ageing is practically an obligation, for each and everyone to do something for themselves (self-responsibility) and also for others – “doing good feels good” (shared responsibility). This also goes for society which has to create the necessary framework conditions and possibilities to this end. Today our long-lived society needs civic engagement – not as a substitute for various services, but as a complement.

Shaping change – also through civic engagement

The period of the “roleless role of the aged” is over. In 1961, almost half a century ago, the sociologist Tartler described the given “lack of a role and function of older people” due to social and technical development. The roles expected of older people today go beyond simple family roles. Even outside of the family each generation is dependent on the other generations. What is important is the “ability to be a neighbour” (Sixth Commission Report on the Situation of the Elderly, Chapter 4). So let us find and take on our role.

By now there are a number of exemplary and future-oriented projects that clearly demonstrate the numerous tasks, functions and roles assumed by older people. Their voluntary commitment ranges from providing support in the family and the neighbourhood to voluntary activities in sports associations, church communities and politics and other forms of civic engagement, all the way through to the

holding of traditional honorary offices. Libraries and swimming pools can be kept open longer; visiting services in families, homes and hospitals help the needy and relieve caregiving relatives; neighbourhood assistance provides support in the household and helps with visits to the authorities; and “grandparent services” create more space for families. Mentors care for young people in education and training, mediators defuse conflicts in schools, sponsors help young migrants improve their reading and writing skills, Senior Academies use the knowledge of older people, and PC and internet courses are taught by volunteers.

The image of active ageing gives room to autonomous personal development and enables social sharing and involvement. At the same time, there is a danger of exploiting the civic engagement of older people – when it is instrumentalized to compensate for the limited ability of the welfare state to perform. Voluntary commitment cannot be commandeered, and the engagement of volunteers cannot be steered externally or by institutions. The initiative must come from the older people themselves.

What is important is to motivate older people to assume functions that they themselves experience as meaningful. It is important to promote voluntary commitment without pleading the case for a “mandatory year of social services” for senior citizens.

Motivation and impediments

People – and not just the elderly – need to have a task in life. The feeling to be needed contributes to quality of life in every age group, and there is a strong correlation between the ability to do something meaningful and satisfac-

tion with life. Having a task, being able to help, making someone else happy is also a chance to train one's own abilities and to keep fit – given that the voluntary post does not make excessive demands or turn into stress. The learning requirements associated with further training can be partly experienced as motivating, partly as inhibiting.

Socially engaged individuals have contact with other people, work together on a given task and are able to express their thoughts. People are more likely to accept an offer that matches their interests, just as the experience of voluntary work in earlier periods of life acts as a strong motivational force. It is also for this reason that reconciliation between occupation and voluntary engagement should be facilitated, as should flexibility with respect to the time spent volunteering. The activity should be recognized and its success made visible, for example through certificates.

Problems of time can be impediments. These include – entirely justified – leisure activities, but also being needed in the family, being with children, grandchildren and perhaps even one's own elderly parents. There is also the "hesitation of committing oneself in terms of time" and having to be available for fixed appointments. After the end of one's professional life there is finally the feeling of being free, of not being tied down in terms of time and the desire to enjoy it.

A further problem may be one's own unstable state of health and/or certain health problems with which one has to struggle. Interestingly, individual observations show that once a person engages in a meaningful activity, some problems disappear or are no longer experienced as strongly. A further reason may be

a negative self-image: One does not feel up to the task and fears embarrassment.

Some men and women approaching the end of their professional careers express a reservation to have "anything to do with old people" in particular – "I'll get old myself early enough." Does this reveal their own fear of growing old?

Social engagement not only costs time; usually it also generates monetary costs. Limited mobility can also prevent or hamper engagement.

However, there are also impediments that have nothing to do with the individual: Administrative regulations and the lack of appropriate insurance may result in uncertainty. The accessibility of the place of work also plays a role.

The fear that voluntary work could contribute to a loss of jobs makes it less attractive. In some places there is even rivalry between full-time personnel who are considered to be "professionals" and volunteers.

In some areas – directly or indirectly – the still prevailing negative image of old age undermines the engagement of older people: they are less frequently considered for board elections, or there is a fixed age limit as in the case of telephone crisis lines or jury service.

It is important to discover the reasons for, and remove such barriers while strengthening motivation. Among other things, this can be achieved through:

- the creation, and improvement of suitable framework conditions in the municipalities, and the development of an infrastructure



that promotes engagement such as Senior Citizen's Offices and multi-generation housing

- clear information, a clear description of the task at hand, delimitation of the activity in terms of time and project-related activity
- organizational assistance like the employment of a "volunteer coordinator"
- clarification of insurance benefits
- reimbursement of expenses
- advanced training possibilities
- organization of the relationship between full-time personnel and volunteers; clear arrangements for resolving conflicts are helpful

- social recognition of such commitment and certificates

Let us be encouraged by increasing longevity – and let us try everything, so that the years will become years of fulfillment. Let us not see only the limits of individual ageing and those of an ageing society, but let us also recognize and take advantage of the possibilities as well: Carpe diem!

Getting people involved: exploiting potential and ensuring participation

Impulses provided by the World Café

A living democracy is shaped by active citizens. Their social, cultural and political commitment helps define their living conditions and develop concepts for future society.

In the last ten years, the amount of voluntary work performed by senior citizens has increased substantially. Nevertheless, voluntary activities cannot be taken for granted. Social commitment research and players in the field agree that the willingness to get involved in the community is largely determined by the question whether real participation is possible.

Participation through involvement

For many people, everyday life is dominated by responsibilities and constraints. In contrast, exerting influence through voluntary commitment and establishing something meaningful in society under one's own steam is an enriching experience. Civic engagement gets things moving: People help each other, they bring about change and inspire others to act themselves. They give courage to those who feel powerless.

The experience of making a personal contribution towards the advancement of society, maintaining social contacts and experiencing companionship also raises motivation in other spheres of activity. In many cases, individual commitment covers several fields of action in civil society.

Senior citizens assume responsibility in a variety of roles: They promote the interests of their

own generation, get involved in cross-generational projects and provide practical assistance to children and young adults.

Their involvement advances integration in a pluralistic society in which many different interests have to be reconciled. Through their



active participation in society, they articulate their wishes and concerns in a public forum. Their commitment counteracts ignorance and misinformation. They want to be heard.

Success motivates

Through their voluntary work, committed senior citizens also want to break down social prejudice and show that old age can be more than “taking without giving”. Nevertheless, civic engagement is not synonymous with unselfish altruism. Volunteers do not just work for others free of charge, they experience firsthand the effect, success and satisfaction that arises from their actions. Self-serving interests may enter into a fruitful alliance with the will to right social wrongs.

Those who get involved do so for personal reasons: The act of doing good is beneficial to the actor. It promotes good health. Being needed is also a good preparation for the future. In performing voluntary work, senior citizens in particular can draw on extensive experience from their professional and family lives.

Putting your heart and soul into something is a rewarding personal experience. The enjoyment volunteers get out of their activities is a crucial factor. Gratifying social commitment transcends selfishness and competitiveness. It means being part of a team and acquiring meaning while remaining in charge of oneself. Taking things in one's own hands. Having aspirations and becoming involved in shaping the social fabric, participating in current developments and contributing towards positive change.

Positive commitment reflects all these levels: It creates meaning, is valued at the social level

and provides room for self-realisation. It ensures that all sections of the population are involved and exploits the population's potential for shaping society on a democratic basis.

Appreciation as currency

Civic engagement requires responsibility and acknowledgement. The personal idealism that drives people to expose themselves to ever-changing situations and embark on new courses requires feedback that confers value on such activities.

Participation in shaping society is also defined by material and immaterial framework conditions. People must be able to “afford” voluntary work, both financially and in terms of time. Full compensation of the expenses incurred, e.g. telephone, travel or training, is paid in very few cases.

A culture of acknowledgement reflects the variety of voluntary activities: It offers material assistance, such as expense refunds, offers training opportunities, ensures that a mutual exchange takes place and acknowledges the “results” achieved by the volunteers, namely the assistance they have provided and good deeds they have done.

Potentials and participation

Good practice examples



Creative organization of life

alters.kulturen – the “Association for Creative Organization of Life” – was established by Nora Aschacher and Elizabeth Nöstlinger as an “informal think tank” in Vienna with the aim of analyzing the current conventional images of ageing and developing additional and realistic

modern images. The association aims to reveal new life concepts for ageing persons, helping them to recognize and strengthen their individual creative development potential in order to realize their dreams and facilitate careers later in life. What is important is to use the available space and to dare to undertake a new beginning without losing sight of the restrictions caused by aging. alters.kulturen takes a stand against the social exclusion of people who are becoming older and turns active social participation into a topic to be actively addressed. Apart from lectures, conferences and artistic campaigns, an interactive website is operated that covers numerous contributions and dates in the fields of art, culture and media policy. The portrait gallery 60 plus presents artists who work as painters, dancers and singers.

Further information is available at:
www.alters.kulturen.cc

Technology without barriers

Whoever opens the door to the House in the Park community centre enters a unique place with singular role model character in Germany: Surrounded by old trees and flooded with light, the house in the Hamburg district of Bergedorf is open to people fifty years and older – people who want to take an active role in shaping their own future, and people who seek assistance in the case of illnesses and age-related restrictions. Visitors can take part in educational and leisure activities and discover preventive health measures, projects for the young and old, cultural events, a café, a physical therapy practice and an outpatient nursing



care service as well as numerous possibilities for doing voluntary work. Those interested in learning about computers and internet applications meet in the computer club. Voluntary tutors are available 6.5 hours per day – and that means five days a week! Domestic computer problems are also handled at the same time. Seventeen PCs and further notebooks can be used, with the Körber foundation bearing the cost for the equipment, programs and operation. All the members and tutors are people fifty years and older, so learning barriers are easily

overcome. Even with different levels of user knowledge, the spirit of mutual support creates an atmosphere in which training is good fun. The club encourages cooperative learning based on the interests of the members and thus it comes as no surprise that the 192 places have been in continuous use for nine years.

Further information is available at:
www.cc-hip.de und
www.koerber-stiftung.de/gesellschaft/begegnungszentrum-haus-im-park.html

Lifelong learning and research

In Germany a total of fifty universities provide education specifically for older people.



Those over sixty years of age constitute nearly half of the approximately 40,000 guest students. They participate in the general courses or visit curricula developed specifically for them and take part in research projects. As a result, they participate in the social process of acquiring knowledge; in return they contribute their experience to this transfer of knowledge. In the German network of the representatives of older students (DENISS) older students from now thirteen universities have come together with the shared commitment to preserving this diversity of learning as well as individual approaches to using it. The network serves as a forum for the exchange of experience and information, as well as representation of the interests of older students to policy-makers and the public. Contacts with the European Federation of Older Students at the Universities (EFOS) and the International Association of Seniors Universities (AIUTA) show that the knowledge society has recognized the importance of lifelong learning, instruction and research for active ageing.

For additional information: www.deniss.de

Trans-generational policy for civic engagement

Prof. Dr. Thomas Klie, Centre for Developments in Civil Society (zze), member of the Sixth Commission Reporting on the Situation of the Elderly

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to the conference and giving me this opportunity to provide further input to the discussion. I would like to do this in the form of ten propositions.

1st proposition: Engagement secures participation and integration

Voluntary activities represent a central building block in promoting participation, integration and belonging, not only for those who are actively involved but also for those on whose behalf the activities are performed. Participation cannot be had without this civic and caring form of taking action, without being there for each other. Engagement creates social capital for those who need new social networks and are willing to enter into new friendships. Sympathy is the essential currency that plays a major role in fostering inclusiveness. Engagement brings together people that would otherwise remain strangers to each other.

2nd proposition: Engagement is a response to demographic change

This is stated by the National Strategy on the Promotion of Volunteering, passed by the German government in October 2010, and I wholeheartedly support it. The challenges associated with the demographic and social changes taking place in our society cannot be met with the resources and logic of the market, state and family alone. We need both old and new forms of solidarity and cooperation



in society. This is our only viable option for meeting the economic, and especially the cultural, challenges associated with demographic change. In this context, one of the central issues is the care we take of each other beyond the support that a government system can and should provide. Long-term care insurance rightly takes the form of a partial insurance cover offering partial benefits for partial requirements. It is based on the assumption of society's ability to provide care – which is also a fiscal ability. “Who cares?” has a double meaning. “Who minds?” and “who will attend to the problem?” will be the two central issues in the coming decades. What we need is policies that are not indifferent to these issues and people who care: for children, neighbourhoods, people with disabilities, the

very old in need of support. Any responses capable of answering these questions must be based on the reasoning and spirit of engagement. The social architecture is changing. It requires forms of cohesion beyond families and friends. We need an infrastructure in which engagement can be expected and promoted, especially if we want to reach those who will not easily volunteer because engagement has always been part of their lifestyle.

3rd proposition: Civic engagement is an important form of activity in old age

This is the conclusion drawn by the Sixth Commission Reporting on the Situation of the Elderly. The concept of retirement is outdated. The concept of “active ageing”, which was developed by the WHO, is challenging people and policies all over the world, be it in Japan, Germany, Bolivia or Namibia, where I was last active as guest professor researching the life situation of the elderly. The challenge consists of learning to actively shape our old age if it is given to us. It is the paradigm of active age that is of central importance rather than a generalised paradigm of withdrawal and retirement. The latter does not contribute towards the development of society, nor does it help people themselves. For those who become involved, engagement yields benefits in terms of health, participation, meaning and productivity. The range of opportunities for engagement is as diverse as old age itself.

4th proposition: Civic engagement is a crucial vehicle for shaping relations between generations

Change in the generational fabric, the challenges of intergenerational equity and the speed of cultural and technical change de-

mand creative forms of cooperation in society. Ambivalence among generations is not uncommon in most societies. A friendly approach and solidarity between generations is not only a must, but also a cultural achievement. With relations between generations in the process of profound transformation, including the structure of our social security system and the way generations meet and interact, cross-generational meeting places provided by volunteer work represent a crucial vehicle for practicing new approaches to intergenerational relations.

Today, it is increasingly rare that different generations meet in public spaces. Social engagement provides meeting places and opportunities to experiment with new forms of cooperation between generations. Young people demanding cuts in social and health benefits for older people, tampering with the balance between the generations in an undifferentiated way, raise the same fears of a contentious downward spiral in intergenerational relations (Missfelder effect) as the one-sided commitment to pension security (“as long as my pension is secure”). But relations between the generations are not that bad. The promise of long life in society is associated with the challenge of finding a creative and equitable approach to using limited resources. Cross-generational engagement provides an opportunity for experimental meetings between generations and the creation of new roles for senior citizens in the negotiations between generations based on a sense of companionship.

5th proposition: As crucial as it is, engagement must not be functionalised

Now or in the future, our society cannot function without social engagement. Hardship

cannot be alleviated without it. At the same time, engagement arises from society and is an expression of our culture. It may not be used as a stopgap to eliminate bottlenecks in the welfare state. However, this requires us, the citizens, to accept the necessity of social engagement as a precondition for a functioning and equitable welfare state. This insight will not come overnight, as engagement may not be dictated from above. This would undermine the cultural requirement of a society based on solidarity. Especially in Germany, citizens have a keen understanding of the point at which their engagement is being functionalised. In a free society, we must recognise and defend conditions of freedom and subsidiarity.

6th proposition: Engagement is priceless but not available for free

We all know that engagement is essentially a donation of time whose value for the economy cannot be overestimated.

Engagement must not be monetarized. It must not be incorporated into the monetary exchange logic. Unfortunately, there have been a few infringements of this rule in the past, most recently in the field of long-term care insurance. Conducive infrastructures are required, especially at the local authority level. Without them, any approach to social engagement lacks the required seriousness and remains pure rhetoric. If political insights fail to be implemented in reliable infrastructures, if investment is not also expressed in the willingness to promote engagement at the political level, then all the politicians have given us is lip service. It would be wrong to assume that mere appeals are capable of establishing and promoting broad-based social engagement in a modern society.



7th proposition: Engagement must be associated with rights but no duties

Statutory regulations must be free of discrimination, especially where senior citizens are concerned. The state must not turn the cultural dimension of engagement into an obligation. It was, and still is different in the case of classic honorary positions in the Stein-Hardenberg tradition. Regrettably, our approach to the term “honorary position” does not take history into account. At the local authority level, for example in the judiciary system, the honorary position is and remains a civic duty, and rightly so. Otherwise, our state and its institutions could not function. But let’s not make voluntary activities by senior citizens compulsory, even now that general military service has been abolished. Instead, institutions should be opened up to promote voluntary engagement for all generations: the available resources and the learning experiences that can be facilitate should be accessible to all people and all age groups.

Discrimination against older people in volunteer work must be abolished. When Ms.

Lehr was Minister for Family Affairs, she commissioned an expert report on the subject of age limits in German law. The report came up with 455 age limits. In my capacity as member of the Commission Reporting on the Situation of the Elderly, I have found that we still have numerous age limits in place, including the honorary positions: jury service is not possible beyond the age of 70 - an unnecessary rule that has been inspired by a questionable view of old age.

8th proposition: Engagement is co-productive and advocational

Social engagement achieves a lot: it supplements family solidarity, which I consider really important, and shares out the responsibility for care tasks. However, it is also associated with taking a critical attitude and advocacy, a fact that we are currently experiencing once again at the political level. Solidarity, defiance and democratic involvement are closely connected in a culture of civic engagement and should not be reduced to a single dimension. Civic engagement always has a latent political content and acts as an expression of joint responsibility in shaping life in public spaces.

9th proposition: Civic engagement has many facets

Civic engagement has different faces and comes in different dialects and forms. We must be open to the various dialects as they carry specific traditions in one form or another. Social plurality is also expressed in a plethora of different forms of engagement. As Rosenmayr says: “A diverse ageing society knows many forms of joint responsibility.” Whether taking up an honorary position, or

becoming active in volunteer work or self-help, there are many different approaches to engagement.

10th proposition: Civic engagement is an expression of the search for new, worthy social images

This is the utopian content of civil society which is absolutely indispensable. In a religious society, people have the kingdom of God to aspire to, if possible in the here and now. In terms of civil society, this aspiration is aiming too high, both as a claim and at the semantic level. Civil society is a bit more modest. Nevertheless, it also searches for utopian images of a society undergoing rapid change. The ageing society requires new utopian images based on solidarity as well as equitable and sustainable co-existence. In addressing core social issues, civic engagement aspires to higher things, acting not only in the here and now but also considering the other dimension – the future. The engagement of senior citizens takes a special place in the categories of joint responsibility and generativity: “The marks they leave are somewhat larger than a depression in the sofa”. This is the postulate of joint responsibility, which does not take away from the respect for the vulnerability of old age and its different forms of existence.

Social engagement in flux – demands on organisations and local authorities

Impulses provided by the World Café

Civic engagement leads to significant change. Local authorities, churches and associations have long been aware of the fact that they cannot do without voluntary work. Social engagement is in flux: The manifold challenges arising from a society undergoing significant demographic change demand new fields of activity, new forms of cooperation and new structures adapted to suit these developments, in short: a new culture of cooperation between volunteers and institutions.

Local authorities adopt new approaches

Given the importance of our future tasks, there is no room for competitiveness. Institutions' ability to adhere to the status quo should not be underestimated, nor should their justified fears of losing power and official positions. Nevertheless, more and more local authorities are adjusting their hierarchical structures and are asking citizens to become involved.

They see themselves as committed local authorities focusing on the local interests for voluntary work. They pool resources and promote cooperation, form hubs for networks and provide material and conceptual support.

Staff units for civic engagement have been established at the management level while master plans for voluntary activities list the infrastructure of rooms, forms of acknowledgement, training options and possible fields of involvement available to volunteers.



Action must be taken where the activation and organisation of citizens' involvement has not yet been recognised as a responsibility of the local authority, while other cities and local authorities are establishing and supporting visible and efficient contact points. The encouragement and support of civic engagement should be rooted in the local authorities' organisational structures. This can either take the form of a central unit for social commitment or of various coordination units within the existing departments that help reduce red tape.

Promotion of social engagement as a future challenge

With its fresh link to local fields of activity, community organising is raising public interest. Citizens are joining together in interdenominational citizens' platforms that are politically and financially independent.

New alliances are forged, business and local authority action groups seek contact with each other. Estate agencies and local senior citizens and family offices work together to create new neighbourhoods. Processes are supported by coaching.

Community organising draws on resources at all levels to ensure that its effects are sustainable. Activities are discussed at round tables, district conferences and other local forums. This allows volunteers to establish and control networks in the social neighbourhood, avoid duplication and coordinate processes without restricting the diversity of services offered.

Productive participation of citizens in current needs planning requires open communication and cooperation between local authorities, organisations and individuals. This communication should be based on verifiable information that is understandable to outsiders.

Where aims and target groups adopted by action groups, institutions or associations overlap, officials and volunteers can create synergies through transparency. Collectivity as a positive experience – fellow campaigners are working for the same aim.

Catalyst for social processes

Socially committed citizens act as catalyst for social processes. Mutual exchange between of-

ficials and volunteers provides a valuable stimulus for the identification and activation of interested citizens.

Negotiation processes need high-quality support and should involve varied social milieus. Intercultural access allows everybody to get involved. This discourse releases energy for activities and shows a large potential for social innovation: Differences are overcome where diverse people commit themselves to jointly work for the common good. Civic participation helps shape a positive future.

De-democratisation arises when political decisions are made in a non-transparent manner or if those concerned are indifferent to the issues at hand. The involvement of responsible citizens can effectively counteract such tendencies. Players inform the public of existing social wrongs, suggest solutions and demand that the elected officers act in a responsible manner.

Senior citizens should regularly contact their political representatives to enquire as to the extent to which activities and offers to talk about the concerns of the older third of society are taken into account in the planning process. The active participation of senior citizens is a valuable pillar of society.

Shaping the community

The financial situation of the local communities is severely restricting their room for manoeuvre. Voluntary services are being cut or outsourced. This presents citizens with new challenges which are met in the context of an open process in which citizens' empowerment strategies will not support new forms of demo-



cracy unless all decisions are made on a transparent and accessible basis.

Within this process, local authorities as neutral actors play a central role in identifying the needs of the various sections of the population and including these in the joint discussion. This needs analysis and the reflection and discussion of fair distribution in the face of scarce resources should be carried out with reference to the individual local communities. Projects based on local joint agreements reflect the local authority's appreciation of its active citizens.

Local forums at the district or neighbourhood level create an environment that invites people to make a positive contribution. Citizens' acceptance of political decisions is commensurate with the degree to which they are heard by the authorities. Volunteer parliaments with their own budgets need to manage the use of their funds in a responsible manner.

Communicative interfaces in the dialogue between local authorities and citizens are of crucial importance. Local authorities should consider how they could make better use of their staff's potential when staff members retire and become active in the voluntary sector.

Organisations are also called upon to promote community organising. They are important vehicles of civic commitment and have the power to provide substantial support to volunteers.

Proven examples of neighbourhood centres should be taken up and introduced in other neighbourhoods. Senior citizens' offices should be set up and promoted as catalysts for an innovative work with elderly people. Here, as in other areas, volunteers should take an active part from the beginning rather than having decisions handed down to them.

In the future, voluntary activities will have to extend to new fields: Property owners' associations, for example, could attempt to revitalise neighbourhoods and new local needs-based approaches could emerge. Personal contact, for example with immigrants or senior citizens, is indispensable where no family ties exist and other services have not yet been established.

Innovative local authorities and organisations

When creating opportunities for civic engagement, local authorities and organisations should take notice of voluntary work in all its diversity even outside their own structural boundaries. This also includes autonomous forms. Conflicts arising from dissimilar efficiency and performance criteria should not be mired in the juxtaposition of non-binding voluntary work and professional officialdom.

Dialogue based on contact and exchange rather than rigid self portrayal helps overcome patronising behaviour through cooperative participation. Official and unofficial sides swapping chairs with each other is also a helpful tool.

The acceptance of voluntary work depends on finding common ground with those concerned. Organisations should develop further structures for those in need of help and should internalise and implement an enabling culture. Volunteers with highly developed emotional intelligence allow associations to give important impulses regarding the future development of organisations.

Such development does not necessarily have to be "new". To exploit their existing potential, organisations must first assess which structures can still be used, expanded and perhaps

developed. The "old" voluntary work concept and its reliable representation rules will remain in demand in the future.

Strategies for participation

Aside from the right to participate, real participation also requires the right opportunities. This involves motivational publicity work as well as support and facilitation of exchange processes. Volunteers joining to form a net-



work need to be clear about organisational requirements and the context in which they perform their activities.

It is one of the central responsibilities of local authorities and organisations to support self-assurance in the voluntary sector. This creates a sustainable basis for enabling structures. Social commitment by all generations can be promoted via local authority contact points or via "social commitment officers", either at the local or the national level. Far from conflicting with self-determination in the voluntary sector, professional support actually gives it a boost.

Today, volunteers are involved in a plethora of different participation models: Roundtables in the neighbourhood, markets of opportunities at large events, World Cafés at conferences, local volunteering fairs, volunteer exchanges and information events provide ideas and facilitate the exchange of experience between volunteers and those who would like to become involved. They inspire people to volunteer by demonstrating how participation can shape public concerns and social community.

Motivation, qualification, guidance

Local authorities, institutions and organisations should support volunteers in the exercise of their social commitment. Attendant publicity work brings news of projects to the public and suggests possible fields of activity for civic engagement.

Volunteer exchanges provide information on lines of action and inspire potential volunteers to become involved. Existing qualification processes can be supplemented with new formats (e.g. a “social certification system” for volunteers). Educational leave should also contain elements of reflection and dialogue, providing participants with personal and social skills. Joint training programmes for officials and volunteers can provide opportunities for a change in perspective and create mutual understanding.

Social cohesion is based on civic engagement. It is characterised by openness, respect and interaction. By revealing their motives, participants inform others of their wishes and needs as well as impart values.

Mutual dialogue facilitates social participation. This process should be subject to quali-



fied guidance. It should begin with an outline specifying which people may be willing to be asked via a respectful invitation and which information is required. Attentive and humorous guidance should accompany exchanges, while joint agreements to continue working together ensure the continuity of the dialogue. The implementation of the decisions taken should be supported and, if possible, the process evaluated for quality assurance purposes. It is a central responsibility of effective guidance to ensure that results are clearly presented to sponsors and those in charge as well as to political decision-makers. These aims also apply to cross-generational exchange, an area in which it is all the more important to focus on the various target groups and address them specifically.

Promoting engagement in organisations and municipalities

Good practice examples

ZWAR – Between Work and Retirement

Social networks of older people are becoming increasingly important in responding to the challenges of demographic change. In North Rhine Westphalia, more than 50 municipalities have independent, self-organised ZWAR networks which enable people over the age of 50 to actively participate in their quarter and become engaged with their local community. In these networks people 50 years and older find new perspectives for their older age. Apart from supporting one another, they become involved in shaping the future of their quarter, for instance in multi-generational projects; they also instigate housing projects, help the socially disadvantaged and take part in round tables and senior advisory committees. A ZWAR network supports a living neighbourhood and can markedly improve the social quality of life in the quarter. In order



to initiate and support the ZWAR networks the ZWAR central office in North-Rhine Westphalia works with various municipalities and associations to offer a dedicated support structure. The central office provides qualification and networking events and advice on how to organise future-oriented work with senior citizens and promote social engagement.

For further information: www.zwar.org

Seniors in New Networks – SINN

Municipalities play a central role when it comes to organizing the conditions for living and ageing in the city. Lawmakers have committed municipalities to providing services for citizens and ensuring their participation in social life – which also includes social engagement. Since 1993 welfare organisations, hospitals, senior citizens’ homes, the hospice movement, family educational centers and the city have come together in the association “Age and Social Affairs” in Ahlen to improve the living conditions and services for older



people. In the SINN network older people themselves and the partners who work with the elderly cooperate in a spirit of equality. Twice a year the SINN conference offers the opportunity to exchange or develop new

ideas. All citizens of the city are invited to attend.

For further information:
www.senioren-ahlen.de

Creating enabling structures

The municipal “senior citizens service” of the state capital of Hanover (KSH) supports seniors in living an independent and self-determined life even at an advanced age. Its services range from personal assistance and advice, to open work with the elderly, all the way through to home supervision and the planning of a nursing care infrastructure. The KSH maintains a total of nine commu-

nity centers in the city of Hanover to promote the participation of older people in public life and prevent them from becoming isolated. They see themselves as part of an infrastructure for senior citizens dedicated to providing information and promoting social engagement. In order to achieve this, they work with several sponsoring bodies in such a way that meets the respective needs and requirements. Apart from offers for senior citizens groups and visitor services, current open work with the elderly also includes an individual approach to securing participation by means of social engagement. New participation procedures such as citizens’ forums or workshops for ideas can strengthen solidarity in the quarter and help its citizens to organize themselves. The KSH has a comprehensive information service on its website and provides an overview of the offers for senior citizens in the state capital.

For further information:
www.seniorenberatung-hannover.de



Germany in 2030 – a look ahead at tomorrow's society

Prof. Dr. Horst W. Opaschowski

Many parts of the world are currently facing a political crisis. Globally, citizens are losing faith in the politicians’ ability and willingness to meet the challenges of our times. In Germany, too, disillusionment is spreading among the population. Increasingly, critical voices are questioning both politics and policymakers. There is a widespread opinion that “politicians are no longer honest and rarely fulfil their election campaign promises” (90%). At present, there is not one active politician on the scene whom the majority of the German population would consider “honest and trustworthy”. People think that parties and politicians are “more interested in maintaining their power than in the welfare of their citizens” (87%). Social cohesion between policymakers and citizens is on the verge of disintegrating as the number of protest, swing and non-voters is rising.

The affluent society is discharging its children – into a rather insecure future. The population has discovered that it can no longer expect any good deeds from the government. The end of the entitlement state is nigh. The days of the state as provider and allocator are over. The equation – more growth equals more affluence goods equals more happiness in life – no longer adds up. The level of affluence has changed and is affecting the everyday life of the people in Germany. The relationship between freedom and security must be redefined: For Germans, security has become more important (80%) than freedom (64%). Not without consequences. What prospects for the future are on the horizon?



Future prospect No. 1: Bowling together rather than bowling alone

The millennium fever around the year 2000 marked the peak of the fun and single society in the entire western world. At the time, social research coined the phrase ‘bowling alone’. Everybody played their own game. Individualisation appeared to be limitless. The collapse of the community was predicted. Social cohesion was beginning to show cracks. However, since 11 September 2001, the values of the 1980s and 1990s have become increasingly questionable. Financial, economic and environmental crises have had their share in bringing about a new mindset: bowling to-

gether rather than bowling alone. Experience has shown that those who care for others live longer. In contrast, those who are deficient in social behaviour place their lives on the line.

Future prospect No. 2: The end of the “me-first generation” – no future for egocentrics

The end of the me-first generation is imminent; egocentrics no longer have a place in society. The entitlement state can no longer be financed and the welfare state is often over-taxed. Mandatory community service as a replacement of military service has been terminated as well. This is the moment when cities and charity organisations must spring into action and solicit volunteers. We are facing a paradigm shift: Markets and states are losing their dominance and the effectiveness and sustainability of our traditional social systems are no longer guaranteed.

In these times of crisis, the immediate environment consisting of family, friends and neighbours can provide cohesion, sustain the population and make it more crisis-resistant.

Up until now, politics have promoted social commitment predominantly via institutions, association, churches and foundations – not least for purposes of social control. People who wanted to get involved had to put aside their own interests and take a subordinate role. Now, a new civic consciousness is developing on our way to a socially active society outside of institutions, such as citizens’ initiatives, neighbourhoods and informal groups. The sandwich generation that feels responsible for both younger and older members of the community will show the highest social commitment. In comparison to the last thirty years, there will also be an above-average increase in the level of engagement of senior citizens by the year 2030. One of the focal points will be older people helping the very old. After all, a better state of health creates new potential for civic engagement.

Future prospect No. 3: Crisis in volunteering sector – social commitment must be acknowledged

2011 is the European Year of Volunteering – but the response is not overwhelming. Twenty out



of one-hundred citizens feel “disadvantaged and virtually exploited” when they do not receive financial compensation, such as tax relief or expense allowances. Others, in turn, refer to lack of time (“takes up too much time” / 27%) and money (“brings no money” / 24%). However, the main reason people quote for not getting involved is the fact that unpaid voluntary work receives “too little public acknowledgement” (36%). The lack of acknowledgement is more important than loss of time or money. Families with adolescent children (44%) are currently most vocal in complaining about the lack of public acknowledgement of voluntary activities. How are parents to become a model for their children if they believe they “are being exploited” (18%) or feel like a “stopgap” (17%). Despite the best intentions to foster a culture of acknowledgement, the fact remains that, try as one might, a certain percentage of the population will never be inspired to do voluntary work. Twelve percent of young people have admitted outright that “voluntary work is not my thing”. Some associate an honorary post with “tedious duties” (6%) while others associate “charity work” with an “old-fashioned attitude” (7%).

Voluntary work needs a culture of acknowledgement if it is to thrive. Information, awareness and advocacy work is required on a large scale. The first step has now been taken with the 2011 European Year of Volunteering. To achieve sustainable effects, we need reliable social service providers with serious intentions rather than altruistic Samaritans and benefactors.

Future prospect No. 4: Help exchange – a social bridge for all ages

Let us look at the “brügge” help exchange, a sample project in east Hamburg: Supported

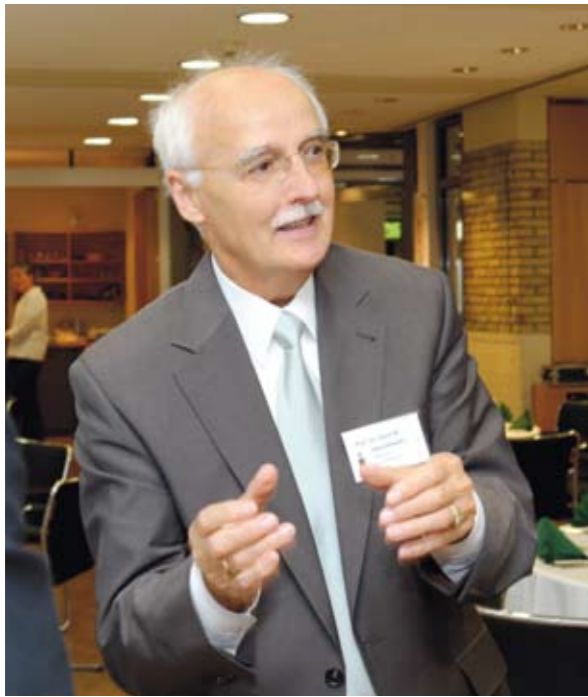
by their teachers, school students in 8th grade and above get an opportunity to acquire essential abilities they will need in addition to their vocational qualifications: social skills and assuming responsibility. The students receive a certificate together with their school report stating the hours of voluntary work they have performed. In job interviews, this certificate may offset a number of academic deficits.

The help exchange considers itself to be a social bridge for all ages. Popular services include help with wheelchair trips, shopping, visits to the doctor and computer-related problems. The students read out newspapers, help in the household and explain the use of mobile phones. In the future, having straight “A”s but no social skills will affect a person’s chances of getting a job. Team spirit has nothing to do with adding up individual’s top academic performances. Students involved in help exchanges during their time at school gain practical experience and build up their social skills on a sustainable basis.

Future prospect No. 5: Return of the cooperative idea

The return of the community spirit goes hand in hand with the return of the cooperative spirit: together we are strong! In 2030, the majority of the over 60 year olds will be either single, widowed or divorced. Most of them will live in single households and, in the absence of any children or grandchildren, will depend on an infrastructure of help and support. To expect that those who have no partner, children or siblings can resort to paid help is simply an illusion considering the high costs involved.

The promotion of private assistance networks (help exchanges, volunteer agencies, self-help



centres) will be an essential responsibility of local politics. This also includes the development of novel housing projects and the support of exemplary communal living projects.

Future prospect No. 6: Mobilisation of citizens in the "involved society"

A different mindset is required both in the housing industry and in housing policies. The promotion of building construction will take a subordinate role behind the promotion of non-material infrastructures ranging from informal neighbourhood centres to child and old people's care facilities. Neighbourhood managers will promote social cohesion. At present, there is no training or qualification for this type of services which will soon develop into a new occupational category with significant future prospects.

The quality of people's living conditions will become one of the main factors determining

their personal quality of life: Tell me where and how you live in old age and I'll tell you whether living that long is really worth it. In the future, it will mainly be service, advice and care as well as affinity, image and interest profile that will sell housing.

Future prospect No. 7: A new culture of mutual assistance

The introduction of a gap year for voluntary work, not only for adolescents and young people but for all generations, including younger and older senior citizens, is becoming increasingly crucial. To get people to volunteer, such an offer must be attractive and raise motivation and commitment. The incentives (such as acknowledgements, merits, tax relief, benefits, etc.) must be created in the near future to prevent mandatory gap years that provide maintenance and care services on a compulsory basis.

Over half of the population (52%, of which women: 57%, generation 65plus: 60%) would like to live in a philanthropic society where people help and support each other to a much larger extent than they do now. Such a philanthropic society would be a preliminary stage of a civil society in which freedom, equality and security are guaranteed and put into practice and of a citizen's society in which citizens and citizens' initiatives play an active part in social life.

The population will not live in the best of all worlds but people will be in a position to make the best of it. A community based on reciprocity will show more solidarity and have stronger citizens. A deep-seated civic spirit will establish itself: That's how we want to live!

Future prospect No. 8: Elective affinities and social groups

The extended definition of family is changing the way people want to live. In the future, cross-generational concepts will become increasingly popular, such as joint housing ventures and housing cooperatives. The new concepts also represent alternatives to traditional old people's homes. In the future, senior citizens could live in households guaranteeing certain standards of domiciliary care which allow them to lead a more autonomous and self-determined life.

In the future "society of longevity", the century-old concept of the "whole house" will be reinstated because people will be more dependent on each other and on themselves. At the same time, the term "family" will be extended to include the "whole house". The "whole house" accommodates not only natural family members but also "adopts" people without grandchildren, children or other family ties. The concept of the elective family is experiencing a comeback. Cross-generational social groups and elective affinities will become increasingly important as lifelong companions.

Future prospect No. 9: Better a good life than many possessions

Prosperity will become a question of personal and social well-being. In the future, prosperity may mean fewer possessions but a better life. A reorientation towards permanence is taking place. This has less and less to do with money. If given a choice, Germans would rather be happy than rich.

This means well-being, welfare, feeling good – the essential things in life. In the course of the

last few decades' exclusive fixation on economic growth, the 'permanence' factor was lost from sight. Given the steady rise in life expectancy, people are attaching more importance to sustainable prosperity, which means high quality of life up to a ripe old age.

Future prospect No. 10: Yearning for meaning People in Germany are getting poorer but not less happy. Their concept of prosperity is changing and sustainable prosperity that does not depend on economic cycles and stock market prices is once again playing a bigger role. A mere increase in living standards is no longer the most desirable aim in life. At the same time, more and more people are searching for meaning, grounding and belonging. Today, people are once more interested in a better society and are willing to take a share in bringing this about.

Social engagement gets things moving – generations are shaping the future

Impulses provided by the World Café

Today's society is responsible for the social and cultural foundations of future generations. Not an easy task considering that we are on the verge of a profound transformation.

Society on the verge of transformation

Today, the traditional nuclear family stands side-by-side with a range of different ways of life. The number of single-person households is increasing. The ageing society is speeding up this trend.

A high degree of mobility is expected of both students and employees. Personal relationships are interrupted and have to be re-established. Migration, whether caused by labour market policies or humanitarian reasons, is becoming a central policy area in the immigrant nation. Society is becoming more diversified, social milieus are disintegrating. In the absence of the multigenerational family, generations no longer have any opportunities to exchange opinions. The young and the elderly experience similar problems, for example the labour market situation and the associated financial risks regarding future planning, on an individual basis and at different times.

Understanding through interaction

New channels of communication are required. Dialogue sparks interest and expresses acceptance. It takes time and the ability to listen to get to know people and ideas.

This results in open-minded interaction without any competition between different values and consumption patterns. Simple everyday courtesies have a snowball effect on social cohesion.

People have different aims and wishes, but also different abilities. The concerns of old and young people may differ. Dialogue characterised by openness and honesty does not shy away from problems while seeking to mediate interests. Democratic influence may guarantee cooperation among generations in all areas of life via such intergenerational lobbyism.



Establishment of social networks

With multi-generation families ceasing to exist as a consequence of demographic developments and the mobility requirements of modern society, social networks are becoming increasingly important to the individual.

Helping individuals to cope with their tasks and solve their problems is not the only assistance networks provide. Self-help is always based on individuals first doing something good for themselves or facilitating the exchange of information and experience between those concerned.

Social commitment is based on interaction. Voluntary activities always include the option of re-establishing interpersonal relationships on an intergenerational, intercultural basis and across all different milieus, building bridges between the young and the old.

Numerous sponsorship projects consider this dialogue among generations as an opportunity to develop new social relationships. At the same time, different perceptions of failure and success may also lead to mutual understanding.

Neighbourhoods and social places of learning

Hand in hand with the emergence of new family types, "elective affinities in the immediate social environment", such as those represented by the Kolping families in the last 150 years, are gaining importance. Educational initiatives, such as senior citizens' academies and self-organised groups as part of the "between work and retirement" network, also have the potential to become a "second family". Joint activities, maintaining or establishing new relationships, all this counteracts the experience of loss and loneliness in old age.





Places where voluntary activities take place are places of lifelong learning. Learning processes develop dynamically where people overcome problems through action and develop solutions on an emancipated basis. Out-of-school places of learning, such as associations and projects, provide adolescents and young adults with support and orientation in defining their own identity in a society dominated by constant change.

A joint interest in finding fast solutions for problems and making a change strengthens social competence. Children should make these positive experiences at an early stage with both kindergartens and schools integrating lessons in social learning.

Local neighbourhoods are perfect places to mobilise people's civic engagement and cooperation. Roundtables and community conferences setting up networks for various citizens' initiatives provide the necessary organisational room for target setting and process planning. Established social commitment structures should be used on a

cross-generational basis and should be made accessible to those who have so far been excluded. Volunteers performing neighbourhood work help promote comprehensive social interaction.

Building bridges through projects

Just like all other citizens, senior citizens should be involved in planning as well as being consulted as to their wishes and ideas at an early stage. School students participating in social commitment projects in their social environment have an opportunity to gain practical experience in participation and democratic involvement. School authorities and managements are called upon to provide time off, financial means and a positive culture of acknowledgement.

Dealing with subjects such as dementia provides younger people with a glimpse of other spheres of life. Future issues such as climate change and use of resources whose consequences will have a significant effect on future living conditions should be discussed today at the cross-generational level. This will promote greater understanding of the problems faced by future generations. Sponsorship and mentoring programmes are helpful when it comes to young people's educational CVs and labour market prospects.

Competitions such as "the most cooperative school" or "the friendliest neighbourhood street" can motivate people of all generations to take up voluntary work. A model programme entitled "old for young for old" could provide specific assistance for projects based on the idea of different generations working for each other. Nevertheless, this should not lead to a "duty" to participate in volunteer projects. So-

cial relationships need space to develop just as dialogue between generations needs time to establish itself.

Social and cultural exchange

Neighbourhood events promote cultural exchange beyond the garden fence. Intercultural projects allow people with various religious backgrounds and cultures to discuss their values and customs. Projects such as the homeless choirs in Hamburg, Berlin and Vienna are evidence of the fact that social commitment brings together people from varied backgrounds and that social barriers are not insurmountable.

Multifaceted social movements are also characterised by the fact that people from all different social strata join forces to solve an important problem. Exchange leads to public awareness, solutions emerge. Extra-parliamentary political activities also represent a form of commitment within and for civic society.



A sustainable society must aim to solve current problems and needs in a responsible manner that takes the interests of future generations into account. An environment that promotes dialogue and mindfulness raises our quality of life, releases creative potential and facilitates the shaping of a socially just, culturally open and inclusive society for all generations.



Assuming responsibility for tomorrow's society

Good practice examples



Host families for foreign students

Universities and colleges in Magdeburg have attracted many students from all over the world. The Chinese group is particularly large. Because China is so far away, students are able

to travel home only rarely. In 2002, the senior citizens organization in the city came up with a special idea: volunteers help young people from other countries to cope with day-to-day needs. They teach them German, accompany them on trips to the authorities, or invite their “foster children” to parties and outings. At the moment, 110 host families look after 230 students. The sponsors are prepared for their job and may attend training courses. The senior citizens organization’s Dialogue Between Generations working group also offers other joint activities and a wide range of support, for example in fitting out accommodation.

More information:
www.seniorenvertretung-md.de

Intercultural skills

Unsere Welt e.V. started in 2007 as a parent initiative and has now become a not-for-profit association that promotes children, young people, and adults from German or migrant families. It organizes meetings between young and old, offering joint activities that provide a platform for children and young people to reflect on their own personality in the context of families of different nationalities and with other cultural backgrounds. This helps them to develop their individual skills and talents and promotes multicultural interaction. In addition to a broad range of courses and workshops offering interdisciplinary, preparatory, and supportive education, the association organizes sports tournaments, family parties, and other leisure



time activities. It also supports self-help groups and meetings devoted to specific issues.

More information:
www.unsere-welt-online.eu



Learning from one another, about one another

What used to be entirely normal in previous centuries – several generations living together and benefiting from one another – is now an exception rather than the rule. Yet without

day-to-day exchange, a wealth of experience and social skills is lost. With that in mind, the Integrative Montessori Primary School in Munich established the Workshop of Generations as a regular meeting place for people of all ages – embedded in the “normal” routine at school. Activities and projects enable generations to get in touch, talk, and learn from one another and about one another. Singalongs and joint reading sessions, excursions to the city centre, joint experiments for physics and chemistry classes, and the production of a radio and video clip are just a few examples of a broad range of activities.

More information:
www.montessori-muenchen.de/werkstatt_allgemein.php

Service agency for the dialogue between generations

Dialogue of Generations, a project office in Berlin, brings together and advises activities and programmes linking generations across Germany. It cooperates with the coordinating centres on multi-generational activities in several European countries via the European Map of Intergenerational Learning (EMIL). Its annual summer forums promote exchange, further training, and appreciation of the participants. An online database and an extensive newsletter provide information on activities such as communal forms of living, the development of multi-generational concepts by the local communities, and mentoring offers for people in transition between family, school, career, unemployment, or retirement. Generational dialogue activists engage in neighbourhood and com-

munity work and provide creative input to cultural projects.

More information:
www.generationendialog.de



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