

Documentation

Conference "Participatory urban development: age-friendly, community-promoting and future-orientated"

Wednesday, 6 November 2024 in Mannheim

Moderation: Katja Nellissen

Introduction

Many municipalities are committed to creating an age-friendly, community-promoting and future-orientated living environment. Experiences from Germany and abroad show how important the participation of older persons and their interest groups are in this regard.

The conference took place in the context of discussions surrounding the implementation of Section 71 of the German Social Security Code XII (SGBXII) and the growing interest in the "Age-Friendly City" movement of the World Health Organization (WHO). In Germany, Section 71 SGBXII provides the legal framework for the organisation of ageing support structures to ensure a basis of services for counselling, encounters and active participation of older persons. From an international perspective, the WHO initiative offers a wide range of guidelines, networking opportunities and experience around age-friendly communities.

During the conference, examples of municipal development from various countries were presented, with a particular focus on participation formats. In addition, guidelines, concepts and methods for age-friendly municipal development were presented and discussed. The central question was how the municipality of the future should look like so that it gives everyone the opportunity to participate.

The conference was attended by representatives from senior citizens' associations, organisations and initiatives as well as from municipal administrations. The presentations and discussions provided impetus for age-friendly urban and neighbourhood development as well as for state and nationwide measures to support local authorities.

In her welcoming address, Dr Regina Görner, Chairwoman of BAGSO, emphasised the importance of exchanging ideas with organisations from other countries, particularly regarding responses to demographic change. The associated social changes would be

felt by everyone, in local authorities, but also in the area of work, for example. She also recalled the impact of the two world wars on demographic developments and called on people to work towards a peaceful society. The BAGSO chairwoman encouraged people to think about the potential of older persons and to utilise this potential at a local level.

Nicole Zündorf-Hinte, Head of Division at the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), emphasised the central role of an environment that caters to the needs of all ages to promote healthy ageing. In Germany, most people would want to remain in their familiar living environment even in very old age, in the event of illness or in need of care. For this wish to be realised, a needs-based infrastructure is required to support people in their everyday lives. Ms Zündorf-Hinte named several federal measures, such as the Federal Accessibility Initiative, the Affordable Housing Alliance and the pilot project "Zukunftswerkstatt Kommunen - Attraktiv im Wandel" (Workshop for the Future of Municipalities – Remaining Attractive through Change). As part of this pilot project, 40 municipalities across Germany have developed innovative local solutions on how to ensure good living conditions for all generations in the face of demographic change.

Thorsten Riehle, Social Mayor of the host city of Mannheim, referred to the requirements for housing, the immediate living environment and the social and transport infrastructure in the neighbourhood. These would grow with increasing ageing and the associated care requirements and mobility restrictions. Accordingly, innovative, neighbourhood-based models and resources are needed for implementation. Special mention was made of the "Mannheim Vogelstang model". The Vogelstang neighbourhood, which was developed in the 1960s, today is Mannheim's neighbourhood with the highest percentage of older persons. Aim of the model is to provide older persons with outpatient assisted living with security of care in their familiar neighbourhood. A newly designed, modern meeting place with an attractive programme and a local care support point are part of the concept. According to Mayor Riehle, the central objective is to create care and support services close to home that enable people to live independently in their neighbourhood. He concluded by emphasising the importance of social balance in maintaining social peace in Germany, Europe and the world.

The "Age-friendly City" as a concept for participatory urban development

Natalie Turner from the Centre for Ageing Better in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) gave a comprehensive introduction to the concept of the "Age-Friendly City" in accordance with the framework of the World Health Organization (WHO). An age-friendly community enables older persons to actively participate in community life, maintain their independence and live in their familiar

surroundings for as long as possible. The WHO concept is based on eight key areas: outdoor environments; transport and mobility; housing; social participation; social inclusion and non-discrimination; civic engagement and employment; communication and information; and community and health services. These areas offer concrete fields of action to create age-friendly structures.

The WHO proposes four steps for developing an age-friendly city, which are also a prerequisite for inclusion in the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC):

1. **Engage and understand:** Set up a steering or working group, involve older people, assess the initial situation and secure the support of the city
2. **Plan strategically:** Unite partners behind a common vision; analyse strengths and weaknesses and develop a strategy
3. **Act and implement:** Design an action plan, involve older people, secure support and resources, scale-up successful action
4. **Evaluate:** Create partnerships, for instance with universities, evaluate progress and exchange with others (both nationally and internationally)

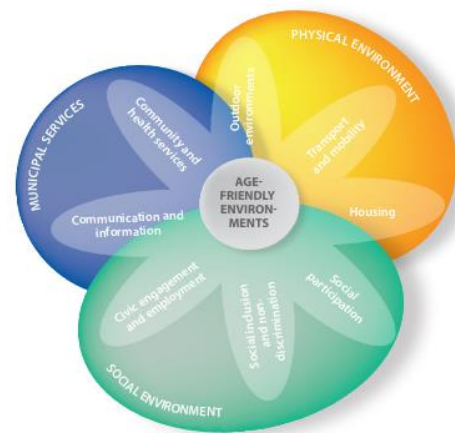


Figure 1: The eight areas of an age-friendly city.
Source: WHO Europe,
<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/334251>

The Centre for Ageing Better coordinates the UK network of "Age-Friendly Communities", which consists of almost 90 municipalities. The Centre supports the communities with educational offers and promotes the exchange of experiences among the participating communities.

Project highlights from the municipalities (United Kingdom)

- **Audits in the form of walks:** Older persons assess their neighbourhood together with planners and decision-makers as part of a walk. Barriers such as inadequate lighting, poorly accessible footpaths or a lack of seating are identified. Such audits help to develop concrete measures to make public spaces more age-friendly.
- **Age-friendly ambassadors:** Older persons are trained as ambassadors to bring their needs and perspectives into municipal planning processes. They raise awareness of the importance of age-friendly structures and act as a link between the older population and those responsible in the administration.
- **News and radio programmes led by older persons:** In some communities, older persons host local news formats or radio programmes. These

programmes create platforms for issues that directly affect older persons and encourage their active participation in community life. In addition, such formats can replace stereotypical images of old age with authentic and diverse perspectives.

- **Sexual Health Charter:** This initiative is committed to the sexual health of older persons. The aim is to break taboos, provide age-appropriate health services and raise awareness of the needs of older persons in this area. The initiative emphasises that sexual health is an essential part of well-being at any age.

In conclusion, these practical examples illustrate how low-threshold activities, often initiated by older persons, can contribute to a better quality of life in older age. At the same time, they strengthen social cohesion and promote a positive perception of ageing in society. They offer senior citizens' organisations inspiration and guidance on how to effectively implement age-friendly concepts. The subsequent discussion also focussed on how the development of age-friendly environments can contribute to the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing and the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Helping to shape municipal care structures for older people

Older persons help shape their city: Vienna, Graz, Linz, Tulln and Wörgl in Austria

Susanne Dobner from queraum, an office for social and cultural research, highlighted innovative projects from various Austrian cities. They show how older persons can be actively involved in shaping their living environment. The projects focus on the process of participation and dialogue at eye level in order to make cities more age-friendly.

Project highlights from the municipalities (Austria)

- **Interactive walks with digital tools in Vienna:** older persons use the *Actionbound* app to develop interactive walks that make their neighbourhoods and interests accessible in a creative way. The content includes quizzes, tasks and thematic information that promote the exchange and visibility of older persons.
- **Networking groups:** In Graz, older persons are connected through local initiatives that strengthen social exchange and develop joint solutions for age-related challenges.

- **Repair café:** The repair café in Tulln offers older persons a platform to use and pass on their manual skills. It promotes both sustainability and social participation.
- **Exercise clubs:** In Linz, older persons meet to jointly exercise in public spaces. These promote health, create meeting spaces and contribute to an active lifestyle.
- **"Computeria":** This programme in Wörgl supports older persons in using digital technologies and contributes to digital participation. It offers training and exchange opportunities in a supportive community.

In these projects, queraum focuses on creating opportunities for contact and networking, making older persons and their interests visible and providing organisations, cities and local initiatives with individually tailored support along the way. The projects demonstrate how the potential of older persons can be made visible and their quality of life improved through targeted initiatives. These approaches further show how important it is to regard older persons as an active part of their communities and to give them the opportunity to help shape communities according to their needs and ideas.

Stuttgart – On the way to becoming an age-friendly city

Gabriele Reichhardt, Head of the Strategic Urban Planning Department of the City of Stuttgart, explained the state capital's path towards becoming an age-friendly city. This is taking place within the framework of the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities of the WHO. Stuttgart is thus facing up to the challenges of demographic change and the associated demands on the municipal infrastructure. The vision of "Our Stuttgart - at any age!" is a place of "ageing well" that enables participation, recognition and a largely self-determined life for all age groups, regardless of age, ethnic origin, gender or income. The principle of participation, which is also stipulated as such by the WHO, is central to this vision. Stuttgart has used methods such as safety inspections, open surveys and participation projects to record wishes, needs and problems from the reality of older persons' lives. The strategy focuses on three main areas of action: the physical environment (accessibility, affordable housing, meeting places), the social environment (education, culture, loneliness, volunteering) and municipal services (care, counselling, health promotion) (see Figure 1 on p. 3 for a comparison). To be able to act in a targeted manner, comprehensive analyses are carried out, e.g. the representative study "Stuttgart Survey 2023" or the Ageing Survey 2024. This scientific data forms the basis for guidelines for action. Milestones in the process include joining the WHO network in 2022, undertaking an analysis of the life conditions in 2023/24 and

developing a concept based on the findings to date with a focus on guidelines for action and public relations work in 2025.

Locally networked ageing and the city of Winterthur's 2025 ageing strategy

Dr Tina Schmid, Head of the City of Winterthur's Department of Old Age and Health, explained the development process for the 2025 Ageing Strategy, beginning with a brief introduction to Switzerland's sixth largest city with a population of around 120,000 inhabitants. The city is characterised as a garden and bicycle city. It is an important centre of education with over 10,000 students. It is also worth mentioning that there is a centre-left majority in the city parliament.

After a brief insight into the division of responsibilities between the federal government, cantons and municipalities, Tina Schmid explained how the 2025 Ageing Strategy is being developed. The Strategy is intended to form the basis of the city's ageing policy and show what the city wants to do for the older population. To achieve this, the city administration must first raise awareness of the special needs of the older population. This would serve to define guidelines, objectives and measures for ageing policy. Involving the population and specialists from the ageing sector is the central goal in the development process. Specifically, there were four participatory events in various neighbourhoods in Winterthur. Between 80 and 100 people took part in each event. The events were advertised in the city districts via advertisements in the neighbourhood newspapers or the daily newspaper, via senior citizens' assistance organisations and personal invitations to 100 people aged 65 and over per district. Moderated small groups of around 10 people each worked out what works well and should be maintained, what could be improved or is missing and what visions the participants have for Winterthur 2030. The format of "future workshops", a method in which all actors are seen as experts, was used for this.

The experience in Winterthur so far has shown that dealing with expectations and the complexity of the topics dealt with in the working groups are challenging. In addition, communication with the participants is very time-consuming. It was important for success to meet the participants at eye level and create transparency about the process.

The approaches presented from municipal practice emphasise the importance of participation and the consideration of the diversity of older persons. The targeted combination of data analysis, practical measures and strategic planning offers a model of how cities can start the process in becoming more age-friendly. The WHO guidelines and the experiences of those who have already used them provide a good orientation and basis for the development of similar approaches in other municipalities.

Supporting municipalities

QUARTIER 2030 State Strategy, Baden-Württemberg

Dr Maren Wittek from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and Integration of the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg presented the QUARTIER 2030 State Strategy. The aim of the Strategy is to support municipalities and civil society actors in developing neighbourhoods that are age- and generation-friendly. It also aims to anchor neighbourhood development as a cross-cutting issue under municipal responsibility, promote intensive participation and networking at all levels and find local answers to the challenges of our time. Overall, the aim is to strengthen social cohesion.

The State Strategy includes the following programmes: Funding programmes for municipalities and civil society with funding amounts ranging from €2,000 to €115,000, an information portal including a newsletter, tools, practical examples and contact points as well as an advice guide, e.g. in cooperation with the Alzheimer association of the state (Alzheimer Gesellschaft Baden-Württemberg e.V. | Selbsthilfe Demenz). In addition, the State Strategy includes a neighbourhood academy offering financial subsidies for further training, in-house events and costs for speakers as well as events for networking and exchanging experiences.

The Spanish network of age-friendly cities and municipalities

Spain is one of the countries in which there is a national network for the coordination and promotion of age-friendly communities. This is based at the state organisation IMSERSO (Institute for Older Persons and Social Services), which reports to the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Protection and 2030 Agenda. Manuel Monteiro, responsible for international affairs at IMSERSO, presented the national coordination centre for age-friendly communities, which is part of the WHO network. The Spanish network is growing steadily and consists now of over 250 municipalities. Most members are cities with between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, although the proportion of rural municipalities with up to 2,000 inhabitants has increased significantly in recent years.

IMSERSO conducted a qualitative study in 2024 in which almost 200 documents from over 100 municipalities were analysed. It showed, among other things, that in addition to the eight central areas of an age-friendly city, three cross-cutting issues (ageism, gender issues and loneliness) are playing an increasingly important role. Manuel Monteiro emphasised that measures in the physical environment are just as important as measures in the social environment.

The Slovenian network of age-friendly cities and municipalities

Dr Ana Ramovs from the Anton Trstenjak Institute for Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations presented the Slovenian Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Municipalities. The network was founded in 2008. One of the key reasons for setting up the network was the recognition that municipalities are best suited to developing and implementing age-friendly solutions. It was made clear from the outset that membership does not mean that a city is already age-friendly. Rather, it was about committing to becoming age-friendly as part of a five-year contract between the municipality and the Institute.

For successful implementation at local level, it is important to involve all stakeholders. In addition to the local administrative level and political decision-makers, these include older persons, professionals and institutions from the fields of health, social affairs, infrastructure and education, and civil society organisations. The Institute supports local authorities in implementing the four steps proposed by the WHO (see page 3) and in developing and implementing participation formats with older persons. The Institute also advises local authorities and develops handouts, events and training programmes for members of the network.

In focus: Dementia-sensitive communities and neighbourhoods

Dementia affects not only the person with the disease and their relatives and friends, but also their neighbours and the wider surroundings and community. The work of the Alzheimer association of the State of Baden-Württemberg (Alzheimer Gesellschaft Baden-Württemberg e.V. | Selbsthilfe Demenz) shows why the term "age-friendly" should be understood more broadly. This is the only way to ensure that people with dementia and their relatives can continue to live in their familiar surroundings. In this context, there are particular challenges for participatory urban development, for which attention and awareness of dementia must first be created.

Ute Hauser from the Alzheimer association therefore presented the project focus on dementia in communities and neighbourhoods, which the organisation has been pursuing with state-wide model projects since 2016. The National Dementia Strategy of 2020, which was developed by 60 stakeholders and comprises 27 goals and 162 measures, provides an important framework for this work. Developing and establishing structures for the social participation of people with dementia at their place of residence is one of the strategy's central fields of action. To achieve this, visibility and awareness are crucial.

As part of various pilot projects since 2016, the Alzheimer association has looked into how the topic can be promoted at a local level. To this end, it has established new services in local neighbourhoods and tested how knowledge about dementia can be increased. One concrete example is the awareness-raising campaign, entitled

"Sometimes". It draws attention to the fact that people sometimes experience certain situations that many people with dementia experience every day. For example, it is about the situation in which one perceives one's head as empty or thinks one is speaking a different language. Posters, flyers and other effective publicity materials and campaigns, including ambient media, were used to raise awareness directly in the neighbourhoods. In addition, opportunities for encounters were created, e.g. during city walks, at the weekly market or local festivities. The information and awareness-raising materials created in the projects, including short films, are available to all interested parties for their events, campaigns and projects.

During the discussion, it was suggested that the short films, which are already available in several languages, should also be available in an accessible manner. Music projects for people with dementia were also theme of the discussion. Here, Ms Hauser referred to projects in kindergartens and the Dementia Partner training course "Making music in choirs and instrumental ensembles", which is also based on the existing training concept of the Dementia Partner initiative of the German Alzheimer Association. The former chairman of BAGSO, Franz Müntefering, focussed the discussion on prevention and early recognition. The best prevention, according to Mrs Hauser, is the interaction of cognitive, motor and social activities. For early detection, it is important to see a doctor as soon as one notices the first signs. This is because the already approved medication and non-medication therapies work well in the early stages. In connection with early detection, the question of communication with relatives also came up. It is important to talk about concerns and avoid confrontation. If the person concerned is not open to a specific visit to the doctor, a general check-up can be suggested and relatives can offer to go along. One should obtain information at an early stage and seek advice in local centres via the German Alzheimer Association.

Showing ways for age-friendly, community-promoting and future-oriented communities

The panel discussion focussed on the question of how municipalities can be designed to be age-friendly, community-friendly and future-oriented. The focus was on urban development that enables participation and considers the needs of all generations without promoting competition between old and young. The basic idea of "What is good for older persons is good for everyone" served as a guiding principle.

A central point of discussion was the term "age-friendly", which provoked many different reactions. Jens-Peter Kruse, Deputy Chairman of BAGSO, criticised the fact that the term often has a deterrent effect, as it is associated with frailty and burdens. He advocated for an alternative formulation such as "city for all ages" or, as a working title, "age- and generation-friendly" to emphasise the positive aspects of the concept. Nicole Zündorf-Hinte from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,

Women and Youth pointed out that the English term "age-friendly" has a more neutral connotation than the German term "altersfreundlich" and is understood as covering all generations. She emphasised the need to give the term a positive connotation in Germany to successfully promote the WHO programme. From the discussion with the audience, it emerged that terms such as "old" and "ageing" should be specifically reinterpreted, similar to the positive reinterpretation of the term "gay", which was originally used as a swearword. Even though the name of the WHO programme is intended to make it clear that it is about all age groups, it was urged that older persons should be explicitly included in communication so that their concerns receive visibility.

The panel discussion also highlighted the importance of municipal structures for age-friendly urban development. Friederike Scholz from the Association of German Cities emphasised that integrated neighbourhood development and social planning are key elements in establishing age-friendly structures. However, she called for sustainable funding, as scarce resources often require prioritisation, which hinders important developments. Jens-Peter Kruse referred to Section 71 SGBXII, which obliges local authorities to provide infrastructure for older persons and criticised the fact that this requirement is often neglected. Ilka Borr from the Healthy Cities Network and the state capital of Saarbrücken emphasised that although awareness of a networked and socio-political sustainability strategy in municipalities is progressing, there is a lack of financial resources to implement far-reaching measures. Friederike Scholz emphasised the need to work both "top-down" and "bottom-up" to create sustainable structures in the long term.

One concrete demand that emerged from the discussion was to promote stronger networking between municipalities and to set up a national coordination centre in Germany. It is important for cities to realise that membership of the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities is not only for networking and exchanging experiences but also reflects a municipality's cosmopolitanism.

The final panel discussion was moderated by Dr Heidrun Mollenkopf, Chairwoman of AGE Platform Europe and BAGSO Board Member, and Ina Voelcker, Head of the Secretariat for International Policy on Ageing of BAGSO. Dr Mollenkopf concluded by highlighting some aspects that were important to her: Municipalities play a crucial role as a centre of life, as they shape the immediate reality of people's lives. Municipalities offer space for community, a sense of purpose and active participation. Dr Mollenkopf also referred to the diversity of ageing, generations and regional conditions (urban and rural). To do justice to this diversity, customised approaches with the participation of those affected are required. During the presentations and discussions, it also became clear that participation should not lead to unrealisable expectations. This requires transparency about who is invited and the right conditions to enable genuine participation. Another aspect that continuously emerged from the

discussion was the financing of sustainable structures. Reliable structures must be created and financed in the long term to promote participation at local level. Especially in the current times, we need to keep an eye on what is happening in other countries and, conversely, share our experiences to strengthen our common European values.

Further information

- Platform of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, <https://www.decadeofhealthyageing.org/>
- WHO, 2007, Guidelines for age-friendly cities, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43755/9789241547307_eng.pdf;jsessionid=32B3AE9C3AB47F698617A325F9B64066?
- WHO Global Network, <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/>
- WHO Europe, 2017, Age-friendly environments in Europe: a handbook with areas for policy action, <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289056076>
- WHO Europe, 2020, Age-friendly environments in Europe: indicators, monitoring and assessments, <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2018-1088-40834-55192>
- BAGSO, 2022, Growing older in cities and communities, https://www.bagso.de/fileadmin/user_upload/bagso/06_Veroeffentlichungen/2022/Special_issue_Growing_older_in_cities_and_communities.pdf

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