

Report

Quick Scan of Policy and Research documents on empowerment and participation of older citizens in Austria

European Project: “From Isolation to Inclusion:
Promoting Innovation in Re-Integrating Older Citizens into Community
Life”

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1 Introduction

The European Project “From Isolation to Inclusion: Promoting Innovation in Re-Integrating Older Citizens into Community Life” is aiming to (further) develop measures that enable groups of older men and women at a multi-dimensional risk of social exclusion to fully participate in community life.

In a first step this report gives some overview about recent Austrian policy and research documents dealing with social in-/exclusion and active ageing. The review is supposed to find out whether the topics “empowerment” and “participation” of older citizens are principally given attention to in the respective documents. Apart from providing a background knowledge about the political and theoretical discussion, we also want to identify concrete initiatives and innovative ideas to promote empowerment and participation of older citizens in Austria.

2 Empowerment and participation of older people in policy documents

In Austria the competences for governmental senior policy are divided between the federal government, the governments of each federal state and the municipalities. Since ageing is a “transversal” issue, policy-making responsibilities in Austria, like in most other European countries, are dispersed across at least four different policy domains: policy communities concerned with welfare state, the labour market, the political representation of older persons and the health care sector (Ney 2004). However, in Austria a Federal Ministry of Senior Affairs does not exist so far.

The following policy documents have been reviewed according to their relevance for the objectives of the project:

- National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Common Outline for 2003-2005)
- 2nd National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2003-2005 (Austria)
- Evaluation of the second NAP-Inclusion (2005): Austria (including NAP Update 10/2004)
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2003-2005. Implementation Report and updating (2005)
- International Year of Volunteering 2001: Results & Prospects (2002) (Internationales Jahr der Freiwilligen)
- International Year of Volunteering 2001: Programme of Action by the Austrian Federal Government
- International Year of Older People: Towards new politics for older citizens (2001). Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations. (Internationales Jahr der Älteren Menschen: Auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Seniorenpolitik, Bundesministerium für Soziale Sicherheit und Generationen)
- Vienna Strategy Plan of medical and social Care of Elderly People 2004 (Strategiekonzept für die Betreuung älterer Menschen 2004, Gemeinderätliche Kommission)

2.1 2nd National Action Plan Social Inclusion 2003-2005 (incl. update 2005)

Every EU member state composes a National Action Plan (NAP) on policies and intended measures to combat poverty and social exclusion. The aim of the National Action Plans is to give an outline of the general policy framework and to identify what specific and concrete changes or additions are proposed to existing policies or programmes or what new initiatives are planned in order to address identified problems and weaknesses. The conclusions of the Barcelona European Council invited Member States were *“to set targets, in their National Action Plans, for significantly reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2010”*. (Common Outline 2003/05, p. 1)

In the Common Outline for the National Action Plan 2003-2005 the Social Protection Committee suggested, that more attention should be given in approaching the common EU objectives inter alia *“to identifying and developing policy responses to assist those who are most marginalised and excluded and who experience particularly severe integration problems. They will vary depending on specific national circumstances, but could include for example women from ethnic minorities, ex-prisoners, drug addicts, the homeless, street children or people discharged from institutions”*. (Common Outline 2003/05, p.2)

Hence, according to the Household-Panel (ECHP 1999) in Austria the following high-risk groups were identified (p. 3-4):

- Women
- Lone parents
- Long-term unemployed people
- People, who at most have completed compulsory education
- People with disabilities
- People over 65
- Non EU-citizens
- People living in rural areas

The challenge for an effective policy against social exclusion – mentioned in the National Action Plan – lies *“in the coordination of specific measures targeted towards vulnerable groups with preventive poverty avoidance programs”*. It is also mentioned that, *“the measures additionally have to take the demographic ageing of society and other far-reaching changes in society into account”*. (p. 5)

However, in the National Action Plan (2003-2005) aged-related topics are hardly adressed and no specific groups (e.g. socially disadvantaged older people) are targeted explicitly. The target groups are defined very generally, inter alia women, asylum seekers and migrants. The only age-related target group mentioned in the Implementation Report are older female pensioniers, identified as a group at high risk of poverty and social exclusion¹.

Although in the NAP it is pointed out that a multitude of actors are engaged in the fight against poverty in Austria². The participation- and empowerment-approach of people at high risk of social exclusion hasn't been taken up in the document.

¹ The at-risk-of-poverty rate of older female pensioniers amounts 19 %. In comparison that from women in general amounts to 14 % and from men to 12,3 %.

² There are inter alia advisory councils for the agendas of senior citizens, disabled people or asylum seekers.

Measures and plans with regard to older persons are aimed at people in need of long-term care. Further aged-related topics discussed in the National Action Plan are the pension insurance and the pension reform.

2.2 International Year of Older People 2001

During the Year of Older People 2001 the Austrian Federal Government launched numerous activities in order to intervene on the cultural prejudices against the third age and to create a society for all generations.

Seven interdisciplinary expert working groups have been formed within the Austrian National Committee. They have been dealing intensively with challenges and suggestions regarding the objectives of the International Year of Older People. Further, the working groups put their focus on fundamental principles and prospects for the development of a senior citizen policy in long term. (p. 3)

One of the working groups dealt with the topic "social and political participation". A major concern of the group was to strengthen the political representation of older Austrian at regional and local level. On basis of their recommendations all senior citizen organisations have been integrated in the "Political Representation of Older People in Austria" (Österreichischer Seniorenrat). In addition, senior citizen representations at local level were established. (p. 5)

Another challenge pointed out from the working group is to enable and empower older people to fully participate in social, political and economic community life. New concepts and structures of voluntary work which allow consideration to be taken of individual wishes, interactivity and participation need to be initiated and developed. On scientific level, more research on the situation of elderly people is recommended. (p. 24)

2.3 International Year of Volunteers 2001

In the Programme of Action for the International Year of Volunteers 2001 the Austrian Federal Government expressed its willingness "*not only to draw attention to the great importance of voluntary commitment for society but at the same time to give concrete impulses for the improvement of structural framework for voluntary commitment*" (Report to the Council of Ministers, September 2001, p. 1).

In this very Year of Volunteers numerous activities were launched comprising the whole sphere in which voluntary organisations are active. With regard to the target group of our project the following examples may be quoted:

- Ten expert-working-groups had been established within the Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations to discuss problems and common concerns of NPO and volunteers and to develop recommendations concerning measures to be taken by the Federal Government, the provinces and the NPO to strengthen voluntary commitment and facilitate voluntary work in practice. The results of these working groups were summarized in a "Volunteers' Manifesto – Seven Demands for the Promotion of Volunteer Commitment in Austria".
- The website www.freiwilligenweb.at was installed to provide information on existing initiatives and activities in the field of voluntary work.
- The Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations initiated the election of the Voluntary of the Year for the first time. Prizes were awarded in different

categories, among others in the categories “Senior Citizens, Children & Youth” and “Social Concerns and Neighbourhood”. The initiative is going on.

- The Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations offered start-up subsidies for the foundation of ten additional Citizens’ Centres for Young and Old.
- Furthermore, attention was drawn to the transnational exchange of older volunteers. For instance, Austria took part in an European Exchange Programme for older Volunteers in non-profit organisations, sponsored by EU-subsides and by governments involved. Twenty older volunteers from Austria, working with welfare institutions or independent institutions caring for needs of older people rendered voluntary services with exchange partners for two months abroad.

2.4 Vienna Strategy Plan of medical and social Care of Elderly People

Responding to a growing concern over the speed and scale of global ageing and the increasing number of old people in need of long-term care the “Gemeinderätliche Kommisson” of Vienna adopted a political strategy paper aiming to secure an active and self-determined ageing in Vienna.

Although the key targets denominated in this paper are development, management and providing of health care and social services for the elderly, a further central theme running through the paper is the avoidance of social exclusion of the elderly. (p.13)

According to the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the policy framework by the WHO “Active Ageing”, the Vienna Strategy Plan stresses the importance of overcoming negative stereotypes concerning older people by promoting participation and volunteer work of older people as well as by launching initiatives from and for senior citizens. Through measures that promote participation, mutual learning of the generations may be possible. (p.16)

3 Empowerment and participation of older people in research documents

The following research documents were reviewed according to their relevance for the objectives of our project:

- Kunter, Ch. (2005). Active Ageing in Vienna. An analysis of health promoting actions for older citizens. (Aktiv altern in Wien. Eine Analyse der gesundheitsförderlichen Angebotsstruktur für SeniorInnen in Wien 2005)
- Leichsenring, K., Strümpel, Ch. (2000). Social and political Participation of Older People. In: Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection. Older People – New Perspectives. Report on Living Situation of Older People (Ältere Menschen – Neue Perspektiven. Bericht zur Lebenssituation älterer Menschen 2000)
- Brückner-Diesner, D., Kolland, F., Oberbauer, M. Decision and Voluntary Work. Final Report (Entscheidung und Ehrenamt. Abschlussbericht).
- Giedenbacher, I., Strümpel, Ch. Living conditions of women 50+ in Austria (National Research of the European Project MERI). European Centre for Welfare Policies and Social Research
- McCormick, W., Egger de Campo, M., Gentile, N. et al. (2003). WP2: Analysis of views, needs and requirements of Elderly People. Reports of Interviews conducted by Compass (Graz, Austria). (MEPESE – Methods to Prevent Elderly Social Exclusion).
- Ney, S. (2004). Active Ageing in Europe: Austrian Country Report.

3.1 Active Ageing in Vienna

Kunter's thesis deals with an investigation and analysis of health promotion programmes and actions for elderly people in Vienna that facilitate and support healthy and active ageing. Both literature and internet research as well as experts interviews were used. Some examples of the projects analysed by Kunter are described in chapter 4 of the present report.

Further, the thesis contains results of an expert meeting (June 2005). With regard to the objectives of our project following recommendations have been elaborated concerning planning and realizing initiatives promoting health and empowerment of older citizens. (Kunter 2005):

- Integration of participational approaches
- Promoting an intergenerational dialogue
- Launching gender-specific offers
- Using existing resources and infrastructure
- Developing a national strategy
- Involvement in national and international networks

3.2 Older People – New Perspectives. Report on Living Situation of Older People

In the Austrian Report on the Living Situation of Older People a whole section covers the topics social and political participation of older people. In the report political participation is defined as “*participation in political processes on federal and regional level*” (Leichsenring/Strümpel 2000, p. 472). A number of institutional structures of political representation of older Austrians, like the senior citizen advisory councils at federal and regional level or senior citizen organisations affiliated to different political parties are identified (see chapters 5.3 and 5.4 for details).

Leichsenring and Strümpel question the representativeness and independence of senior citizen organisations. However, they undoubtedly are a major resource for the political participation of elderly Austrians. Nevertheless, from the authors point of view the possibilities of political participation of disadvantaged groups or minorities, for instance older migrants, have to be improved.

Social participation, by contrast, relates to “*participation of older people in social processes concerning voluntary work and/or neighbourly help*”. (Leichsenring/Strümpel 2000, p. 472) There are varying results as regards the degree to which older citizens are engaged in voluntary work, but for both men and women the percentage decreases with increasing age. In fact, 30 % of people under the age of 55 are involved as volunteers compared to 20 % of the respondents over 55. Most of the elderly engaged in voluntary work are themselves active in the sector of neighbourly help.

Finally, the following recommendations for a future-oriented senior citizen policy promoting the political and social participation of the elderly are given:

- Support of voluntary work
- Political participation on local level
- Establishing opportunities of participation for older women
- Promoting the intergenerational approach of voluntary engagement

3.3 Decision and Voluntary Work

The report of Brückner-Diesner at al. exposes the results obtained by a questioning of 100 people who have been interested in voluntary work and took part in a consultation at the “Ehrenamtsbörse” in Vienna.

The results show³, that the majority of the interested people, 53 percent, are 60 to 70 years old (14 % are 70 years of age or older, 33% are 60 years old or younger) and 75 percent are women. Nearly fifty percent of the persons consulted by the “Ehrenamtsbörse”, decided to get involved in voluntary work. The respondents mentioned following reasons for their engagement:

- the wish to help other people
- the wish to contribute usefully to the community
- the wish for personal satisfaction

On average, they spend almost 28 hours per month doing voluntary work.

³ The questioning targets the population over 50 years.

3.4 Living Conditions of Women 50+ in Austria

The main objectives of the European Project MERI⁴ have been to map available information on the living situation of older women in Europe, to identify existing knowledge gaps and to strengthen the knowledge base on a specific population group. Within the national research in Austria research documents and statistical publications on the living situation of older women in Austria and further MERI themes (among others social integration and participation) were collected and analysed.

According to the objectives of this quick scan report we focus on the results concerning social integration and participation of older women in Austria. The analysis of existing research results shows that women have a higher life expectancy than men (5-6 years) and are usually younger than their partners (2-3 years on average). As a consequence older women face a higher risk of losing their partners than old men do and are more likely to be living and cared for in homes for older people.

Further, older women are regarded to have a stronger social and family network than older men and to actively stay in contact with family members and friends. Due to lack of mobility older women, however, are more likely to network within their direct neighbourhood. Generally, it can be said that older women like to spend their free time by taking part in cultural activities and going shopping, whereas older men prefer sport events, gardening and going to cafés and restaurants.

Research on the involvement of older women in voluntary organisations indicates that women are less likely to be represented in higher positions than older men and that there are gender-specific patterns concerning the fields of voluntary work. Whereas older men tend to get involved in political organisations, women are more likely to turn to social work.

Generally, it is pointed out in the research documents, that in Austria men over 55 years are more active in volunteering than women of the same age group. Research suggests that a very traditional allocation of gender roles – women working in the house and for the family and men being active outside the household – is the reason for this.

3.5 Analysis of the Views, Needs and Requirements of Elderly People

Within the European Project MEPESE (Methods to Prevent Elderly Social Exclusion) the aim of the work package 2 was to find out what elderly people themselves think about their role in society. The research took the views of elderly people at risk of social exclusion as well as those in the younger age group of 50 to 60 years old.

In Austria, the interviews have been carried out with seven people living in the City of Graz. The participants have been asked about the older people's role, loneliness, the role of family and the state and the capability of older people to follow modifications, transformations and innovations in society.

In the present review we focus on the main findings concerning loneliness and personal strategies against social exclusion.

The issue of loneliness was identified as particularly acute after the passing of a life long partner, or a parent. However, all of the interviewees were able to give examples of activities, which help them to overcome loneliness and the feelings of being socially excluded. Personal strategies against social exclusion range from taking part in cultural and

⁴ Mapping existing research and identifying knowledge gaps concerning the situation of older women in Europe.

educational activities (especially people with higher education and income mentioned travels abroad or studying at university) to make use of the offers of the city's department for senior citizens. The company of others is seen as important and necessary to regard one's life as meaningful by almost all interviewees.

3.6 ActiveAge Project: An Analysis of the Active Ageing Policy in Austria

The overall aim of the ActiveAge Project is to identify and analyse the socio-institutional, economic and political realities facing the implementation of active ageing policies in Europe. The aim is to systematically chart existing active ageing policy initiatives and their socio-institutional settings in ten European countries.

In general, active ageing reforms ensure that citizens can actively participate in the economy and society in older age. In Austria, active ageing both as a reform programme and a policy-belief system, is relatively new to Austrian policy-making. The following four principles of Austrian ageing policy are mentioned in this report (p. 31):

- Strengthen intergenerational solidarity by strengthening distributional justice. Policy must preserve intergenerational solidarity in face of demographic ageing.
- Include older people in policy-making. Senior citizen policy also has to find ways of integrating women and elderly women into policy-making.
- Austrian senior citizen policy focuses on the individual person. Austrian policy-makers explicitly recognise and acknowledge the capabilities and skills of older people. In the future, the human resources of the elderly will play an important role. For this reason, policy needs to integrate and reintegrate older workers into the labour market.
- A policy of all generations has to ease the burden on young families. In particular, Austrian ageing policy aims to help women balance family and career.

In fact, the basic policy problem, proponents of senior citizenship argue, is that older Austrians are politically disfranchised and socially excluded. From the advocates of senior citizenship the solution has to be empowering of older Austrian in all aspects of life and granting them full social and civil citizenship.

They suggest to provide existing institutional structures (e.h. senior citizen organisations and advisory bodies) with power and real influence over decision-making. Advocates of the senior citizenship approach also stress that empowering the old invariably means also empowering and including other social disadvantaged groups, like people with disabilities or ethnic minorities.

4 Examples of initiatives to promote empowerment and participation of older citizens

In the following section a selection of initiatives by and for older citizens to promote their participation and empowerment will be discussed.

In summary we can keep in mind that a number of different types of programmes at regional and local level aim at maintaining and conserving cognitive and physical abilities by offering various kinds of leisure-time and life-long learning activities for older people. In addition, some voluntary work initiatives are launched. Most of them target the group of the young old, who represent an interesting potential group for volunteer work. Very old persons are mainly focused as a second target group and receivers of voluntary initiatives. A single demonstration project realized in Vienna, aims at socially disadvantaged older people, particularly older persons with migrant history.

The following documents and links were reviewed:

- Herfort-Wörndle, U. (2001). From Care to Proaction. The example of the Senior Office Graz (Von der Altenbetreuung zur Eigeninitiative, Dissertation)
- Reinprecht, Ch., Donat, L. (2005). Investment in the health of older people. Evaluation of the WHO-Project "Activ Ageing". (Investition in die Gesundheit älterer Menschen. Begleitforschung zum WHO-Projekt Aktiv ins Alter". Endbericht.)
- Pabst, B., Purner, I., Rappauer, A. et al. (2005). Final Report on the Demonstration Project Plan60 – Health Promotion for Elderly in the Urban Setting. (Abschlussbericht des Modellprojekts Plan60 – Gesundheitsförderung für Ältere im urbanen Setting. Forschungsinstitut des Wiener Roten Kreuzes.
- City Department of Senior Affairs (Graz): www.seniorenbuero.at
- Lebenswerte Lebenswelten für ältere Menschen: www.lebenswelten.meduni-graz.at
- Plan60: www.plan60.at
- Talents Exchanges (Graz): www.talentetauschgraz.tripod.com
- Third Age Coach: www.vhs.at
- Society for the Promotion of Gerontology and Higher Education for Elderly People (GEFAS): www.seniorenweb.at
- Active Ageing! www.aktivinsalter.at
- Senior Advisory Council www.seniorenrat.at
- European Federation of Elderly (EURAG): www.eurag-europe.org

4.1 Initiatives promoting leisure time activities

City Department for Seniors' Affairs

In the last ten years in some Austrian cities departments for Senior Affairs were founded. The first has been established in the city of Graz and is integrated in the Department of Social Affairs. The senior office acts as a networking and relay institution for the various activities offered for the elderly citizens in Graz.

The Department sees itself as an office from seniors for seniors and is aimed at different target groups: On the one hand it focuses at the “young old” at the age between 55 and 75 years, who want to engage as volunteers. On the other hand the project intends to encourage and support isolated older people to become active.

A further objective is to develop conditions and structures for community-development and empowerment of the elderly. The City Department for Seniors' Affairs organises various events, like discussion rounds, dancing, travels or guided tours in museums. Once a week “English Talk Table” takes place, where participants have the possibility to talk to a native speaker. Furthermore, a “Narrative Café” was founded, where younger and older people meet to talk about their biography. The “Senior-Nett-Café” is a weekly internet café, with instruction for seniors. Most of this initiatives are organised and carried out by the elderly or with the help of volunteers.

The number of users of the various offers amounts approximately 2000 citizens per year. It is noticeable, that most of the users were not engaged in voluntary work before. However, activities like discussion rounds or tours in museums are accepted especially from younger seniors.

Active Retirement

The association „Active Retirement“ (Aktiver Lebensabend) was founded in 1964 in order to prevent older people from isolation with the help of volunteers. This organisations are aiming to help older people physically, psychologically and socially independent from their political opinions, religion and race.

Today, the initiative has about 500 members in the city of Graz and organises various events. In about 10 so-called “Tagesbegegnungsstätten” older people have the possibility to meet. Furthermore, lectures about certain topics like travel and nutrition are offered and retired doctors or lawyers give advice to older people on legal care or health related issues.

4.2 Initiatives promoting voluntary work of older people

Citizens´ Centres for Young and Old

Since 1998 twenty-eight Citizens´ Centres for Young and Old have already been established. These offices are places for voluntary and charitable work in the regions. The idea is, to create networks of old and young volunteers working on social projects and to strengthen intergenerational solidarity. Senior citizens are enabled to actively make use of their gifts, talents and knowledge as well as to remain vital. (Ney 2004)

Lebenswerte Lebenswelten für ältere Menschen

„Lebenswerte Lebenswelten“ is a best-practice model of community-based health promotion for elderly, sponsored by the Fund for a Healthy Austria (Fonds Gesundes Österreich). The three-year-project´s aim is to develop, explore and evaluate innovative approaches or policies for community-development and empowerment of elderly population groups. Project-teams made up of volunteers were formed in order to link elderly individuals with people, who either work with elderly persons (e.g. nurses in social services) or have frequent contact with elderly people at their associations and clubs. These teams are empowered to take over planning, organizing and realizing intervention to perceived needs of the target group. The idea of this model-project is to give “cash and coaching”: Cash for funding local mini-projects

(e.g. initiating a regular get-together, working on everyday life topics) and “coaching” to help to implement these mini-projects professionally.

Plan60

Another health promotion project for elderly people, funded by the Fund for Healthy Austria is called “Plan60” and was launched by the Research Institute of the Viennese Red Cross. Plan60 started in December 2002 and ended in October 2005 and promoted the concepts of empowerment, participation and active ageing in Vienna. In so-called empowerment courses retired people developed and realized a wide range of projects, providing voluntary services in public and private organisations, such as museums, libraries, and different social institutions. These initiatives have attracted more than 500 elderly people to spend time and work together according to their specific skills.

The evaluation showed, that the project enhanced the number, the spectrum and the quality of social contacts of the participants; enabled them to put to use and further develop their skills, added meaning to their lives, made them feel that they can still contribute to and are of use to society and reduced the feeling of isolation. The project also helped to positively develop the perception of elderly people in our society. However, the project also showed that it is difficult to approach and involve socially disadvantaged older people.

Talents Exchange

In some regions in Austria community exchange systems (“Talente-Tauschkreise”) were founded in which neighbours and friends (all age groups) exchange services and time according to their individual facilities and knowledge. In the association launched in Graz for instance, the participants meet once a month to stay in contact and get to know new members. The group compiles and distributes a directory of goods and services offered by participants, as well as a list of their wants. When a participant requires something advertised in the directory he or she contacts the “seller” and the trade takes place.

SMS and Helfen Sie uns Helfen

In this projects trained volunteers visit isolated elderly persons living in retirement homes in Vienna for conversations, short walks and little everyday support.

Centres of Neighbourhood

The centres of Neighbourhood of the “Wiener Hilfswerk” offer further possibilities of engaging in voluntary work. Most of the volunteers are older persons, although they are aimed at people of all ages. Similar to the Citizens’ Centres for Young and Old the Centres of Neighbourhood act as a turntable for voluntary commitment. In addition, they offer rooms for meeting of self-help groups and self-organized initiatives by visitors. The volunteers, for instance, offer visiting-services for very old and isolated persons and help to organize parties or flea markets. (Leichsenring/Strümpel 2000)

4.3 Initiatives promoting lifelong learning of older people

Third Age Coach

The course “3rd Age Coach” offered by the adult education centres (Volkshochschulen) in Vienna aims at those men and women over 50, who want to work with elderly people. The participants are inter alia empowered to develop and realise projects for elderly persons.

LENA

LENA – Learning in the post-professional and empty nest phase – carried out by GEFAS follows up the already finished project LISA (Learning In Old Age). The main task during LENA (duration of the project: October 2004 to September 2006) is to develop a curriculum which mainly deals with lifelong learning for senior citizens and is practicable transnationally. Further, a set of methods with useful strategies and tools for the trainers will be provided. Older people are involved in the development of the curriculum by participating in focus groups.

LENA also deals with the question how older people with no education and people with different social, cultural or gender-specific needs can be involved in educational programmes.

Reading in Old Age

This initiative was launched by 2000 libraries in Austria, which are mainly managed by volunteers. The goal of the project is to establish literary circles, cafés and discussion rounds for young and older people. (BMSG 2001, p. 18)

Austrian Senior Experts Pool (ASEP)

The Austrian Senior Expert Pool was founded 1988 in cooperation with Federation of Austrian Industry (Vereinigung Österreichischer Industrieller) and is still an innovative idea to strengthen of older people’s participation and empowerment. Members of the Expert Pool are retired managers who provide their experiences and knowledge to young founders of business or to enterprises. (Leichsenring/Strümpel 2000)

4.4 Initiatives aiming at disadvantaged groups

Active Ageing!

The WHO-demonstration project “Active Ageing!” (Aktiv ins Alter!) was carried out in three boroughs in Vienna from 2003 to 2005. The project intended to improve the health of older people and combat social exclusion on the basis of existing resources in the community. This was realized through a multisectoral and client-centered approach, which means that trained social workers and psychologists visited the target group at home to find out their expectations and needs.

Target groups of the intervention were 55 to 80 years old persons that are either in the process of retiring or have entered widowhood lately. Furthermore, the project addressed groups that are considered to be difficult to reach, like older women and men from ethnic

minorities. In general, older migrants are badly informed about asserts and services existing in the community. The evaluation of the project showed, that the defined target group could be reached: Of the 335 persons participating in the questioning about 41,8 % were migrants (people with migrant history).

The social workers carried out counselling with the individual older person and mediated between the professional services and the personal goals and needs. Therefore, the project established and further developed cooperations between relevant stakeholders, representatives of the target group and organisations providing health and social services in the boroughs. With regard to the empowerment-approach the older people have been supported to become active and to participate in community life. The participants, for instance, took part in existing initiatives like exercise courses or social events. (Reinprecht/Donat 2005)

5 Services and offers for the interests of older people in general

Apart from the City Departments for Seniors Affairs that represent the interests of older people in public there are also explicit lobbying organisations for senior citizens in Austria, like the European federation of Elderly (EURAG) and the Society for the Promotion of Gerontology and Higher Education for Elderly People (GEFAS). On a political level there are several senior citizen organisations as well as the senior advisory board (national level) and senior councils (regional level).

5.1 EURAG – European Federation of the Elderly

EURAG is an European umbrella organisation of seniors' organisations and is engaged in networking and lobbying on the national and transnational level. EURAG has some 150 members that are organisations such as the seniors' clubs in a total of 34 European nations. The work of EURAG Austria emphasizes preservation of quality of life of older people as well as solidarity between the generations.

5.2 GEFAS – Society for the Promotion of Gerontology and Higher Education for Elderly People

GEFAS is a non political and non-profit organisation supporting older women and men to make more of their lives and to strengthen their participatory acting. The organisation developed from a programme supporting senior students at Karl-Franzens-University Graz and is currently involved in a number of projects concerning activities in later life (e.g. education, women 50+, young and old and travel) or health and in international networks dealing with old age and participation in society.

For instance, GEFAS launched the project “Assistance For Living” which aimed at the intergenerational assistance. The target groups are older people and students looking for an appartement in Graz. Students can live at an economical price at the homes of elderly people and the elderly are entitled to receive little everyday support in return.

Furthermore, members are offered counselling, cultural and social events. A specific gerontological lecture is organised at Graz university by GEFAS. Further, GEFAS has promoted internet use among seniors with the Seniorweb homepage.

5.3 Senior Citizen Organisations

There is an extremely wide range of clubs and organisations for seniors which represent the interests of their members and offer leisure time activities ranging from social and cultural activities to legal counselling. For instance, the Pensioners of the Federal Trade Union that act as lobbying organisation for the interests of the retired employees or the seniors' sections of the various political parties, like the "Pensionistenverband Österreichs" (affiliated with the Socialdemocrats), the "Seniorenbund" (affiliated with the Conservative), the "Seniorenring" (affiliated with the right wing Freedom Party), and the "Zentralverband der Pensionisten" (de facto affiliated with the Communist Party although it claims to be independent).

There are a lot more organisations addressing seniors with offers of entertainment or travel that explicitly claim to be independent of political organisations such as the "Neutraler Seniorenclub" in Styria (170 members). (Leichsenring/Strümpel 2000, Egger de Campo/Gentile et al. 2002)

5.4 Senior Advisory Councils at federal and regional level

The Senior Advisory Board (Bundesseniorenbeirat) serves as communication forum and dialog through institutions between political decision makers and representatives of senior organisations related to senior specific questions which are of general Austrian or intergenerational political concern. Further, the Senior Advisory Board inaugurates the chance for seniors to influence the society by introducing their experiences. It also offers a possibility for those at a political level to discuss given defiances with the representatives of older generation and to solve current problems together.

On the web presence of the Senior Advisory Council inter alia following responsibilities are quoted:

- Submitting of suggestions for social, economic, cultural, health and construction concerning measures considering senior politics
- Elaboration of long-term senior plan including suggestions for financing of this plan
- Submitting of statements for laws and regulations, which touch interests of seniors
- Submitting of advice for granting support for senior specific projects
- Exercising the seniors right of hearing the guidelines for general senior support before it is enacted upon

The senior councils in the regions primarily advise government, comment on draft legislation and initiate activities to combat age-related discrimination. Like the Senior Advisory Council, the senior councils at regional level are also staffed by representatives of senior citizen organisations. (Ney 2004)

6 Conclusion

The review of political and research documents shows that elderly citizens are regarded more and more as an important political power with a high potential for political and social participation. A major resource for the political participation of elderly Austrians are the Senior Advisory Councils at federal and regional level as well as the Senior Citizen Organisations. However, observer question the influence on decision-making of the existing structures and demand to provide them with more power.

Further, studies of ageing research and the analysis of the active ageing policy in Austria show quite clearly that it is particularly important to increase the political and social participation of disadvantaged groups (e.g. older women or older people from ethnic minorities). The issues empowerment and participation of older people at the high risk of social exclusion do not rank high on the political agenda.

In general, the policy debate about ageing so far has been dominated by health care and pension system and political documents focus on institutional measures and solutions. For instance, in the National Action Plan age-related issues are hardly addressed and no specific groups are targeted explicitly. Thus, the immediate and medium-term challenge for Austrian policy-makers is to integrate the issues participation and empowerment in future policy documents.

Within the literature and internet research various initiatives promoting empowerment and participation of older people and raising awareness about ageing have been identified. However, in Austria we tend to focus too heavily on launching initiatives that are aimed at young and already rather active seniors.

By contrast, very old and socially disadvantaged persons are mainly focused as a second target group. For instance, as receivers of voluntary initiatives. A single project dealing with the question how to promote participation and empowerment of disadvantaged people in particular of women and men from ethnic minorities was detected.

Further, it can be criticized that the activities and programmes are not based on a consistent strategy.

In summary, in the research and policy documents reviewed the following recommendations are given in order to develop coordinated and sustainable empowerment and participation programmes for older people:

- Social empowerment must go hand in hand with political emancipation
- Cooperation between different actors
- Developing a national strategy
- Including social disadvantaged groups
- Promoting the intergenerational approach
- Using existing resources and infrastructure on national and international level
- Launching gender-specific activities
- Promoting voluntary work and developing new forms of voluntary engagement for and by older people