Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active ageing
UNECE 2012 Ministerial Conference, Vienna, Austria

Short outline of the main objectives and deliverables of the project:

Founded by Dr. Nora Aschacher and Elisabeth Nöstlinger-Jochum, the association ALTERS.KULTUREN specialises in activating and encouraging creative life designs for people aged 50plus in all areas of society.

The AGE COMPANY is a project initiated by ALTERS.KULTUREN in association with Ilse Stadler, arge region kultur. The AGE COMPANY consists of currently thirteen women aged between fifty and seventy-three years. Together with the choreographer and artistic director Nicole Berndt-Caccivio, they create modern dance performances which are then performed in public. Since the foundation of the AGE COMPANY in October 2008, three performances have been choreographed and performed in Austria. International studies confirm the positive influence of arts and creativity on seniors’ health and well-being. Contemporary dance is high-performance training for body and mind, fosters social skills, memory, creativity, mobility and self-confidence. Older people so far have hardly used the possibility of expressing themselves artistically through contemporary dance performances. Contemporary dance neither fit the stereotype assigned to senior citizens by society, nor did it play any role in the mental pictures seniors had of themselves. European and international examples, as well as the AGE COMPANY, now prove that dance companies with older protagonists may also be of artistic significance.

Why is it considered a good practice:

The model is innovative and pioneering. It was initiated by seniors, who also financed it, although some of the performers have only a very modest pension. The organisers launched the project based on learning by doing and developed the necessary infrastructure step by step. The starting point was the wish to make dreams come true for seniors, dreams beginning with thoughts like: “I always wanted to...” or “When, if not now...”. Despite all resistance and the absence of financial support, the group was not discouraged and continued to pursue its dream. In the meantime, the project has become a role model for a number of other interested groups and can be seen as an example of lifelong learning.

Timeline/duration of the project:

In place since mid-2008 and – it is the hope of all involved – for another ten or more years.

Lessons learned:

Older people have sufficient competence, knowledge and experience to speak for themselves and to express what they want. Unfortunately, there is a lack of institutions able to support such projects, especially in the fledgling phase, with ideas, organisational expertise and funding. The multi-media events presented by the ALTERS.KULTUREN association have shown that a combination of theoretical information and artistic contributions is particularly suited to illustrate the many faces, facets and colours of ageing. They confirm the social policy relevance of older people’s role as active players in rather than consumers of research, social affairs and arts. It is a question of active participation and presence in the public space. The AGE COMPANY’s events and performances also serve as vehicles to raise the younger generation’s awareness for changed perceptions of ageing.

Relevance for the UNECE region:

Demographic developments imply that all of us in general and women in particular will not only live longer but also stay relatively healthy into very old age. On the one hand, this project of the AGE COMPANY shows the importance of gender equality in art and creativity for addressing entrenched perceptions of ageing. On the other hand, it also shows that initiatives of this kind generate economic impulses. Rehearsal rooms, theatres, cultural centres need to be rented, fees for light design, choreography, compositions, programme leaflets, etc., need to be paid. Our vision: embedding projects like this one of ALTERS.KULTUREN and AGE COMPANY into wider networks could lead to economic and cultural cooperation both in Europe and beyond.

Location of the project: Vienna, Austria.

Contact information, website:

www.alters.kulturen.cc; www.agecompany.at; www.argeregionkultur.at