

## THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ELDERLY AS AN AIM OF SOCIAL WORK IN AUSTRIA

### Abstract

The following article analyses participation possibilities of older people in Austria based on the demographic change. On this basis, categories of work types are established and discussed. This concerns the areas of people's own work, familial work, informal and formal engagement as well as paid work. The social worker's attempts to the creation of the informal and formal engagement are presented from an Austrian perspective. Introduced volunteers centres and citizens' offices devote themselves to the coordination of the engagement within the community. In addition, there are new attempts arising in volunteer's work, like for example voluntourism. Social inequalities are to be considered in participation within society. These form along the differences of age, gender, levels of education, migration and socio-economic status. Different participation areas are furthermore to be distinguished against the background of a critical discourse around participation. Participation can cause positive effects for older people and therefore it seems important to work on its realization. Part of this task is to indicate different barriers and possibilities of implementation. Finally, quantitative proportions and developments in the different working forms of older people will be discussed.

**Key words:** participation, social work, volunteering, elderly people, Austria

### Introduction

Social development results in an expansion and diversification of what age is. New duties for social work can be derived from that, for which the paradigm of participation is central (cf. Schnurr 2001). It always has an individual and social relevance, but the form of acknowledged participation is debatable. Thus, it is to be discussed which forms of engagement and work exist, and in which areas participation of older people can take place. A demand for participation requires an analytical assurance. This has a great relevance because it is a question of being and acting like a citizen in the sense of "New Governance". Besides, tendencies of instrumentalisation and of exclusion are to be criticised (cf. Anastasiadis, Heimgartner, Sing 2011). Hence, the question about recognition of social life biographies of older people and their participation in family and community is central.

The development of social work follows the tradition of community work and takes place in centres which intend to support both formal and informal engagement. Social

work appears as a co-ordinator of actors and their resources in the community, and it rarely takes over the direct work with the addressees (cf. Sing, Heimgartner 2009). We no longer speak of “clients” in this context of well-balanced participation where a mutual support of people occurs. The relation between social actor and client is moving to the service of volunteers (cf. More-Hollerweger, Heimgartner 2009b). The effort of social work meets social inequalities, and it has to deal with the question to what extent an activation of older people is justified. On the one hand it means the individual participation and use of resources in a community; on the other hand activation has the meaning of a non-acceptance of existing activity forms. There are new developments that are interesting in the culture of volunteering. They follow an understanding of social space and common responsibility as well as including new actors, such as local companies.

From a scientific view it is to be considered to what extent the participation of older people can be securely cited. While there is a strong tradition in paid work to document the participation rates, the first attempts of a broad recognition in the informal and formal areas are to be noted in the last decade. For the first time in Austria, Eva More-Hollerweger and Arno Heimgartner (2009b) have attempted, in cooperation with the Department for Statistics of Austria, to carry out a national volunteer survey. For that purpose an instrument has been constructed, which first refers to accepted definitions and, secondly, it should be continuously used to be able to illustrate also developments. A further survey by means of this instrument was repeated in 2012 by the Institute of Empirical Social Research, however using a different sample. Thus basic figures can be given both for the informal and formal participation of older people.

It is even more difficult to prove the efforts of older people within in the family although numerous services exist (e.g. care). With the help of a study from Beatrix Wiedenhofer (2000), the volume of services of older people within the family in Austria can be indicated. The article therefore follows an understanding of participation which is produced in different contexts – paid and unpaid. The task of social work is to promote, to accompany and to represent this wide range of social activities.

## Demographic change and the extension of the old age

Demographic change is a term often mentioned and it leads to the thematisation of social and economic consequences (e.g. arrangement of the life, care expenses). The portion of above 65 year-old people in the whole population of Austria has extended from 15% in 1990 to 19% in 2014; the prediction for 2030 amounts 24% and for 2050 even 28%. Especially the increasing numbers of people above 80 years is striking (cf. Statistics Austria 2013d). Because of the rising life expectancy, the period between (professional and familial) activity phases and death is continuously growing. Therefore, new time structures and social duties are needed at that age. Besides, the heterogenei-

ty within population and age areas has to be considered. The numbers of people who, at an older age, spend their time relatively healthy and active is big while others, at the same time, experience a retreat from public communities. In 2011 the retirement entry age in Austria for women on average was 59.4 years and for men 62.7 years (cf. Statistics Austria 2013a). The life expectancy in 2011 for 60-year-old women and men was another 25.6 and 21.7 years (cf. Statistics Austria 2013b). Therefore this meant an average period of approximately 25 years for women and 19 years for men after retiring from work. Already Anthony Giddens (1997) writes that “old age starting at the age of 65 years (...) [is] purely and simply a kind of product from the social state” (Giddens 1997: 230). According to Marcel Erlinghagen (2008), the retirement entry per se turns out not to be so explicitly drastic; rather it is the last five years before retirement that are relevant. Active volunteering at this time therefore raises the chance of volunteers and can be found to be around six fold throughout the retirement period (cf. Erlinghagen 2008).

According to Eva More-Hollerweger and Paul Rameder (2009) “there are still not enough role patterns for the time after paid work in our society” (More-Hollerweger, Rameder 2009: 124). Socio-pedagogical work is in a position to develop such a role picture for older people because “the question as to how pensioners use their time is no more a pure private matter, but has increasingly, and long ago, reached public interest” (More-Hollerweger, Rameder 2009: 120). The topic around older people is debated in different areas of society. In the economic sector older people are, for example, regarded in terms of a huge purchasing power (among other things in the world of tourism). In the political area, too, they count as an important target group. In the social field, older people are relevant as social actors as well as service receivers. As we are talking here of a post professional phase, in particular unpaid working forms are in the focus. By this means, older people contribute not just to their own quality of life but even to the social welfare of the community.

## Contexts of Work

In an analysis of working forms we distinguish between people’s own or personal work, familial work, informal and formal engagement as well as paid work. Activities, which count to people’s own work, are work done for oneself, practical training, self-help activities and continuing education. Familial work can be differentiated in work for the partner, the children, the grandchildren, for one’s own parents and other relatives. Informal engagement is directed at friends, neighbours and the local community all the way up to society as a whole. Volunteering in organizations and associations plays a central role in formal engagement. Furthermore, work in local exchange circles is included here (cf. Table 1). As far as volunteering is concerned, three definition elements are significant, i.e. “voluntariness,” “beyond the own household” and, “without monetary equivalent” (Heimgartner, Anastasiadis 2011: 186).

Table 1. Contexts of Work

People's own or personal work			
Work for oneself	Practical training	Self-help group	Further education
Familial work			
Work for the partner	Work for the children and the grandchildren	Work for the parents	Work for relatives
Informal work			
Work for friends	Work for neighbours	Work for the community	Work for society
Formal work			
Volunteering	Local exchange trading		
Paid work			
Full and part-time work	Low-key employment	Independent work	Illicit work

Source: own data. Findenig and Heimgartner (published the first time).

## Social work and structures of informal and formal volunteering

From the perspective of social work, formal and informal engagement shows an essential possibility for both, prevention and intervention. It is based on the paradigms of empowerment and participation. Biographical concepts are formed for crossing this age phase as well as from within. Besides, volunteering in old age moves between the support for age-specific problem situations and a cultural maintenance (cf. Findenig 2014). As an example, a reduction of social contacts can occur in this phase of life. Also any loss of lifelong companions is a social loss, thus raising the question of social integration or coping with risks of exclusion (cf. Daneke 2003).

Places of social intervention, which have developed during recent years in Austria are volunteering centres. The major tasks of these centres are the recruitment, placement and supervision of volunteers and organisations. Furthermore, public relations are part of the profile. A common platform (“IGFÖ”) discusses and promotes the interests of these Austrian volunteering centres. Naturally, the association backgrounds of these volunteering centres differ. The authority (e.g. in Bregenz) or free associations (e.g., Innsbruck, Linz) are to be mentioned here, too. The volunteering centre in Upper Austria calls itself an independent volunteering centre. It wants to be equally active concerning all people and associations involved. Within the associations, the managers for volunteering are more often also active. Besides, in the year 1998 civil offices were founded to promote the voluntary engagement, in particular looking at the strengthening of generation solidarity at a local level. These civil offices are called “GEMA” platforms (“Gemeinsam aktiv” – Together active) (cf. Heimgartner 2009b). The area of activities has individually developed and ranges from a mediation of services (e.g., baby-sitting), creation of cultural offers, or

ganization of events, mediation of continuing education up to individual consultations granted to people and institutions. Community work plays a substantial role in the culture of voluntary engagements is also classified as community work (cf. Sing, Heimgartner 2009). Thematically and professionally very comprehensive, it boosts the wish of the population and is implemented in various working groups, neighbourhood achievements and political participation (cf. Wagner 2013). Various regional internet platforms are also relevant. They show possibilities of voluntary engagement, and they connect interests (e.g. [www.boerse-ehrenamt.at](http://www.boerse-ehrenamt.at); [www.hilfeundhobby.at](http://www.hilfeundhobby.at); [www.freiwilligenboerse.vol.at](http://www.freiwilligenboerse.vol.at)). The major Austrian ministerial platform is located at [www.freiwilligenweb.at](http://www.freiwilligenweb.at).

Recent developments, such as a stronger support of voluntary engagement of companies also count within the scope of Corporate Social Responsibility approaches. Companies offer social responsibility while at the same time they organise creative continuing education measures for their employees. These approaches also enclose global co-operations. They are often understood as voluntourism as they connect volunteering and education through travelling (More-Hollerweger, Heimgartner 2009a).

## Social inequality and individual differences

Transition and arrangement of this life-time phase are marked by social inequalities. The exercise of volunteering is very much to do with it. Of course, basic variation differences can be expected regarding age and gender. Besides, Martin Kohli (2009) emphasizes the educational level as essential when he writes that “also the functional abilities and the social participation [show] a social gap, because they strongly depend on the animation of the education and the career course” (Kohli 2009: 234). Historically, there appears a continuous improvement of individual educational careers. Today’s older generation has, due to offensives in the educational area in the 1960s and 1970s, a comparatively higher education degree than previous generations (cf. Karl 2009), but the risk of an educational distancing of older people is still high. Trends towards economic inequalities can also be recognised. Further aspects concern regional differences and the residential milieu. In particular, the urbanization degree of the place of residence and ethnic backgrounds seems to influence participation within communities.

Different distinctive claims exist as to how to handle something in a “meaningful” way in the phase after working life. Naturally, the term “meaningful” is interpreted subjectively, so it is related to an individual or a collective decision, i.e. whether something is judged as meaningful or not. Besides, the social stress is becoming stronger in the context of an obligation for contribution towards society. Since according to Fred Karl (2009) “retirement [has] no more rest” (Karl 2009: 12) and the crossing over from paid work to pension “does not mean the concurrent entry into retirement” (Wahrendorf, Siegrist 2008: 68).

## Fields of participation

The concept of participation is radically connected to the thought of different areas of society (cf. Heimgartner 2009a). Therefore, it is necessary to ask which relevant fields of participation are acknowledged. The thematisation of the amount of participation depends on this question. Dorothee Guggisberg (2004) describes four areas, namely political participation within democratic state structures, social participation as a participation in everyday events like living or shopping, economic participation in terms of a participation in working life and cultural participation meaning a participation in performances or festival events. A nearness can be perceived in the discussion about different capital forms after Pierre Bourdieu (1983; 1993): social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital (cf. Lederer 2005). Also the instrumental freedoms of Amartya Sen (2002) have found a similar expression: namely political freedoms, economic facilities, social chances, guarantees of transparency and social security. More-Hollerweger and Heimgartner (2009b) distinguish the following civil-social fields of participation (a) rescue services, (b) art, culture and spare time, (c) environment, nature and protection of animals, (d) church and religious areas, (e) social areas and the health sector, (f) political work, (g) activities for the community, (h) education as well as (i) sports and exercise. A vertical differentiation of social work develops a distinction on four levels and differentiates between case work (direct interaction and relation), service management (institution and organization), local planning (municipal level) and socio-political conditions (national level) (cf. Schnurr 2001).

## Critical considerations concerning participation

Basically, the affirmation of participation and the support of participative structures seem to be beyond question. In the future, social organisations will have to apply their potentials in all life phases. Different argumentations underline the relevance of participation, among other things the value of democratic thinking, the quality of collective activities, the development of competences, the acceptance of diversity, and the quality of united work. However, a critical analysis indicates also problems of participation, according to Maria Anastasiadis, Arno Heimgartner and Eva Sing (2011): (1) in a monetary society it cannot be the aim to shift work to individual time resources without payment. Therefore, participation can be understood as exploitation in particular in the area of reproduction and nursing. (2) Participation possibilities refer every now and then to social matters of minor importance. Thus the question has always to be raised as to what extent the released space of decision meets essential contents. (3) An assessment of a single life biography depends on a subjective perspective. What is accepted as work, as culture and education, are social bones of contention. Argumentation of non-participation, in particular, should therefore be handled in very warily. It is always based on subjective constructs and ideas in the context of a sense of life.

(4) Participation should not be seen as delivery of tasks for the private sphere (cf. Anastasiadis, Heimgartner, Sing 2011) because, after all, economic resources and competences of realisation are unequally distributed (cf. BMASK 2011), and the distribution of participation has to be considered. (5) The general demand of participative behaviour in all relevant areas of life seems to be exaggerated, because a “taking-care-of-everything” seems excessive in regard to the specialisation of life fields and linked knowledge stocks (cf. Anastasiadis, Heimgartner, Sing 2011).

## Positive effects and barriers

Numerous positive effects and barriers of the voluntary engagement can be discussed (cf. Table 2). Investigations have proved that there is a positive correlation between the state of health and social engagement. The latter rises physical activity and interaction for the individuals and this, in turn, influences and boosts a positive state of personal health (cf. Bath, Deeg 2005; Kolland, Oberbauer 2006). Voluntary engagement is furthermore a possibility to compensate for familial changes. As a counter-balance to loaded situations, a few hours of distraction on the basis of volunteering can suffice to help forget one's worries and to lift a person's well-being (cf. Backes 2006). Moreover, the increase of self-esteem is a possible advantage of voluntary engagement (cf. Findenig 2014). It is imaginable that due to the discontinuation of the occupational position and the transformations within family, the roles of life and identity pictures are not topical any more. Voluntary activities can thus be extremely helpful during these role transitions, and can lift the individual self-value which was possibly decreased or endangered before (cf. More-Hollerweger, Rameder 2009). Due to the fact that professional qualifications lose importance in the post professional phase, the aspect of lifelong learning wins attention. Voluntary engagement of older people is designed to extend competences. It can preserve knowledge stocks and open new learning fields and spheres of activity (cf. Findenig 2014). Another argument which speaks for voluntary engagement at an older age is the fact that it contributes “to a new quality of the time creation, contact creation and labour organisation also in other areas” (Backes 2006: 86). Competences and self-images can be transferred to other life areas. This multiple activation can counteract a possible isolation and exclusion. Formal and informal engagement raises the chance to maintain social contacts, to find new networks and to cultivate contacts beyond familial structures. Interesting in this context are in particular any attempts of an inter-generative exchange (cf. Findenig 2014). Finally, the possibility of political participation seems suspenseful. It preserves a democratic lifestyle for older people and strengthens them in their civil roles. Summing up the positive aspects, Gertrud Backes (2006) states that volunteering at an older age functions in a way, that “age can thus lose at least partially the character of the ‘not-any-more-being-useful’ and ‘not-any-more-belonging-to-it’” (Backes 2006: 86).

The attitude of institutions and municipalities influences the amount of elderly participation. Refusals within institutions can lead to the fact that older people are not active (cf. More-Hollerweger, Rameder 2009). Francis Caro expresses a basic institutional ambivalence towards volunteers, “Many organisations see the application of volunteers as ambivalent” (Caro 2008: 86). But maybe a change has taken place during recent years. Till the 1980s, older people were accepted much less than today in voluntary areas. Today, older people are more often recruited because of their resources, abilities and knowledge (cf. Backes 2006).

Table 2. Lists of positive effects and barriers of volunteering at an older age

Positive effects of volunteering at an older age	Barriers of volunteering at an older age
Health promotion	Generational reservation
Compensation of burdens	Restricted access
Increasing self-esteem	Missing offers
Lifelong learning	Institutional refusal
Alternative leisure arrangement	Deficient facilitation of mobility
Enabling participation	Missing analyses of resources
Developing social networks	Deficient familial relief
Upgrading capabilities	Deficient compensation of physical shortcomings

Source: Findenig 2014.

## Participation quota

In the following, the attempt is made to carry out a quantitative description of participation of older people in Austria. Besides, a differentiation is made between work for the family, informal and formal engagement, and paid work.

### *Participation quota in families*

Concerning work for the family recalls a study carried out by Beatrix Wiedenhofer (2000). Through sample census investigations in 1998, 18,000 inhabitants were asked about the life situation of older people in Austria. Familial work turned out as an essential component in everyday life of older people. 44% of people from 60 to 64 years old and 38% of the people from 65 to 74 years old were found to support their children, grandchildren or other people relevant to their families at least once per week. At the age of above 75 years of age, the familial work was found to be a mere 21%. A difference between women and men was elaborated: 48% of women, but just 38% of men at the ages of 60 to 64 were found to work for their families. From 65 to 74 years old,



this gender difference was revealed to drop from 10% to 6% (40% of women and 34% of men) (cf. Wiedenhofer 2000).

### ***Participation quota in formal and informal volunteering***

First, it will be analysed how the participation of older people can be described both in the formal and informal engagement in Austria. Besides, a differentiation will be carried out on the basis of age and gender. Secondly, it will be considered how this participation developed from the years 2006 to 2012. In 2006, an instrument which measures the informal and formal engagement was constructed by Eva More-Hollerweger and Arno Heimgartner. The people questioned were first familiarised with the definition of voluntary engagement and then asked for their participation in different social areas. This interrogative programme was extensively repeated in 2012. The first questioning in 2006 was performed by Statistics Austria and became part of the first report on volunteering in Austria (More-Hollerweger, Heimgartner 2009b). The survey concerned an Austria-wide representative random sample including 11,661 people who took part in Austria at an age above 14. The interviews were carried out via telephone. The second questioning was carried out by the Institute of Empirical Social Research (2013) and is now being processed into a report by the Institute "Public Opinion." In the course of the second survey, exactly 4,000 people gave their answers in face-to-face-interviews.

The participation rate in formal engagement was the highest in 2012 among the 50-to-59-year-olds and 60-to-69-year-olds (32%). Informal participation was even higher, reaching 44% in the age group between 50 to 59; and 39% in the age group 60 to 69. In comparison, 27% of the 15-to-29 year old persons were formally involved and approximately as many informally. At the age of 70 plus, participation decreased. About every fifth person of this age group was found to be formally engaged (22%) and the same amount of people were found to act in the informal sector (23%) (cf. Institute of Empiric Social Research 2013).

With regard to gender differences, it appeared that at the age above 60, men were represented more often than women in a formal engagement. 33% of men and 22% of women above 60 worked in a formal engagement. In the informal area, the relation was nearly balanced. 32% of men and 29% of women were actively working for neighbours, friends and in the community without institutional integration (cf. *ib.*). The results of 2006 showed that at the age above 65, the areas of culture, social affairs and religion were prioritised fields of engagement (cf. More-Hollerweger, Rameder 2009).

Comparison over the years has shown that in 2012 more and more men and women tended to pursue a formal engagement at an older age than in 2006. In the 2006 study, including a more differentiated age spectrum, the participation rates were 26% for men and 15% for women for the age group of 65 to 79. The figures in 2012 were 33% for men and 22% for women at the age of 60 plus. This meant an increase in

formal engagement. Similar developments have also been revealed for informal engagement. The portion of men increased from 23% in 2006 to 32% in 2012, while the portion of women rose from 23% in 2006 to 29% in 2012.

### ***Participation quota in paid work***

45% of people at the age of 55 to 64 in Austria (36% women and 54% men) worked in a paid context in 2013. Within this age group, a strong decrease was noted. While 64% of the 55-to 59-year-olds still worked in a paid manner, there was a drop to 23% for the age group of 60 to 64. 15% of women and 32% of men between 60 and 64 years are still active in this manner. But also at the age above 65 still 5.2% worked in a paid employment (women: 3.4% and men: 7.5%). While there was an increase by 14% (1994) to 23% (2013) in the 60 to 64-year-olds, the rate in people 65 plus was found to stay the same (cf. Statistics Austria 2013c).

## **Summary**

Age is an important life phase which is marked by different dynamics. The demographic analyses has shown a temporal expansion which is accompanied by a diversification. Age is further threatened by problem situations, like they manifest themselves in the cover of nursing need, social isolation or financial poverty. However, age is also a natural phase of an individual and of active life in a post-familial and post-professional period. Hence, the claim of a participative society also has to enclose old age. However, to clarify whether and in which manner people then still participate in society requires some definitions and ordering steps.

The presented working context is guided by the idea that participative behaviour is not only realised in political fields, but different working forms are to be accepted. Besides, it seems significant to act on the assumption going beyond paid work and to consider the familial, informal and formal engagements alike. Further differentiations can be made within these areas. In the familial work achievements, it can be distinguished between tasks which are directed towards the partner, from those achievements which refer to the family or the children and which are seen as intergenerative.

Social work influence happens currently in community-oriented centres. They have an image of professionalism which puts special emphasis on coordination. The establishment of such initiatives stands in the tradition of the settlement-movement as it is historically connected to Jane Addams (cf. Wagner 2013). But also Austrian traditional examples of community work can be found; recently, the history of the Ottakring Settlement was published in Vienna (cf. Malleier 2005). The “Bassena” in Vienna stands for the presence in the present.

The scene is also characterised by social inequalities. In particular the participation of people with a migrational background has repeatedly been a subject of analysis. Be-

sides, the basic question is to what extent individual realisation of participation is just not recognised, or if it requires supporting measures for inclusion altogether. In a similar manner, levels of education and the degree of urbanisation are being discussed. In particular, high numbers of associations in Austria are confronted with the task not to operate repressively for certain milieus. On average, 80 people are referred to 1 association in Austria.

The discussion about recognition of participation fields is related to a power discourse. The population's interests branch out in the most different directions. The diverse activities can only be partly represented by systems or categories. Following the system of More-Hollerweger and Heimgartner (2009b), older people prefer the areas of culture, religion and social affairs. This also indicates that the connection to social work is obvious.

The different expressed aspects of criticism point at the fact that supporting formal and informal engagement are both disputable. Experts distinguish between exploitation, playing field or transfer to the private sphere; in particular, from a neoliberal discussion point of view, the latter reproach is weighty. It means first the retreat of the state from direct work with clients and, secondly, the blind trust in the population's own initiatives. Empirically, it would be important to clarify to what extent additive support happens during community-oriented action or whether the state is retreating, or at least behaving in a restraining manner. Existentially, the analyses has shown that special endeavours embracing everything in this context is not possible due to the sheer amount of possibilities.

Many positive effects as they occur daily in informal and formal areas of activity must be considered. Individual influence on health or self-value in combination with social effects in a cultural cooperation are important to be established. Furthermore, volunteering produces achievements for the community at the most varied levels, and this leads to an increase of collective life quality. Anyway – affirmations of a democratic lifestyle as an ethical principle leaves us no other choice than to appreciate and to promote participative actions of older people. Hence, out of a social work perspective, the dismantling of barriers seems auspicious. In particular, experts have to work and jiggle on those barriers, which appear to be like generational reservations or missing offers in a structural context.

The present situation of empirical perception makes clear that scientific consensus and continuity are demanded. Thus, spheres of unpaid activity should be more strongly empirically and consecutively analysed. Behind this skew situation of missing empirical attention, the (scientifically and politically) critical trend of society assumes that both areas of familial and informal areas – learning and action – are being discriminated against. This discrimination takes place at an older age meaning a special life phase, in which social processes occur substantially within family and community. However, main tasks of social work lie in promoting social perception as well as reducing contingent social exclusion of the elderly.

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