

ENGS Fringe Meeting -19th March 2010 in Barcelona

Venue: Hotel Husa L`lla, Avinguda Diagonal 547, Room: Numancia

Time: 15.15 – 16.45

Happiness as an Aspect of a New Ageing – Another Ageing is Possible

ENGS White Paper with Aging Compass and Hai Indicators

White Paper: Anita Kelles

Input from ENGS members

Power point: Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel

Workshop Leader: Tony Cooremans, Chair of ENGS

Introduction: Anita Kelles-Viitanen

Agenda:

1. Introduction: Why is this theme necessary for us?

a) Aging does not cost! No, bad aging costs. .

b) It is lack of social inclusion and wrong politics:

Bad aging is an economic, social and deeply political issue.

2. We want to change the politics for the European elderly

a) What is important for you about aging in your country?

b) HAI means Happy Aging Indicator - Explanation of the term and why we use it

We put together a set of indicators of ENGS member countries

3. Talking about the best practise models from each country

4. What can we win from this white paper?

Tony opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. Anita introduced the White Paper. Birgit complemented the paper with the power point presentation, prepared by herself and Lucille.

Anita first mentioned that the baby boomers have changed the society in every stage of their lives, and can be expected to do so once again. This time on aging.

She noted that younger people could not present us, because they do not have yet personal experience about aging. We need to represent ourselves and work together with the younger generation to green our world.

The future does not belong to the youth alone. In future society there will be elderly too with the children, young, grown-ups and middle-aged. Citizenship belongs to all members of the society. We, ENGS, do not want to work in isolation but also together with other Greens.

Anita described the HAI (Happy Aging Indicator) with statistics on which it is based. She compared the different situations in the European member countries of ENGS.

(Her introductory paper is attached "Another aging for Europe"!)

The plan is to work on the white in three steps:

Part: setting up the HAI indicators

Part: Good Practise Models

Part: Political Agenda

Some data on indicators is still missing and needs to be completed where possible. In future, the data needs to be collected on a bi-annual basis. That way the indicators can start functioning like a "social aging compass" showing where countries are moving on a right road or erring into wrong paths.

First part was described and the paper distributed to the participants. The participants also described good practices.

Here are some comments made by the participants:

- The life expectancy in many countries is different. For example in Malta, the elderly live longer. Elderly retire on the countryside only when they are not able to work anymore. That time their families will take care of them. Old people homes are still rare.
- In Great Britain, most people go into old peoples homes.
- In Denmark, elderly people are treated like citizens, not as consumers or patients. Automatically their all rights are attended. The Danish state also makes major contribution to the social and health budget including old age care. They are also focusing an integrated and preventive care that is saving money for the state, and has proven to be more effective and efficient care.
- In other countries, there is a lack of money. It should not be an excuse for cutting services and blaming the old. New taxes such as new environmental taxes and financial transaction taxes like Tobin taxes need to be raised. In addition, tax monies hidden in tax havens need to be pursued.
- The healthy life expectancy is what matters and what costs, not long age as such. Most at risks are the elderly whose pensions by that time go down and whose medical costs increase. Only the rich can pay for it. In the Netherlands migrants are found among the elderly poor, too because they have not managed to have sufficient work time and lack pensions from work. This is the case also in many other European countries.
- In Ireland, elderly and handicapped are mentioned together. This gives a wrong image about the situation of the elderly.
- Age-discriminatory limits were also noted. For example, in some countries women with the age of 55 do not get breast screening, although according to the statistics there is an increasing risk for breast cancer after this age.
- In Austria, there is a proposal to bring special elderly rights into their constitution similarly to the children rights. In this context, there was a question on why we need to have special rights, are not all covered by our constitutional rights. Answer was that it is not enough because age discrimination is rampant and needs to be fought with special legislation based on constitutional recognition.
- Many good examples on aging practices, programs and policies were also presented and discussed. One of them is the concept of "kangaroo houses" in Belgium, where younger families live together with older people, helping each other. It was, however, noted that it has not been successful in other countries.
- The different family situation and a more positive aging concept of migrant population was

also highlighted. However, it was warned not to have too romantic ideas since in many developing countries disability such as Alzheimer's is poorly understood and many elderly as a result are discriminated. Yet, European migration policies do not sufficiently respect other family concepts such as extended families. As a result, families can be dispersed to various countries even between geographic regions. Yet, grandparents should have a possibility to stay near their families. In these societies, there is also a stronger family bonding. Yet, families are also changing, and in the future migrant children may not be as willing to take care of their elderly family members. In this case, they need help. The question is, do we have old people homes for them where they like to stay and want. In Germany, there is a good example of a multi-culture home for the elderly.

(Ute Schmitz, 24th March 2010)