

# ZENTRUM FÜR KULTURFORSCHUNG

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## Cultural Participation and the 50+ Generation

### A new study and perspectives of an international comparative research project

#### A. The Challenge

The share of the "50+ Generation" among the European population continues to grow – and with it concerns about the future role of older people in our society. It is argued, that cultural participation could help to meet the challenges of this demographic change by increasing the motivations of the *50+ Generation* to actively engage in community life and volunteer activities, some of them with an inter-generational focus. Recent studies suggest, for example, that culturally active older persons are more active in social life, have greater chances to improve their overall health, make better use of the potentials of the Internet, and the like.

One could, therefore, hypothesize that we are experiencing a true "cultural revolution" in which many of the older generation no longer reflect the stereotypes and some of the traditional public policies which have turned them into mere "objects" of care and protection rather than as "active subjects".

Specific data on the cultural practices and related needs of the *50+ Generation* are, however, scarce. This inhibits the planning of public policies and of services provided by cultural / educational institutions and the media. Consequently, such data collection exercises have recently been undertaken in Germany (by the Zentrum für Kulturforschung - ZfKf) and in Finland (by the Foundation for Cultural Policy Research - CUPORE) to fill this knowledge gap.

In order to build a truly comparative understanding of the cultural practices of the *50+ Generation* in Europe and internationally, data from other countries is urgently needed. Below is a snapshot of the results recently published in Germany (June 2008). The intention is to inspire other countries to take action and begin the process of collecting such information/data. Use of a common methodological framework can lead to a strong basis from which comparative analysis can be generated. For more information on the methodology employed by the German survey team, or to express your interest in participating in a larger international comparative research project on this issue, please contact the European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, of which the Zentrum für Kulturforschung is one of the associates ([info@ericarts.org](mailto:info@ericarts.org)).

#### B. "From Bach to Blues" – ZfKf Study on the Cultural Practices of the 50+ Generation in Germany

Zentrum für Kulturforschung (ZfKf) was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) to carry out a representative survey on the cultural practices and related needs of the *50+ Generation*. Over the last 35 years, the ZfKf carried out many public opinion polls on cultural participation of different groups such as the "Youth Cultural Barometer" published in 2006, which served as a model for the new study (see <http://www.kulturforschung.de>).



*From Bach to Blues* (2008)<sup>1</sup>, presents the results of the representative *KulturBarometer 50+* survey in Germany. Dr. Susanne Keuchel and Prof. Dr. Andreas Joh. Wiesand were responsible for the overall study; they were assisted by a consultative committee of experts. Field work was carried out by a leading Gallup Institute (IFAK) which conducted interviews (20-30 minutes in duration) with 2,000 persons over the age of 50.

The *50+ Generation* was not studied as a "homogenous" group, but rather broken down according to age groups and other categories. In addition to standard demographic indicators of age, gender, education, family/children, financial status, migration background etc., the survey addressed over 40 specific questions on, for example:

- Definitions of "culture" and "arts";
- Cultural interests, practices and lifestyles, including past/present artistic activities, media preferences etc.;
- Reasons for engaging in, or avoiding, cultural and educational activities, including attitudes towards age-related cultural activities;
- "Lifelong learning" and knowledge transfer strategies and the (potential) role of media/new technologies;
- Actual and potential participation in voluntary work/honorary positions;
- Mobility and "cultural tourism";
- Position towards socio-cultural and multicultural changes in society and towards artistic works/expressions from unfamiliar cultural origins;
- Contacts with young people and participation in intergenerational activities.

## C. Main Results from the German Survey

### 1. Age-specific patterns are becoming more permeable

Classic concerts, theatre, and opera are no longer to be considered as the main points of cultural reference for the *50+ Generation*. Instead, pop or jazz music, movies and even the Internet have an increasing number of fans or followers, despite the fact that pop culture – beside musicals – still lacks “live-events” that welcome older people. Those who are 70 years and older find that their cultural preferences can be carried out at home (e.g. reading books or listening to cultural programmes on the radio) or through smaller cultural events located close to home (e.g. church music).

*Consequence: On the one hand, concert halls, theatres, and operas can no longer count on their supposedly “automatic appeal” to the growing number of people over 50. On the other hand, the image of pop-events as being frequented only by younger people needs to be reconsidered e.g. as regards marketing and other services.*

### 2. Culture – a “rejuvenating cure”?

Cultural participation is a particularly intensive form of social participation. Older people who stay culturally active have a higher-than-average interest in education programmes, social engagement and honorary positions, or use diverse media content – without, however, being able to stay "Forever Young" (the title of a Canadian news magazine).

*Consequence: Increasing the levels of cultural participation among the 50+ Generation could lead to more social engagement and could motivate their turn from consumers to creators within their environment.*

### 3. Beware of new stereotypes!

Only 20-30% of the *50+ Generation* are consistent with the ideal image of a mobile and spend-happy generation, as propagated by advertising and consumer studies. This corresponds with the interest to participate in the cultural life in one's own region: 30% are strongly interested, 31% “less” or “not at all”, 39% have no real preference in either direction. Beside age, cultural participation is influenced by health,

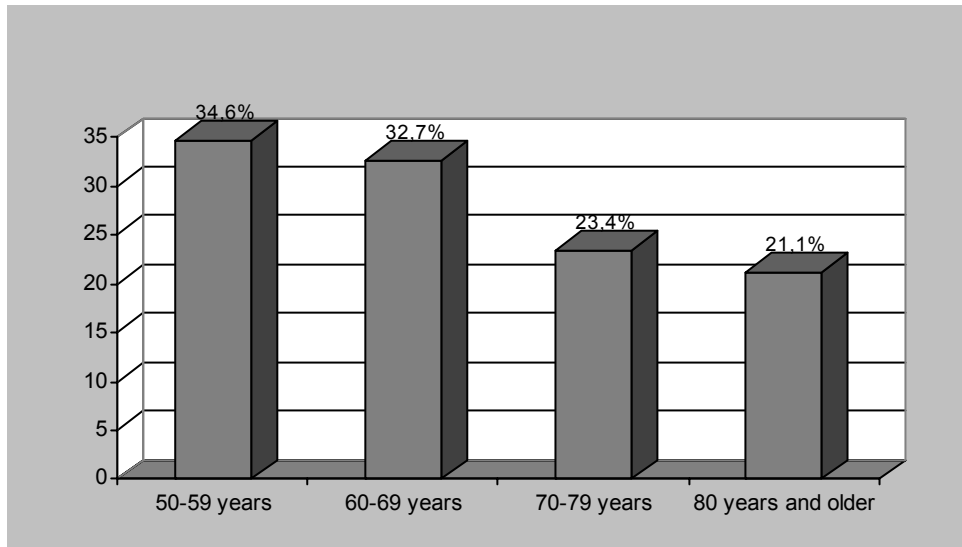
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<sup>1</sup> Keuchel, Susanne / Wiesand, Andreas Joh.: *KulturBarometer 50+ - “Zwischen Bach und Blues”*. Bonn: ARCulture Media, 2008. ISBN 978-3-930395-81-9

education, their job situation, migration background, and their social and family environment. It is mostly the people between 50 and 60 years that look forward to changing events and experiences.

*Consequence: Cultural and education policies should take into account that only an important minority of older people is mobile, socially active, or interested in wellness travel and other expensive hobbies. Old age poverty or isolation should not be excluded from debates about social and cultural integration.*

**Graph 1: "Strong" or "very strong" interest to participate in the cultural life of the region**



Keuchel/Wiesand 2008

**4. From the work place to voluntary work...**

18% of the interviewees are engaged in organised voluntary work or hold an honorary position. This figure could increase as over one-third of respondents indicated that they would be interested in holding such a position in the arts and education.

*Consequence: With adequate structures, qualifying measures and supervision it would be possible to reach the full potential of engagement of the 50+ Generation. One example: the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation's programme "Canto elementar" attracted a few hundred active helpers and motivators ("Singpaten") in Hamburg alone, who work with children e.g. in day-care centres.*

**5. Cross-cultural communication is needed**

Most of the older people, especially those aged 70+, have not yet realised or accepted the changes in society that have lead towards more cultural diversity.

*Consequence: If more intercultural content or interpretations would be offered in the programmes of classical cultural institutions, older people could become more sensitised to social change caused by immigration and globalisation.*

**6. Improving conditions for cultural participation at all ages**

Cultural participation among the 50+ Generation falls short of its potential. Among the most important reasons given for the low number of visits to cultural institutions and events, are insecurities about travelling to and from such events as well as a lack of knowledge about certain cultural content.

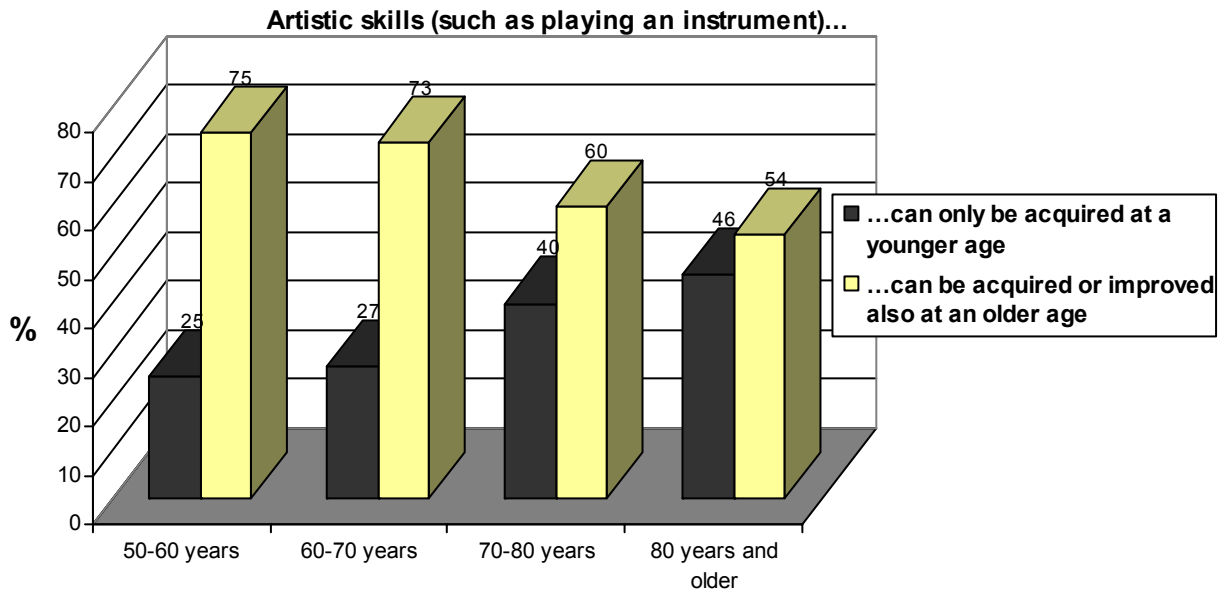
*Consequence: Cultural institutions should learn more about their actual and potential publics, including about conditions for the use of their programmes by older people, in order to develop strategies to address deficits and to help increase their participation. Such strategies could include, for example, improved information material provided especially for that target group; intermediation services provided by "friends of..." groups; or the organisation of shared taxis for the way home.*

## 7. High motivation to learn artistic skills...

The majority of respondents aged 50-70 years are convinced that it is still possible for them to acquire artistic skills – e.g. to play an instrument or draw pictures. One third of those who are not yet artistically active are interested in becoming so.

*Consequence: The interest placed by the 50+ Generation on artistic activities could be served, in the mid-term, by cultural institutions. Some music and art schools, amateur theatres and orchestras, choirs, and civic or church adult education centres are already active in this field. Qualified staff are required to provide artistic and related courses – for newly retired participants also in an intergenerational format – that can really encourage older people to engage (again) in meaningful cultural activity.*

**Graph 2: Attitude to arts-related lifelong learning in the older generation (in %)**



Keuchel/Wiesand 2008

## 8. ...but cultural education must start earlier!

Only 2% of respondents who are interested in cultural activities are "newcomers", most of them were already engaged in one way or another in cultural life at an earlier age.

*Consequence: Such results underline the significance of cultural education for children and young people. Raising interest and encouraging cultural activities in earlier phases of life increases the probability that such participation continues in later phases of life.*