

## **Caring Communities – Participatory Action and Reflection To Foster Dementia-Friendly Living Environments**

### Background

Presented is a collection of theoretical considerations and practical references focussing on new and humane approaches to the increasing challenges posed by age, care dependency and dementia to those affected and their families. More specifically, the focus lies on the concept of the caring community – a dementia-friendly communal environment – where people with dementia and their families are met with the general acceptance that is so important for their unique situation. On the way towards a caring community, the tasks of the social integration into the public sphere, of overcoming stigmatisation and of an open approach to the illness in order to be able to make use of offers of help or support shift from being solely the responsibility of a small circle of “those affected” to being the goal of the whole community.

A wide array of projects aim towards raising the awareness for dementia among the public as well as of the complexity of this most feared risk of ageing. The advancement of understanding and acceptance and the development of a social attitude which translates into corresponding actions and behaviours are repeatedly being identified as important prerequisites for social participation. However, for this to be successful, physical meeting places and spaces of action are needed, where contact and even real encounters are possible – getting to know each other, letting each other in, engaging in shared activities (Wißmann 2016). A foundation like this allows for an exchange between generations and professions and people in all of their diversity. Adding to it the activation of people’s willingness for civic and neighbourly engagement results in the building blocks for a dementia-friendly environment.

The panel “Social Competence in Action. Teaching and Research for Responsible Coping of Future Challenges” has inspired us to present experiences from a Community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach fostering the practical application of awareness-raising, support, and relief activities on the way towards a dementia-friendly communal environment in the market town of Moosburg in Carinthia, Austria. By applying this participatory research approach, we try to find out whether the focus on resources and capabilities, which are already present in the neighbourhood / community, as well as their advancement in terms of Community Capacity Building (Chaskin et al. 2001) reveal as promising starting points towards a solid establishment of a new form of communitisation in the model region.

### Methods and activities

The project “Dementia-friendly model community Moosburg: Ready for diversity – shared responsibility for a liveable future for people with dementia” is funded by the Fund for a Healthy Austria, the provincial government of Carinthia, the market community Moosburg and Carinthia University of Applied Sciences

from 02/2018 – 01/2020. The goal of the project is to facilitate social participation in the community until old age, especially for people with dementia and their families.

A participatory research approach serves a dual purpose. On the one hand it aims to engage social actors as co-researchers, on the other hand there is a focus on empowerment and Capacity Building, involving all partners – citizens independent of their socio-economic status, professionals in health and social care, researchers, people working in public administration, students (Social Work and Healthcare Management) (von Unger 2014).

Following a community-based participatory research approach (CBPR), active citizens as community partners and scientists from the Institute for Applied Research on Ageing (IARA) at the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences developed a concept focusing on **public** awareness-raising for respectful social interaction and civic engagement, support and relief activities for people affected by dementia. In a co-design process actions were planned, implemented and collaboratively reflected. In a module-based social science approach, citizens were engaged in various research activities, ranging from interview participation, interview conduction as well as participation in group discussions and networking events. Students of Social Work were involved in the implementation and reflection processes, as part of their specialization in empirical social research.

### Results and Discussion

First results of the CBPR approach will be discussed within the panel. A high satisfaction of intervention participants with training measures goes along with additional expectations concerning enhanced networking activities and strengthening of participation opportunities.

### Sources:

Chaskin, R.J., Brown, P., Venkatesh, S. & Vidal, A. (2001). Building Community Capacity. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Von Unger, H. (2014). Partizipative Forschung: Einführung in die Forschungspraxis. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien

Wißmann, P. (2016). Demenz: Ausschluss aus der inklusiven Gesellschaft? Ein Einspruch von Peter Wißmann. In Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V. (Hrsg.), Soziale Arbeit kontrovers (SAk) 15. Berlin: Lambertus.