

Citizens' Summit: Intergenerational dialogue event with citizens on the topic of loneliness

Guide to preparation and implementation

June 2022



Lonely? Let's unite!

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Foreword

Dear readers,

You have before you the "Guidelines for the Preparation and Implementation of an Intergenerational Dialogue Event on the Topic of Loneliness".

An intergenerational dialogue is a dialogue between generations, here specifically between a younger and an older generation. Within the euPrevent PROFILE project, our overall goal is to prevent and combat loneliness among older people in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. We do this by working on various project activities and products that address the issue of loneliness. Some of our project activities are specifically related to intergenerational exchange and dealing with loneliness. Among them is the organisation of local citizens' summits that focus on dialogue and exchange between young and old.

Intergenerational exchange and corresponding initiatives can be realised through joint activities, but also through conversations and the exchange of thoughts and experiences, thus creating a common ground.

Besides learning from one another, there are many reasons and goals for bringing two generations together. For example, such an exchange can lead to greater mutual understanding and solidarity, reducing negative perceptions of the other generation, forging a stronger social bond and many other positive outcomes.

Although the prevalence of loneliness increases with age, the COVID 19 pandemic raised awareness of loneliness and made it clear that loneliness is a common and serious issue even among younger people.

Creating an intergenerational dialogue on loneliness is therefore crucial and could lead to useful input on issues that need to be addressed.

Please visit our project website (<https://euprevent.eu/profile/>) if you would like to read more about the euPrevent PROFILE project, receive up-to-date information or contact us.

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1. Generations and intergenerational dialogues

1.a What are generations?

Generations are far more diverse than suggested by the simple distinction by age, the simple juxtaposition of "young & old".

Generations offer a possibility for identification: I am connected to my generation through a shared world of experience.

This basic understanding goes back to the sociologist Karl Mannheim (1928). In the current discussion (in Germany) around this concept, generationality is emphatically also reinforced via media. "Generations, however, are primarily identity constructions that make certain age cohorts visible in society and offer individuals the opportunity to interpret and reflect on their own life stories against this background." Media identity constructions play an increasing role in this. Generations are also spoken of in the public discussion of social and political conflicts, "without this necessarily being based on a uniform shaping of experience"².

Regardless of whether it is in the form of experience or reinforced by media constructions: Generations shape facets of social identity. Thinking, feeling, wanting and doing are oriented towards social perspectives for which the year of birth, age, the interpretation of historical events or one's place in a family or organisation are decisive³.

Depending on the context and relationships, generations can be understood very differently. Some generational terms at a glance

Generation concept	Explanation
Genealogical generation concept	Generations are characterised by kinship relations. <i>E.g. generation of grandparents, parents and children</i>
The pedagogical concept of generations	Generations are connected through learning processes. <i>E.g. (older) teachers, (younger) learners, but also: young people teach older people.</i>
Historical–social concept of generation	Generation groups are shaped by historical or social events. <i>E.g. the "post-war generation", the 68 generation, Generation Z</i>

¹ Ziemann, Benjamin (2020), p. 9

² Ibid.

³ Lüscher, K. et al. (2017), p. 11

The differentiation of different generations is therefore not only oriented towards age. Depending on the perspective, different generations must also be distinguished within the ‘elderly’ – from the ‘young elderly’ to the very old. In addition, there are biographically connecting/differentiating life phases, for example, between those who are (still) in employment or those who are no longer in employment. Likewise, among ‘the young’, major differences exist between toddlers, school children, adolescents, young adults, etc. Moreover, with a view to the different concepts of generation, the following applies: every person can basically be assigned to different generations.

So if generations offer a possibility of identification, this also means: besides the experience of commonality, there is also the experience of difference from other generations. Ambivalences and tensions can arise between generations, like those known to exist between generations in families: some want to persevere/preserve while others want change, some have a need for familiarity and others a need to distance themselves.⁴

In all these aspects, it should be borne in mind that belonging to a generation is only one of several forms of identity. Categories such as gender, education, culture, socio-economic living conditions etc. are also decisive.

1.b Value and objective of intergenerational dialogues

Intergenerational interaction has changed in today’s Central European societies. Due to increased life expectancy, there is more time for intergenerational togetherness than ever before. Nevertheless, the environments in which different age groups live are drifting apart and understanding between the generations is becoming less self-evident. Since the beginning of the 20th century, technological, media-related and social developments as well as demographic change have altered social coexistence, social roles and familial and professional spheres.⁵

Against this background, the following applies: "In a pluralistic, ever-changing world, the learning of different generations is ultimately an important resource for individual as well as social development processes".⁶ Intergenerational education and dialogue events try to initiate such learning processes. They can help to increase mutual understanding, to deal with differences and differentiations, and to promote perception and reflection on social and individual images of age. Thus, when different generations come together, this always results in images, stereotypes and prejudices about respective other generations, e.g. about ‘the young’ or ‘the elderly’, coming together.

⁴ Lüscher (2010), p. 12

⁵ 1 cf. Franz, Julia (2014), p. 19 ff

⁶ Franz, Julia, (2014), p. 27

***TN, 17 years:** "I have often had bad experiences with the older generation, but today I was able to experience how nice everyone is and that not everything is great with them either."*

***TN, 81 years:** "I discovered that there are similar problems across generations."⁷*

Exchanging biographically shaped perspectives, assessments, habits, values and learning preferences, allows a new diversity of perspectives to grow and the participants can develop options for action to realise a different cooperation between the generations.

'Generativity' can emerge in such togetherness. Generativity refers to the human ability to know, individually and collectively, that the generations depend upon one another, and to be able – and expected – to consider this in one's own actions.⁸

1.c Intergenerational learning

Intergenerational learning processes are not self-propelling. They require a generation-sensitive attitude and usually careful didactic and methodological preparation in order to do justice to the specific constellations and dynamics of intergenerational groups.

A thematic focus that is relevant to all participating generations initiates or facilitates dialogue in the context of educational events. This also applies to a didactic approach in which the different generations are involved on an equal footing and in a participatory way.

This facilitates learning in different orientations, usually involving several dimensions:

- **Learning from one another:**
benefiting from the experience and knowledge of the other generation.
- **Learning about one another:**
expanding knowledge about the other generation, questioning ideas about age and stereotypes, developing understanding
- **Learning together:**
developing new perspectives together and/or designing products/results (e.g. a theatre production, a joint action).

⁷ From the evaluation forms of the intergenerational dialogue event on 10.6.2022 in Düren, DE

⁸ Lüscher, K. et al. (2017);, p. 13

1.d Conditions for success in intergenerational dialogue and learning processes

Different mixes of generations can vary enormously in nature. For example, a gathering of nursery school children with the very old is different from a gathering of young adults with older working people.

The dialogue events in the euPrevent PROFILE project focus on creating a dialogue between young people aged 16-27 and older people aged 55 and over. Subsequent explanations therefore refer to this type of composition of intergenerational events.

In order to open up to the other generation, it is helpful if all participants hope to benefit from the dialogue. In many events/projects, generally older people are very interested in getting together with young participants. They look forward to contact with younger people, they expect their horizons to be broadened, and appreciate the 'vigour' of young people. Younger participants are more likely to be reserved or sceptic or may not know what they might get out of intergenerational encounters.

This is why it is all the more important that the topic is interesting for both generations and that especially younger people are approached as groups and not as individuals when recruiting them for participation. Young people are less likely to register as individuals, but are more likely to come to events if other young people they know are also interested.

General tips and conditions for success

- a topic that interests everyone
- a place/space that is hospitable and welcoming for both generations.
- enough time
- a balanced mix of participants so that one generation is not overrepresented

⁹ Antz, E.M./Franz, J./Frieters, N./ Scheunpflug, A., 2009

Approaching one another, gaining trust and possibly being able to reflect on and deal with strangeness or conflicts is a process that should be carefully monitored. Some basic didactic orientations can support the planning, preparation, implementation and evaluation of intergenerational learning processes:

Reflective orientation

Reflect on the experiences in mixed age-groups and evaluate them for joint learning as well as individual learning.

Interactive orientation

Specifically initiate and promote an intergenerational dialogue and exchange of experience, thereby supporting changes in perspective and in the processes of understanding.

Participatory orientation

Enable open and equal forms of learning together in such a way that no generation is given a privileged role because of its age or experience.

2. Citizens' Summit: Intergenerational dialogue event with citizens on the topic of loneliness

In the euPrevent PROFILE project, the intergenerational dialogue events focus on the following core question:

How can we prepare ourselves in the future to create an age-friendly environment for all generations and work together to combat loneliness and isolation?

An important concern of these dialogue events in the framework of the euPrevent PROFILE project is to jointly engage in the establishment and development of networks to promote intergenerational solidarity in the participating Euregio Meuse-Rhine regions. This project emphasises the importance of active citizenship and promotes the exchange of knowledge and resources in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

2.a Objectives:

The following objectives have been distinguished for participating citizens:

- Share experiences, knowledge and questions about loneliness
- Develop awareness of the dangers of loneliness and social isolation, ageing and stigmatisation
- Contribute one's own ideas on intergenerational initiatives and projects

Objectives for partner organisations of euPrevent PROFILE:

- Gain insight into individual experience of loneliness among younger and older people
- Use knowledge gained from the dialogue between the generations for future activities
- Implement/experience the 'intergenerational dialogue' format, so that this approach can be used in the future.

2.b Approaching and recruiting participants

To encourage people to participate, it is useful to draw up a short concise announcement that addresses both generations. It should make clear who will be attending and what the appeal or benefit is of participating in an intergenerational dialogue. The title and a short text about the event should make it clear: everyone is being addressed for their experience and perspectives.

Example of an invitation mailing¹⁰

We invite open-minded and interested citizens in the age-groups between 16-27 years and 55+ years to our dialogue event in Düren on 10 June.

Did you experience (directly or indirectly) loneliness and isolation during the pandemic? Are you interested and inquisitive enough to want to talk about this with people of your own and other generations?

We also want to build on the positive experiences of increased solidarity during the Corona period – all around us, in families, communities and neighbourhoods, which resulted in new bridges, trust and intra-generational respect being built through mutual support.

What can I expect?

- *Discussions and talks on mental health issues in different life situations*
- *The encouragement of self-reflection and the exchange of experience and opinions with members of other generations.*
- *a ‘change in perspective’ and more mutual understanding between the generations*
- *Opportunities to present or jointly work on your own ideas for intergenerational initiatives and your own projects for combatting loneliness.*

What is the event about?

- *The afternoon is participative and interactive and lasts four hours, including breaks. It is about:*
- *coming into contact/exchanging ideas with one another*
- *exploring the topic of loneliness*
- *jointly developing ideas for intergenerational cooperation/prevention of loneliness*

Another possibility is to send separate invitations for different age groups.

As a general rule, it is almost impossible to entice individual people to attend such events by means of written announcements. A very effective way is to send personal invitations to potentially interested people through known contact persons. These could be regional or local project partners. Similarly, interested parties can also be approached through previous or new cooperation partners, social institutions, educational institutions or other societal organisations.

Tips for attracting participants from the generation aged 16 to 27 years of age

Seek timely personal contact with: educational institutions that may have a connection with the topic of loneliness and ones that have direct contact with the target group: e.g. nursing colleges and other specialised colleges in the social sector.

- vocational schools, other secondary schools
- youth departments in associations (fire brigade, rescue services)
- youth groups in parishes
- youth representatives (e.g. schools, municipal youth councils, etc.)
- youth centres, district centres, multi-generation houses
- social media: use your own channels and those of cooperation partners who have direct access to young people. Ask them to disseminate the invitation through their social media channels (those that actually reach young people).

Tips for attracting participants from the 55+ generation

- Announcement in newsletter, local press
- Disseminate the invitations in care-homes for the elderly and facilities involved in work for senior citizens
- Disseminate the invitations in welfare institutions, in existing projects on the topic

Here too, what matters is: personal contact with institutions and organisations makes it easier to access potential participants.

¹⁰ See report on the event in Düren, DE, on 10.6.2022
<https://www.bagso.de/themen/euprevent-profile/>

The aim should be to involve both generations in the event in equal measure and to avoid over-representation by one generation group. If necessary, places should be kept free for possible spontaneous late registrations from younger people.

If achieving a balanced number of participants is not possible, the moderator should pay particular attention to the division of mixed generations into small groups. The moderator can also make sure that contributions from all generations are distributed in such a way that the numerically stronger group does not overshadow the other group.

The hope is that participants with different approaches and interests will register, resulting in an extremely heterogeneous overall group. Different approaches are possible, irrespective of to which generation participants belong:

- Professional interest in the topic of loneliness
- Personal experience of loneliness
- Experience of loneliness in one's surroundings
- Interest in intergenerational dialogue exceeds interest in the topic of loneliness
- Experience with loneliness and/or intergenerational dialogue based on one's own civic engagement

2.c Creating an ambiance of meeting and learning

An open, participative and appreciative setting promotes contact, coming-together, exchange and reflection. A reliable learning atmosphere is important, especially with the topic of loneliness – which is often a taboo subject – and which, for those affected, is part of the difficult process of accepting one’s own limitations¹¹, which can cause individuals to experience a sense of shame.

The place in which the event is held should be inviting, ‘neutral’ and low-threshold for both generation groups. If the event is held in a senior citizens’ facility, for example, it is important to realise that young participants are less familiar with such a place and its design. This is not an obstacle, but it should be kept in mind and, if necessary, this should be mentioned at the start of the event.



The dialogue event on 10.6. 2022 in Düren, DE, took place in a multigenerational housing project.

A circle of chairs in which everyone can see one another creates a framework for contact on an equal footing.

A sense of connectedness will be created among participants when they come into contact with one another in different groups. A large room (hall) can be helpful for this. This will allow the formation of small groups in the event room, warming-up exercises can be done and it facilitates the catering, e.g., with drinks during breaks.

Name tags make it easier to speak to one another and they make individuals visible as personalities. At the start, you can discuss with the group whether they want to be addressed by their first or last name. An alternative to pre-printed name badges could be to have the participants make their own name labels. This also makes it easier for any young people who may want to clarify their gender identity.

The language of address should be agreed upon jointly. Does everyone address one another on first name terms? For some people, the arrangement will be unfamiliar, sometimes older people will tend to be more formal and expect young people to address older people as Mister. or Miss/Mrs. Agreement on this matter is a first step towards having an equal relationship.

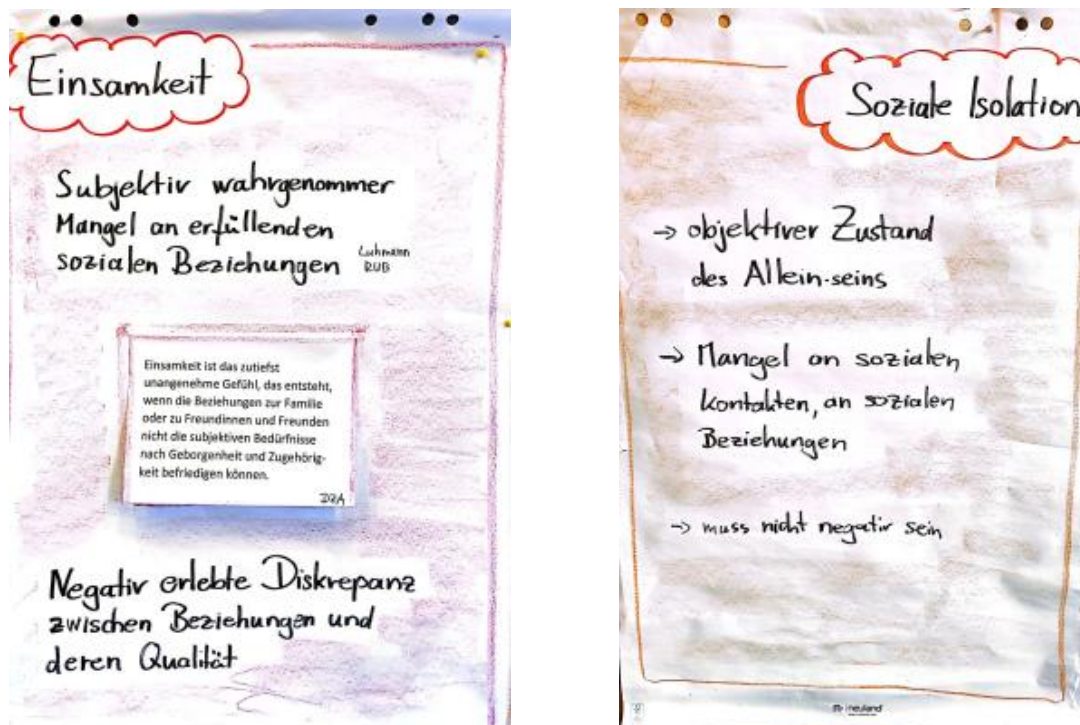
Interactive methods and varying social forms such as working with a partner, in small group phases and in plenary sessions are appropriate in order to establish contact, create trust, facilitate communication and promote exchange. Interactive warm-up exercises can help to create a more relaxed atmosphere.

¹¹ Cf. Franz, Julia / Scheinpflug, Annette (2019), p. 147

Last but not least, an attractive setting with drinks and a small snack is a sign of appreciation for the participants and helps reduce the workload at such a long, interactive event.

2.d Work content

The basic terms 'loneliness' and 'social isolation' should be briefly explained at the start of the event as a basis for everyone, and relevant statistics on the prevalence of loneliness in the respective country of the event can also be given. For example, 1-2 large posters with definitions of loneliness/social isolation can be put up initially. This way, the content of the event is transparent for all participants right from the start.



Dialogue event on 10.6.2002 in Düren: Posters with these two terms in the room

Since the events are realised in cooperation with local partners involved in the euPrevent PROFILE project, presumably some of the participants will have both professional expertise on the topic of loneliness as well as experience with projects in which people are civically engaged. The main purpose of the event is the exchange of experiences and perspectives, and reflection in a mixed-generational setting. Therefore, there will be no professional input or involvement of external practical expertise (projects on loneliness in old age). If necessary, however, such elements can be incorporated into an intergenerational dialogue meeting/citizens' summit. This could take the form of a short session on the topic of risk factors, discrimination.

In the phase of raising awareness of the topic of loneliness in the different generations, small mixed-generation groups will help to generate a personal discussion atmosphere. In addition, it is also good to plan a small amount of time in single generation groups. This will allow participants to share their experiences and they will quickly be understood by other members of their own generation. It can also be useful to talk to one another in an even more intimate situation, e.g., in the form of mixed-generation pairs.

Visualisations (right from the process to individual aspects in certain phases of the event up to the central results) will make the process transparent and visible for everyone.

The visualisations also serve as a back-up for documentation and evaluation of the overall project.

2.e Possible procedure

The structure of an intergenerational dialogue event is based on the objectives and contains three essential phases:

1. getting in touch with one another,
2. opening up the topic of loneliness,
3. jointly developing ideas for action.

The time frame is set at 4 hours; in the following schedule, the fictitious start time is 3 pm. In order to enable informal communication and to ensure concentration, we suggest a total of two breaks of 15 minutes. A time frame of 4.5 or 5 hours would make it possible to extend individual phases or breaks and, depending on the time of day, to include a snack, for example.

If the only possibility is a shorter framework of only 3 hours, the last part 'ideas for action' could probably be shortened considerably. A short brainstorming: "Do we know of (intergenerational) projects that counteract loneliness?" could then follow the previous exchange on loneliness. Another idea is to invite people to two separate events, with more intensive work on approaches to action at the second event.

The following detailed description of the process is based on an assumed number of participants of 15 - 25 persons, each with equal representation from the younger generation (16 - 27) and the older generation (55+). A larger number of participants will require making more small groups and the exchange in the plenary session, e.g. during the interactive exercises, will have to be consistently moderated according to the time available.

Suggestion for a possible procedure

Time	Duration	Goals	Content	Method / Social Form
Phase 1: getting in touch with each other				
15.00	15	Introduce participants to the context (euPrevent PROFILE project) and the topic, provide orientation on the process.	Welcome, introduction, Organisational matters (photos) Language arrangements	Plenary session in a circle of chairs Introduction by the moderator Introduce terms used (loneliness, social isolation, statistical figures if applicable). If necessary, provide self-adhesive labels for name tags.
15.20	15	Getting in touch with the group and the theme	Getting to know one another	Brief round of introductions (name/place) Sociometric constellations, generation latter See below
15.35	10	Open up emotionally as an individual and in the group	Emotional worlds/sensitivities	Physical exercise (can be omitted if time is limited!) See below
15.45			Break	

Phase 2: Opening up the topic of loneliness				
16.00	20	Gathering perspectives and experiences from the different generations	<p>What is loneliness?</p> <p>How do young/old people experience loneliness?</p>	Mixed-generation groups (3 - mx. 5 participants): Talk about your own experience of loneliness and that of others.
16.20	1: 15 2: 10	Shedding light on perspectives and experiences of the different generations		<p>Generations divided as indicated on bulletin boards (2-3, depending on the composition of the groups, or separation into generations):</p> <p>The generation group collects aspects from the small groups, writes them down on cards and pins them onto a bulletin board: This is what our generation has come to know about loneliness.</p> <p>Second round: Visit each of the other bulletin boards and examine briefly the contents.</p>

16.45	20	Delving more deeply into the topic	What increases loneliness? Risk factors, discrimination	The moderator summarises what is displayed on the bulletin boards, asks about risk factors, discrimination Moderated discussion, if necessary more cards are added to the moderation walls. Alternative: short technical input by an external speaker
17.05	10	Deepening intergenerational aspects		In mixed-generation pairs, pointing out individual cards in a two-way conversation: This is what moved me in the last lesson on loneliness!
17.15	15		Break	Prepare 4 - 5 tables: lay out posters, have pens ready for the later work phase.

Phase 3: Developing ideas for action jointly				
17.30	15	Brainstorming: making the experiences of the participants visible	Ways out of loneliness? Projects tackling loneliness?	Plenary discussion on the question: What do we already do/know? Record on cards titles of projects mentioned briefly. The moderator should have 3-4 examples in reserve in case few examples are provided by the participants.
17.45	30	Exchange about involvement opportunities	Commitment pro togetherness and contra loneliness	4 - 5 tables displaying titles on posters, on which ideas/results can be noted down. <i>see below</i> The participants can organise themselves according to their interest in the questions!
18.15	15	Recording the results		Short reports from the 4 tables in a session plenary
18.30	30	Feedback on the event, prospects of utilisation in the euPrevent PROFILE project	Final round	Distribute an evaluation form (plan 10 min for this) In turn: a one-word or one-sentence feedback Moderator's conclusion
19.00				

2.f Comments about the various methodological suggestions

Sociometric constellations

The participants are asked to organise/position themselves in the space provided:

1. **Who comes from the same place? Stand in groups according to places!**
2. **Why am I here (primarily)? Designate a location:**
 - a. interest in the topic of loneliness
 - b. interest in intergenerational exchange
 - c. no specific interest
3. **I am committed to the issue of loneliness**
 - a. professional
 - b. voluntary/volunteer
 - c. I have no involvement in the issue of loneliness either professionally or voluntarily/voluntarily
4. **I have personal experience of loneliness**
 - a. none at all
 - b. a little
 - c. sometimes
 - d. often

It can be interesting to ask individual participants in larger groups who find one another if they would like to comment. Similarly, participants who are standing alone or only in a small group can be invited to comment.

Form a generation ladder

The participants are asked to form a circle/or a line, according to their age: arranged from the youngest to the oldest. In turn, everyone says their age and their name. The moderator uses this 'generation ladder' to develop possible generation boundaries. Who belongs to the same generation? The moderator points out possible demarcations: e.g. younger students separate from those who are 22-27 years old, trainees or young workers, and e.g. the different generations in the group of older people aged 55 and over. With short questions or personal observations, the moderator can make it clear that more than just 2 (young & old) generations have come together at the event.

Emotional worlds – physical exercise

All participants stand on one side of the room. The moderator asks 4-5 volunteers to come forward, standing in a row with their backs to the audience. Then the moderator names an attitude and asks the participants to spontaneously adopt a posture in response. After a short moment (the moderator counts down: 3 - 2 - 1), the participants turn around and remain in the posture they have adopted.

Possible terms: Waiting for a call, uncertainty, surprise, loneliness, caution, discrimination, anticipation, relaxation.

The moderator can ask the audience for reactions after each term: what do you notice?

It is advisable to change volunteers after two such postures, so that as many participants as possible are activated in this way.

The exercise demonstrates physical forms of expression in a simple way, relaxes the atmosphere and opens up people's emotional access to the topic and to exchange.

Possible titles for the table activity: jointly developing ideas for action

1. Ideas for intergenerational projects to prevent and reduce loneliness
2. How can we set up intergenerational projects for the prevention and reduction of loneliness in such a way that people (young and old) get involved?
3. Good experience from projects to prevent and reduce loneliness
4. What specific challenges exist in preventing and reducing loneliness?
5. Which 'locations' are particularly suitable for intergenerational projects to prevent and reduce loneliness?

If you have 25 participants, it is worth providing 5 tables – if the number is smaller, 4 tables will probably suffice, whereby one question is omitted. The titles can be printed out in their entirety, or reduced to key words on cards. This leaves room for spontaneously setting up another table on a topic from previous discussions of the event.

Important for this method: the room must be large enough so that the groups do not acoustically hamper one another.

2.g Aspects of facilitating an intergenerational dialogue event

The moderator structures and accompanies a learning process in groups. An open and curious attitude is particularly important and helpful in intergenerational dialogues.

In order to evaluate and use the discussions and processes of the event within the framework of the euPrevent PROFILE project, the moderator must be supported by another person who makes notes and takes photos. These materials will be useful when drawing up the report on the event.

The small group phases as well as the exchange phases at the tables in the third part of the event do not need a designated moderator. For the work at the tables, the participants can be asked to designate who will take notes, summarise, etc.

When different generations come together in groups, the moderator will help to ensure that matters are not simplified too quickly in terms of generations – neither by him/herself nor by the participants. This also includes making sure that no generation dominates the discussion, that no judgements are made but instead differences and differentiations are clearly distinguished, respected and valued.

The starting point and goal of the euPrevent PROFILE project is to examine the topic of 'loneliness in old age'. It is especially important in an intergenerational dialogue event that all participants remain open to loneliness among young people. Although ideas for measures against undesired loneliness among young people may have received less focus in the planned event, young participants should always feel they are being taken seriously and are motivated to contribute.

Despite all efforts with regard to generation-sensitive preparation, facilitation and implementation, unforeseen dynamics of their own often arise.

"In this respect, intergenerational educational processes can only be controlled to a limited extent and are highly situational and open-ended."¹²

Thus, intergenerational education work is always an open – but usually exciting and enriching – process for all participants.

¹² Antz, E.M./Franz, J./Frieters, N./ Scheunpflug, A., 2009, p. 24

3. Literature used

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Information on the implementation of this concept:

Report "Intergenerational dialogue event on loneliness" on 10.6.2022 in Düren, DE:

In German at: <https://www.bagso.de/themen/euprevent-profile/>

In English, French, Dutch at: <https://euprevent.eu/de/profile/>

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