

ALT.MACHT.NEU

Ideas for a senior citizen friendly city



RES[i]
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Interdisciplinary

Do senior citizens with their interests and demands get heard?



Introduction

Thank you for inviting the project Alt.Macht.Neu – Ideas for a senior citizen friendly city. My name is Eva Doringer, I represent the interdisciplinary team of RES[i], which initiated and implemented this project. My colleagues are Renate Kinzl, an architect, and Sabine Gruber, an urban ethnologist – I am a landscape planner.

We formed as a team in the context of a course in project management at the faculty of interdisciplinary Research and Training, IFF.

Alt.Macht.Neu focuses on the microscopic level of the topic „old age in the city“ – we worked with a small group of senior citizens in one district in Vienna.

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Intention and Background

Alt.Macht.Neu - Workshops and Activities

Results and Problem Solving Strategies



Overview of presentation

- First I will present our main objectives and give you some information about the background of the project.
- Then I will tell you about the Alt.Macht.Neu-activities: where, who, when, what...
- Finally I will point out some examples concerning problem solving strategies that were of importance for the group of elderly people we worked with.

Clarification of Terms

In the following I will refer to **older people as the everyday life-experts** since they gain knowledge from daily experiences and from being confronted with the topic of ageing in the city personally and permanently.

On the other hand there are the **professional experts** – specialists working in the field of planning, mobility or social work.

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General Objectives of Alt.Macht.Neu

_empowerment of senior citizens

_awareness (planners and decision makers)

_knowledge on working with older people, insight into qualities of urban neighbourhoods



3 main OBJECTIVES of Alt.Macht.Neu

- **empowerment** of senior citizens (by means of activation and participation)
 - develop ideas for a senior citizen friendly city together with those concerned
 - exchange information between older people
 - form a lobby for the interests of senior citizens
- raising planners and decision makers **awareness**
 - invite decision makers and trained experts to share experiences with the everyday life - experts
- **generating knowledge** on how to work with a hard to reach group in a participation process and **gaining insight** into the qualities of a residential area for the senior citizens living there

The participation process was documented with thorough protocols.

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SUCCESSFUL and HEALTHY AGEING

„Everyone wants to live long and become old, but nobody wants to be old....“ We avoid thinking of dementia, incontinence, multimorbidity... But **what is growing and being old like?** And what are the circumstances under which we do want to grow old?

If a person keeps the gains and losses in balance that come with ageing and by doing so satisfies her vital needs and pursues her aim in life, **Noack** and **Reis-Klingenspiel** speak of successful ageing.

This definition implies social skills and strategies to select and optimise adequate behaviour as well as to compensate for losses of competence. This can be one precondition for healthy ageing.

One aspect of healthy ageing is **mobility**. Personal and situative conditions influence the level of mobility. Diseases with impact on the ability to walk, see or hear lead together with inadequate open spaces to loneliness and isolation.

For healthy and successful ageing to be possible, **the social and physical environment must be adequate and practical**. Alt.Macht.Neu tries to integrate these two aspects.

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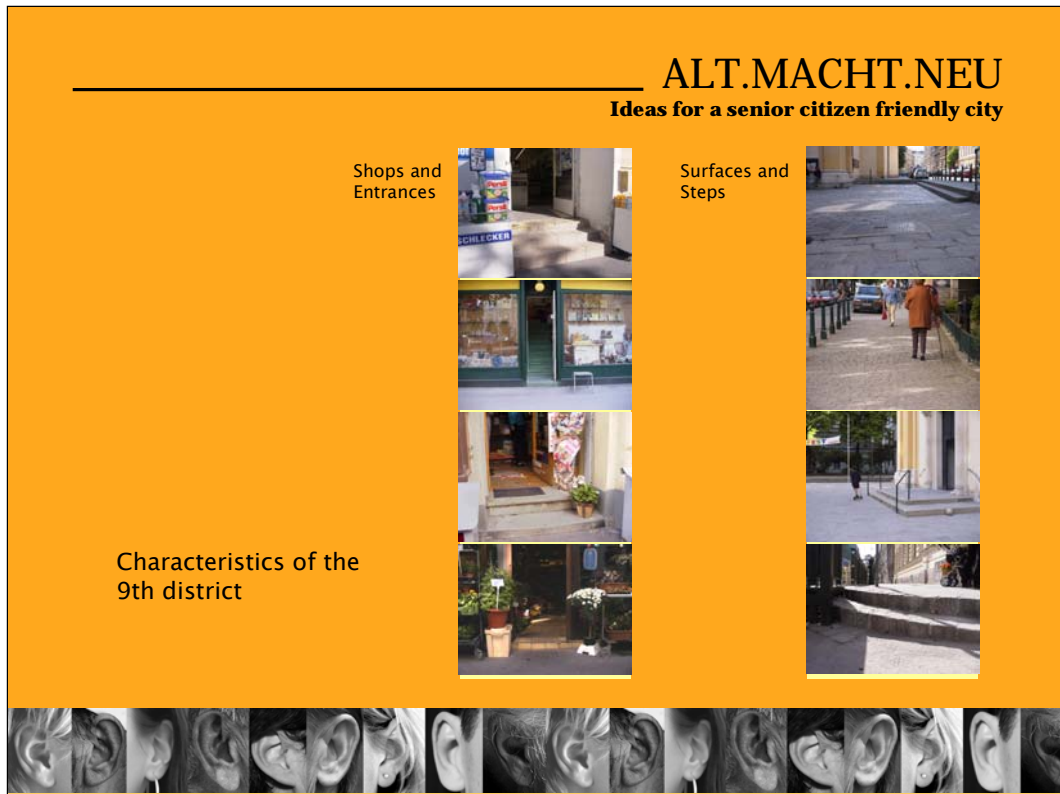
Rossau – part of the 9th district in Vienna

● the older peoples's home „Haus Rossau“

Alt.Macht.Neu – where?

The Rossau is part of the 9th district in Vienna. This high-density area was mainly built during the 19th century, its roots go much further back though.

The old people's home „Haus Rossau“ where we worked with a group of older people is situated quite close to the city centre and the Donaukanal. The canal is a recreation area within close reach. The situation of local supply is quite good – there are supermarkets, banks, pharmacies at hand.



Alt.Macht.Neu – characteristics of the 9th district

In order to give you a short impression of the living conditions in the 9th district, two aspects can be pointed out.

- Because of the topographically different levels the building had to be adjusted to street level – many shops have at least one step at the entrance.
- Since the 9th district has a long history there are some squares and buildings under protection of historical monuments. Therefore steps, cobblestone or uneven pavement are present at many places.

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The process:

workshops	April to July 2004 – eight meetings
going public	31st July 2004 – mobility team relay walk with representatives of district and municipality
	19th October 2004 – delivery of the catalogue of ideas with local politician and Local Agenda 21

The participants



The process – project design

The Participants all live at Haus Rossau.

Alt.Macht.Neu was formed by a core group of about 8 persons and by a group of about 20 interested or associated members, who would not attend the meetings continuously but who were present at the public meetings. They were informed and kept inquiring about the status-quo of AMN. For this pool the old people's home was a viable platform.

The youngest member of the group was a woman at the age of 65 – she had moved to Haus Rossau after her husband had had a slight stroke. Previously they had been living in an apartment within a stone's throw from Haus Rossau.

There were as was to be expected mainly women in the group – about only one fifth of the inhabitants of Haus Rossau are men.

One of the most active participants was a woman at the age of 86 – she had owned her own store and had always been very self-dependent. After a downfall and a longer sojourn at the hospital she could not return to live at home and had to move to the old people's home. Even though she has to use a wheelchair when outside and a rollator when moving within the building, she is full of beans.

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RES[i] gets to know the surroundings...



Workshop 1

SeniorInnen aus dem Haus Rossmann unterstützen bei RES[i]

Workshop 1 – get to know the area

On our first walk the group introduced RES[i] to their residential area.

Already in the first workshop the participants picked out an obstacles that accounts for the biggest problems for them: The steps disturb the connection to the closest recreation area, the Donaukanal. They cause detours and the feeling of insecurity when having to cross the street there.

Another problem is the closest supermarket with two steps and insufficient handrails.

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Living in the Rossau –
experiences of older people



Workshop 2



SeniorInnen aus dem Maus Rossau unterwegs mit Res[...]

Workshop 2 – discussion group

Every Friday afternoon members of the local pensioner club as well as inhabitants of the old people's home are invited to a coffee-break with different kinds of entertainment or lectures. We used this wider platform to discuss with about 50 elderly people life quality and problems they face while being outside.

This Workshop formed an interface to those still living in their private homes. This group is even harder to integrate into participation procedures, than the senior citizens who live in old people's homes, like the core group of Alt.Macht.Neu .

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Meeting outside:
Heterogeneous needs and
surroundings



Workshop 3

Workshop 3 – Meeting outside

In Workshop 3 we discussed the topic of surfaces and different patterns of mobility. Since the group of older people is very heterogeneous, the demands on adequate external space and urban design diverge strongly.

For example a person using a wheelchair is dependent on smooth surfaces or flattened slopes. In Vienna the 3 cm high curbstones at pedestrian crossings are said to be low enough to be tackled by a wheelchair and high enough for a blind person to notice it with a white cane. For visually impaired persons this little step can be a dangerous trap, since it is almost invisible.

Other „insecurity-factors“ discussed were: potholes, manhole covers or cobblestone pavement, adverse weather...

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The picnic at
Brigittenauer Lände

Workshop 4

SeniorInnen aus dem Haus Rossau unterwegs mit Alt.Macht.Neu

Workshop 4 – picnic at the Brigittenauer Lände

For our picnic we went to the recreation area at Donaukanal where there are tables with benches attached.

We happened to evaluate a table-bench-combination, a piece of urban furniture that can be found in almost every bigger park in Vienna. We found out that they are far from usable for older people. In order to sit around the table facing each other you would have to climb over the attached benches, which is almost impossible for an older person.

For most of the Alt.Macht.Neu-participants this picnic had been the first since childhood – they simply had not assumed it would be possible. We took the opportunity to discuss possibilities in the use of public space according to one's own interests. For the participants of Alt.Macht.Neu it was not self-evident to be able to claim a piece of public space for a certain amount of time and for a special purpose – like a picnic.

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Workshop 5-7

Senioflamen aus dem 1. bis 10. Stockwerk am Haus

Workshop 5 – working on ideas


During the following three workshops we collected all ideas that had come up and worked on an action plan. We intended to invite local politicians and municipal representatives to present the group's results.

In the course of those meetings we understood some principles when working with a marginalised group. Not only are they rather hard to reach, they have also certain special needs that have to be taken into consideration. Two of the women we used to pick up from their rooms and accompany them to the workshop. When going for a walk we organised assistance to help with the wheelchairs so they would as well have the chance to join the group.


One woman could hardly follow the discussion since she was almost deaf in one ear – she then faced us with the sound ear and clearly enjoyed all the meetings.

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Invitation for a walk:
everyday life-experts
and trained experts
exchange experiences
and opinions



Going public 1



Going public: mobility team relay walk

On the mobility walk everyday life experts and trained experts exchanged experiences and opinions. About 30 senior citizens living in Haus Rossau and about 25 guests from the municipality, local commissions or interested neighbours participated in the event.

In the relay walk different „mobility teams“ started from Haus Rossau, crossed two streets and reached the goal at the problematic steps in Seegasse. The mixed teams consisted of elderly people and guests.

Each team could focus on a different „mobility type“: we had the wheelchair team, the Rollator team and there was the team with walking sticks and crutches...

The guests were surprised about how different experiences can be. One woman told us that she noticed a curbstone which simply had “not been there” when she had rushed along this street before.

Another example: With a Rollator (or like some call it “Mercedes Benz“) you do feel that the pavement is sloping towards the street for drainage – and it can be quite strenuous to hold the rollator.

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Addressing the local politicians



Going public 2



SeniorInnen aus dem Haus Rossau unterwegs mit Res[]

Presentation to local politicians

With the second public event the project AMN as it was designed ended. The group of senior citizens delivered the catalogue of ideas to the local politicians.

The group members on the other hand were quite proud that there came representatives from the municipality who were interested in their problems! They never would have believed it and quite appreciated it to be in the centre of attention.

But since then Alt.Macht.Neu continued to grow.

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Outcome

_alteration of the steps in Seegasse

_group of senior citizens continues within the Local Agenda



Outcome

1. Alteration of the steps in the Seegasse – one barrier is going to be removed

As one result of going public the municipal planning departments in co-operation with the district are currently preparing an alteration of the problematic steps in the Seegasse. This problem was the most urgent to the group so we all are very happy about the group's success. An improvement of the immediate surroundings within the near future is to be expected.

2. Continuing in a Local Agenda Group

The Local Agenda is quite active in the 9th district and was interested to carry on with this already activated group of senior citizens. Currently the group is working on the topic of „barrier free shops“.

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Expertise - Contents

Tips on activation and participation of older people

Solutions for Problem Solving

- social aspects (support for self-determination)
- physical aspects (design of external space)

Verification of Assumptions

- participation ...enhances independence.
- ...trains skills.
- ...supports (Re-)Mobilisation and prevention of diseases.

Contracting Authority: Bereichsleitung für Gesundheitsplanung und Finanzmanagement
der Stadt Wien - WHO-Project „Vienna Healthy City“



Expertise - contents

Based on the intensive documentation we worked out an expertise, contracting authority was one department of the municipality of Vienna.

In this paper you can find...

1. Tips on activation and participation of older people
2. Solutions for problem solving – those we observed and those we developed together with the participants
3. Verification of assumptions

The expertise is available in German as pdf-format. When interested please contact RES[!]¹ at: resi_horcht_raum@yahoo.de.

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Physical and social requirements for...

 ... **Shopping** – „I like to choose my apple myself“

 ... **Use of Public Space** – „is it possible to...?“



Results and approaches to problem solving

The Alt.Macht.Neu-group showed us that the social and physical requirements complement each other in daily life.

Shopping – „I like to choose my apple myself“

A crucial topic since it has much to do with autonomy and self determination. As one woman in our group put it: I want to choose my apple myself“.

- Ramps, handrails, lightweight or automatic doors, legible and big price tags are physically adjustable features to enable shopping for old people.
- Accompaniment and support, the choice of certain barrier-free shops or help from a salesperson are the strategies that the participants of Alt.Macht.Neu use. These strategies compensate some of the impediments.

Use of Public Space – „is it possible to...?“

The configuration of urban space and the design of urban furniture are influencing our behaviour.

- The availability or the lack of public toilets, shady benches, non-slippery surfaces determine the usability of public space for different user groups.
- Mental barriers like the discontinuity of paths, the necessity of detours and other insecurity factors intimidate older people – they choose rather not to go out at all.

As an example take the table with benches attached, we had been using during our picnic: A woman told us about a group of cardplayers (older men) that she had noticed in one park. They had been meeting on a regular base there. When the park was being restructured and renovated the tables were substituted by the tables-with-benches-attached. From then on the woman never saw the cardplayers there again – the new tables were simply not usable for them.

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Thank you for listening



To what the project boils down to are two main factors, which had been two principles of Alt.Macht.Neu:

-There has to be **a cause** to go outside instead of mental barriers that prevent from being mobile. Barriers can even be prejudice or vanity („I do not want to be seen with a rollator“) or others.

- There has to be **support** for the different personal strategies of coping with limitations.

The most fascinating aspect for me was the expertise the Alt.Macht.Neu-group had on their neighbourhood and on coping with obstacles. Older people are indeed harder to reach and to integrate. But once involved in a participation process they can make immense contributions to it.

Thank you.