

# AGE INCLUDED

ON MUSIC,  
GENERATIONS,  
DIVERSITY,  
AND FREEDOM

**SWP**

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# INTRODUCTION

# 1. We Are All Included

Ger Tielen

## Age Segregation

Age segregation seems to be hard to eradicate. The Grimm Brothers' fairy tale "The Old Man and his Grandson" illustrated the predicament of people who have grown old and vulnerable:

*There was once a very old man, whose eyes had become dim, his ears dull of hearing, his knees trembled, and when he sat at the table he could hardly hold the spoon, and spilt the broth upon the table-cloth or let it run out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife were disgusted at this, so the old grandfather at last had to sit in the corner behind the stove. They gave him his food, and not even enough of it, in a wooden bowl so that he would not break the earthenware. One day, the little grandson of four years old began to gather together some bits of wood upon the ground. "What are you doing there?" asked the father. "I am making a little trough," answered the child, "for father and mother to eat out of when I am big." The man and his wife looked at each other, and deeply ashamed, they took the old grandfather back to the table, and henceforth always let him eat with them, and likewise said nothing if he did spill a little of anything.*

Age segregation took on an institutional dimension in the care of older people.

In spite of the best intentions, with the expansion of the welfare state, age segregation took on an institutional dimension in the care of older people. In 1990, in the Netherlands, seven per cent of the population over 65 lived in an old people's home or care centre. Living in these facilities may not be as extreme as in the "no kids allowed" Suncities into which well-to-do older people withdraw in the USA, but nonetheless, it can be regarded as a mild form of segregation. Only now that the institutionalisation of so many older people has become too big a financial burden, do we enter a new phase. Currently, elderly people are encouraged to remain living in their own homes with the support of family, friends, and neighbours in the local community.

The oscillation between segregation and integration can also be seen in other sectors. In the 1980s, large numbers of people over 55 exited the labour market, assisted by various early-retirement schemes. This accounted both for jobs in businesses and governmental institutions. The percentage of 55- to 64-year-old men in paid employment decreased during that period from 80 to 27 percent in 1993. The rationale was that older people would make way for the younger generation for whom job opportunities were bleak. Such substitution is also a form of segregation. Moreover, not only were the retirement schemes in vain, the younger generation still faced unemployment, and by the end of the century, it had become clear that these schemes were too expensive to keep up. The introduction of the Anti-Age-Discrimination Act of 2004, the raising of the retirement age to 67, and the introduction of diversity policies for businesses resulted in an increase in the number of older people in paid employment to almost 70 per cent of 55- to 64-year-old men. That is what I call a great act of integration.

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A similar swing from segregation to integration is discernible in the Dutch media. In the 1980s, older people began to disappear from the television screen, and there was less and less space for older people in the press, fashion, and commercials. This can be interpreted as a direct outcome of the generational conflicts of the 1960s: the baby boomers, who were by then in charge, were fixated on remaining young and dynamic. Older models, actors, and above all, actresses were put out of work. Here too, the turn of the century signalled the beginning of a new phase. Although the faces and voices of older people are increasingly seen and heard in the media, simultaneously a new form of segregation emerges. PLUS magazine and broadcasting corporation Omroep MAX, both catering specifically to the older generation, are highly successful in the Netherlands. MAX' programmes have even replaced Sesame Street at the hour and broadcasting channel Dutch children have been watching it for decades.

This brief account tells us that the oscillation between segregation and integration is apparently unlikely to reach a permanent equilibrium. Where some forms of segregation disappear, others emerge. These developments express a strong financial motivation to fight age segregation. But surely, there are more pressing reasons to eradicate it. As a society, we need to work continuously toward the prevention of age discrimination and other forms of discrimination in all societal domains. We should strive for a permanent dialogue and collaboration between people of all different generations in social, cultural, and political organisations and institutions. Why? Because of societal urgencies and because of its positive outcomes. There is a need to stimulate relations between generations, because generational and historical awareness enables people to invest in each other.

Specifically in a time in which our government hands over its responsibility for care, welfare, and the social domain to citizens, reciprocity is key.

### **Generations and Diversity**

There are several examples of intergenerational approaches that yield positive outcomes. Experiences with diversity management in business show that intergenerational (and intercultural) collaboration improves productivity. Generations differ from one another in the possibilities offered by the times in which they grew up. The media, music, and technologies of an era define the experience of a generation, in addition to the shifting parental educational norms. Social work based on such generational awareness unleashes—so is the experience—unexpected creative and innovative forces with many possibilities for action. Similar experiences were identified in discussions following the viewing of films with intergenerational storylines. In MusicGenerations, the intergenerational music programme that is central to this volume, the energy set free in the collaboration between older and younger talents is tremendous. Moreover, the programme shows how much the generations enjoy working together. It is simply fun!

Acknowledging age diversity is important, but does not suffice. Our societies are increasingly super-diverse and large numbers of people continue to migrate to Europe and North America. Besides working toward the prevention of age discrimination, as a society, we need to work toward the eradication of other forms of discrimination as well. We also need to realise that working from an intergenerational awareness is inevitably to work from an intercultural—super-diverse—perspective (and vice versa). It is such messages that practices such as MusicGenerations convey, and make them valuable and worth studying. Both the philosophy and the approach underpinning such practices may also carry some of the answers to questions currently raised by the arrival of large numbers of refugees and their integration into our Western societies.

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### **MusicGenerations**

MusicGenerations began as a song contest for migrant seniors, called the Euro+ Songfestival, during the celebrations of Cultural Capital of Europe in the Dutch city of Rotterdam in 2001. In subsequent years, the music programme evolved into a musical encounter between generations under the name MusicGenerations - Appendix I provides some facts and figures. This on-going programme connects young people between 14 and 25 years, and people over 50 through music, including rap, hip hop, poetry en spoken word.

The talents enter a series of master classes, workshops, and rehearsals. As a group, they work toward concerts at festivals and a range of cultural venues. The composition



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of the group is diverse in terms of age, of ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, and in musical taste. The programme carefully combines talent development, reciprocity between ages and cultures, and urgent social issues. By changing the theme of the programme periodically, the MusicGenerations' organisation responds to and expresses its involvement in political issues, such as the alienation between generations, the celebration of 70 years of freedom since World War II in 2015, or the present-day arrival of refugees.

MusicGenerations is rooted in the strong conviction that the arts can and should function as a meeting place. It understands artists as experts in dealing with uncertainty and arts projects as spaces for ambiguity. The collective lingering in such spaces may result in a deeper understanding of what otherwise remains just hype or a trend. This is a valuable contribution in a time in which digital forums, news broadcasts, and political debates are jam-packed with one-dimensional statements made by people who nonetheless all claim to know the truth. The one-dimensionality, the half-truths, and the lack of genuine dialogue fall short of dismantling the man-made complexity and hampers society from moving in more progressive directions.

### **The Background of this Volume**

In this volume, two developments converge. First, this volume compiles the insights of a one-day conference in October 2015. At this conference, the foundation behind MusicGenerations, Stichting Euro+Songfestival, shared its 15 years of experience in working with the arts, age, and diversity. The conference aimed at stimulating critical reflection on these themes and on present-day forms of exclusion. The presentations of the keynote speakers, the moderator, and the workshop leaders at the conference, provided the basis of their contributions to this volume (chapters 5, 6, 8, and 9). Their various roles at the conference are reflected in their contributions, in terms of length and style. Some contributions are more scholarly, others more column-like. Here too, we preferred difference to uniformity! See Appendix II for more information on both the authors and their role in the conference.

Second, this volume is based on the insights provided by a research project organised around MusicGenerations' 2015 programme "Talent for Freedom." Stichting Euro+Songfestival commissioned the research, which was conducted by Sandra Trienekens, who was assisted with different stages of the research by Milda Saltenyte and Britt Swartjes. Chapters 2, 4, 7 and 10 are particularly rooted in this research trajectory. In this research project, MusicGenerations' development of musical programmes was read against the backdrop of Dutch integration policy discourses and cultural policy's approach to cultural diversity in the arts. A video-analysis was made of

“Now or Never,” MusicGenerations’ previous programme, and of comparable music projects dealing with age. Additionally, fieldwork was conducted during the Talent for Freedom programme. The fieldwork consisted of observations of the rehearsals and concerts in Rotterdam and Amsterdam in spring 2015; of interviews with the MusicGenerations team and a selection of the participants; and of a questionnaire that was completed by a total of 39 participants. The audiences were approached with a “quick and dirty” version of the most significant change method.

## **The Contributions**

The contributions to this volume predominantly refer to developments in Dutch policies, political developments, and public debates. As such, this volume offers insight into the specific case of the Netherlands as a site for inclusion.

Central to Part I is the question of how art, and in particular music, contributes to social and political issues around age and intergenerationality, diversity, and freedom. Starting from actual artistic practices, the questions addressed are: What art initiatives can be discerned and what do we learn from them (chapter 2)? From there, we focus on the elements in the MusicGenerations’ approach that can be more widely adapted to cultural and other interventions aimed at bridging among people from a wide range of backgrounds (chapter 4). In chapter 5, taking up the question of how the artistic approach (methodology) can be an inspiration to non-arts sectors, Marjolein Gysels addresses practices that involve people with Alzheimer’s disease. She explores how artists let the voices of these people be heard and how their voices can even become part of research into dementia. Chapter 6, the concluding chapter of this part, adopts a meta-perspective on the power of the arts. By borrowing from neurobiology, psychology, and sociology, Eltje Bos analyses the power of the arts—and specifically music—for individuals, groups, and society.

Central to Part II is the question of what inclusion entails nowadays. In chapter 7, the progressively inclusive experiences of 15 years of MusicGenerations are juxtaposed with the increasingly exclusionary discourses on “cultural diversity” in cultural and integration policies and in public debates. How to enhance both the vocabulary and our understanding of diversity in our contemporary society? In chapter 8 Zihni Özdil wonders if “mixing,” physically, and also mentally, would be an appropriate perspective for post-multicultural Dutch citizenship. He questions our inclination to assume that diversity or difference and mixing contradict each other. In chapter 9, Maurice Crul discusses how the concept of super-diversity can help advance our understanding of (theories of) assimilation and integration. Crul concludes that super-diversity theory offers an intersectional approach as a way ahead, but that the integration context too is

crucial in explaining processes of successful inclusion. Özdil and Crul offer important insights in a time in which European societies such as the Netherlands fear further fragmentation of society and polarization between societal groups. Social cohesion policy is thought able to right such wrongs. In chapter 10, by contrasting popular assumptions underpinning the concept of social cohesion to the “small realities” observable in the Music Generations’ Talent for Freedom programme, Sandra Trienekens further extends Özdil’s and Crul’s search for a post-multicultural approach to inclusion and new Dutch citizenship. How can the reality, presented by a music project such as MusicGenerations’ Talent for Freedom, be an example for an inclusive society?

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The volume concludes with the implications for policy, funding, and education, e.g., social work. What do the different perspectives presented in this volume articulate with regard to how policy and funding programmes are set up and how we can best teach our students intergenerational and post-multicultural awareness?