

## “Proactive Ageing – Older People Help to Change the Future of the Baltic Sea Region”

Final Conference of the “Best Agers” project

21 November 2012, Kiel/Germany

After three years of intense transnational cooperation, the INTERREG-IV-B project „Best Agers“ held its Final Conference at the premises of the Wirtschaftsakademie Schleswig-Holstein (Academy of Economics Schleswig-Holstein) in Kiel, Germany. On 21 November 2012, the nineteen partners of the Baltic Sea Region project presented manifold approaches how to deal with ageing workforces in a proactive manner.

The night before the conference had already witnessed a special event: The premiere of the documentary film „Best Agers - Meeting Demographic Change“ (watch the film [here](#)) took place at a local cinema in Kiel. The documentary portraits four “best agers” from Latvia, Sweden, Denmark and Germany who, for various reasons, decided to remain economically active at an advanced age (>60). After this introduction to the content and aim of the project work, the approximately 80 guests used the opportunity to discuss lively with two of the protagonists and members of the film team who attended the screening.



At the documentary film premiere

The Final Conference itself was opened on 21 November by Managing Director DR. DETLEF REEKER on behalf of the Lead Partner of the “Best Agers” project, the Academy of Economics Schleswig-Holstein. His welcoming words were followed by WOLFGANG RÖTTGERS, City Councillor for Finances, Cultural and Civic Affairs in the City of Kiel, who as head of the personnel department of the City of Kiel acknowledged the need for an age-sensitive HR management. DR. KAARINA WILLIAMS of the Ministry for Justice, Culture and European Affairs, who serves also as Head of the German Subcommittee and Member of the Monitoring Committee of the Baltic Sea Region Programme highlighted the awareness raising and networking activities of the project partnership and expressed her support for the project’s application for an extension stage under the title “Best Agers Lighthouses”.



Dr. Detlef Reeker (right) and Wolfgang Röttgers

HAUKE SIEMEN, on behalf of the “Best Agers” partnership and the project management team of REM · Consult, Hamburg, introduced the project to the audience and gave a short overview of the [main achievements](#) as well as planned future activities such as “Best Agers Lighthouses”. This [extension project](#) which was recently approved by the Baltic Sea Region Programme will build upon results and experiences from the Best Agers partnership. More precisely, the project aims to create lighthouse examples by helping selected companies and public organisations in the Baltic Sea Region to

implement a scientifically evaluated *age management* intervention. The aim is to demonstrate the costs and benefits of adaptation approaches to ageing workforces and address the loss of tacit knowledge through early retirement of older workers.



Prof. Dr. Jürgen Deller

In his following keynote speech “Ageing and Work in times of Demographic Change”, PROF. DR. JÜRGEN DELLER of the Institute of Strategic HR Management at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg presented results from research projects on demographic change and the implications for our future working life. He particularly stressed the enormous challenges for enterprises which call for a change of mind-sets and established working cultures among employers. Moreover, Prof. Deller highlighted the great potential and experiences of “best-aged” workers: He recommended to better utilise their specific skills and to offer more flexible work contexts, taking advantage of the concepts of workability and life-long learning. These measures, he argued, could help in attracting continued and motivated employment of older workers and thus constitute a valuable benefit for enterprises in times of demographic change.

The subsequent roundtable discussion followed Prof. Deller’s line of thought and dealt with the leading question “*How to create an environment that encourages economic activity of older people?*”

Moderator VERNER KRISTIANSEN welcomed various experts from different Baltic Sea States on the panel which engaged in a lively discussion with the conference participants.

○ JÖRAN RUBENSSON, President of the Swedish National Association of Senior Citizens, referred to experiences from the Swedish pension system which offers high incentives for continuous employment through lower taxes for those workers remaining in companies at an older age. However, he also called for an inclusion of socio-economic factors in the design of pension regulations, since workers with lower education retired earlier than those with a higher education.

○ DR. SILVIA STILLER, Research Director at the Hamburg Institute of International Economics, emphasized the greater flexibility of concepts for ageing workforces realised in Sweden and Finland. At the same time, she stressed the heterogeneity of older age groups: Whereas some people would like to work longer, others prefer to pursue more leisure-oriented activities or simply spend time with their family.



Michal Bruski (left), Annette Pauly and Jöran Rubensson

○ ANNETTE PAULY, representing the German Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth expressed her regret that political decision-making processes are sometimes too slow to allow for quick adaptation to changing realities and to help exploring more flexible employment models for Best Agers or adapting retirement regulations. Regarding the heterogeneous patterns of ageing and the need for a more differentiated image of

older people, she referred to the ministry's campaign "[Programm Altersbilder / Images of Ageing](#)".

o PROF. JÜRGEN DELLER underlined his argument for a flexibilisation of later working life which would rather reflect the reality of previous decades than adapting to the current and future demographic situation. Instruments which would allow for further earning of pension entitlements after entering official retirement age as well as more qualitative pension regulations were among the ideas he introduced to the discussion.

o MICHAL BRUSKI, Vice Director of the Regional Labour Office in Gdansk, Poland, stressed the necessity for Poland and the new Member States to institutionalise effective employment services built on the Swedish example. Both an enhanced vocational training for those already in employment as well as an improved standard in ergonomically designed working conditions would be needed in times of ageing workforces – even more so against the background of the Polish pension reform which envisages a significantly longer period of employment.



Ewa Hedkvist-Petersen (Norrbotten County Council; right) shows the Pan-Baltic Network for Regions website to an interested conference participant.

**D**uring the lunch break, the discussions continued while the conference participants had the chance to visit an exhibition of posters which presented pilot initiatives and key results of the project. A website created in

cooperation with BSSSC which aims to create a [Pan-Baltic Network of Regions interested in Age Management](#) measures for enterprises was also presented at this occasion. Further ideas were exchanged and critically evaluated by the participants. All presented posters can be downloaded at the [Best Agers website](#).

In order to accommodate the participants specific interests with regard to the manifold aspects dealt with in the Best Agers project, the afternoon offered detailed insights in two rounds of interactive workshop sessions. In these workshops, the participants discussed with experts from the project partnership and beyond why employing older workers is beneficial, how Best Agers can be supported in the process of becoming entrepreneurs or how family business succession could be organised.



Jörg Stolzenburg

**L**ast but not least, JÖRG STOLZENBURG, one of several members of the network "Mentors for Businesses in Schleswig-Holstein e.V." who were involved in project activities, gave dedicated account of the project's work from the perspective of a "best ager". He concluded his assessment of the project achievements with a call for action: The remarkable work of the previous three years should be continued in the future with even greater willingness and dedication. This, he claimed, would be an essential ingredient for creating lasting changes at the policy-level, but also at the local and regional level, where the need for applied solutions was most significant.

