



EURO
CITIES



Frankfurt's silver screen festival

Active ageing – going to the movies

At a time when ageing is usually perceived in terms of limitations and loneliness, Frankfurt is rewriting the script with a unique film festival. By showing films with positive images of active and healthy ageing, the festival is inspiring new perspectives and behaviours, promoting intergenerational dialogue and spearheading a new approach to wellbeing.

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It was really important to make it clear that this cultural activity is designed to promote participation and the health and mental wellbeing of older and also younger people - and therefore the European Silver Screen Film Festival aims to be much more than just a 'nice to have' event at the movies.

Matthias Roos, psychologist, Frankfurt Public Health Authority

Ageing is routinely portrayed as a difficult, dreary time of life, beset by restrictions and struggles - if it is acknowledged at all. With Germany's population of over-60s set to grow significantly in the coming decades, finding new ways to overturn this negative image and reduce the country's healthcare burden is vital. A forecast dramatic increase in the number of people with dementia in the same timeframe adds another layer of complexity to the problem. Promoting healthier and happier ageing, and solidarity and support among communities are increasingly being seen as the cornerstones of improved quality of life.

In 2010 Matthias Roos, a psychologist from Frankfurt's public health department, and Dr Michael Doh, a University of Heidelberg gerontologist, were discussing this challenge. Out of the blue, their shared love of the cinema came up. As a popular feature of elderly people's culture and heritage, could the cinema play a part in enhancing their lives now? The duo decided it could: by activating fond memories of the cinema from their youth and providing examples of dealing with the challenges, choices and opportunities of ageing. They also realised cinema is the perfect platform for bringing older and younger generations together, to appreciate and learn from each other and strengthen community bonds.

cities in action

November 2018

where: Frankfurt, Germany
what: participation
when: 2010 - ongoing

Healthcare tool

The two partners developed their idea for the 'Silver Screen - European Intergenerational Film Festival' and took their proposal to Frankfurt's public health authority. They were convinced that it had the potential to positively impact the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the elderly. They knew, however, that using a cultural activity as a healthcare tool was a novel concept that might be met with incomprehension. Fortunately, the festival found favour with both the authority and key politicians.

Founded by the public health authority of Frankfurt and the University of Heidelberg, which together contributed €10,000, the first festival took place over four days in the two cities. People over 50 and youngsters were invited to their local cinema for a welcome coffee and conversation followed by screenings of films selected for their portrayal of inspiring new images of active and healthy ageing. After this, question and answer sessions gave the audience a chance to hear from special guests ranging from directors and actors to film experts and local health promotion specialists. Tickets cost €6, less than usual cinema prices, with the first and final festival screenings being free.

Partner support

The Silver Screen Festival archive focuses on films and documentaries with older people at the heart of the plot. Its 80 films range in subject matter from coping with illness to falling in love in later life, discovering new horizons by travelling and learning and becoming more involved in society, politics and local issues. Above all, the films, sourced from across Europe, are chosen for their ability to inspire, touch and prompt new outlooks and the sharing of experiences.

Over the years, the festival's two founders have established partnerships to expand its scale and impact. The association for demographic change of the Rhine-Neckar region contributed funds of €50,000, promoted the festival to its 200-strong membership of towns and villages and produced customisable templates for leaflets and posters that can be downloaded from the festival website. The festival also holds a special annual screening of winning entries from the German Generations film awards, which sponsors short films made by teams of old and young people. Winning the 'German senior citizens' award' from the Robert Bosch foundation in 2013 gave the festival another valuable boost to both its funding and profile.



I think it is important to see different ways of getting old and it's nice to invite people to watch a film together. It's easy and enjoyable and with the spoken word and the pictures it stays in your mind and gives you food for thought - that's the power of movies.

**Astrid van Ketel, health & wellbeing adviser,
Public Health Service, founder Silver Screen
Film Festival, Amsterdam**

Life stories

Today, citizens in over 70 cities and villages across Germany are being encouraged to leave their homes and socialise at festival screenings, helping the fight against social exclusion and loneliness. The number of venues has dramatically increased too following the decision to hold screenings not only in cinemas, which can be expensive, but also in village halls, schools and churches. This greater accessibility is enabled by local organisers from neighbourhood groups, carers' organisations, charities and social enterprises. Spin-off events have emerged too. These include storytelling afternoons where someone whose own experience mirrors the topic of a screened film shares their life story.

The founders' vision of spreading the festival concept beyond Germany and creating a European Silver Screen Festival network is starting to become reality. The concept has spread following a 2015 workshop in Frankfurt, CINAGE - European Cinema for Active Ageing, to which senior citizens and decision makers from all over Europe were invited. It has already arrived in the Netherlands and Portugal and is due to make its debut in the UK soon. In the midst of this international growth the founders, who still manage the project alongside their day jobs, have two goals closer to home: to employ a member of staff, and to make more German screenings free of charge in support of the EU's commitment to social inclusion and accessibility.

