Individual and Societal Perspectives of Aging

I. Background

To mark its 40th anniversary in March 2002, the Volkswagen Foundation introduced a program entitled **Future Issues of our Society – Analysis, Advice and Communication between Academia and Practice**. This funding initiative focuses on different aspects of the fundamental changes facing Germany, as well as its European neighbors and most other states belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development at the start of the 21st Century. The purpose is to generate socio-political learning processes combined with application-oriented research and to explore new forms of communication linking together academia, politics and the public sphere. In order to take into account the plurality of different viewpoints and to develop diverse ways of bridging the gap between academia and practitioners, this initiative will include calls for proposals relating to specific social issues. Previous calls for proposals referred to the topics Transformation of the Welfare State, Migration and Integration, as well as European Foreign and Security Policy. This is the first call for proposals with regard to the new topic **Individual and Societal Perspectives of Aging**.

II. Objectives

In practically all developed industrial countries we can observe the phenomenon of demographic change – albeit to varying extents and with different temporal dynamics – which in combination of falling birth rates and increasing life expectancy can be described as the "aging of society". The ensuing discourse quotes examples of enhanced accomplishment that first emerges in seniority, especially with regard to aesthetic and intellectual matters. When analyzing demographic change as a determinant of economic development and growth, though, it is the problematic repercussions of the aging process which come to the fore. However, an isolated examination of a single determinant in a single country is a too narrow perspective. It is also unable to throw light on the crucial issue of how an aging society can prevail in international competition.

The post Second World War baby-boom years are formative for the demographic development of the near future. These years refer to the cohorts born in the USA around 1954 and in Germany around 1964. It is these cohorts which are at the focus of the first call for proposals. For the aging members of an overall aging society share the responsibility for developing a creative response to demographic challenges. Society, for its part, must provide the necessary structures and take account of the different competencies of older persons.

In front of this backdrop the call for proposals aims at attracting applications which contribute towards the identification and promotion of the development potentials of an aging society on

both the individual as well as the societal level. Such proposals should be future-oriented and should

- combine fundamental and applied research questions and interests

- on the one hand, sensitize fundamental research for policy goals and, on the other hand, sensitize politics and practice for fundamental research

- promote cooperation between different disciplines as well as within single disciplines pursuing different avenues of research

- conduct research in international cooperation with respect to demographic changes which compare with those in Germany

- develop and provide scientific accompaniment for participatory approaches in which older persons themselves play a central role.

III. Thematic Orientation

In respect of the overriding goals of this call for proposals the applications should relate to the following thematic areas. The examples below are intended as an illustration without, however, exhaustively predetermining potential research questions or topics.

Flexibility and Diversity of the Life Course

Individual life courses in the future will bear increasingly less similarity with a "normal biography". This begs an examination of the role played by gender-specific structures, cultural differentiations in the population, regional differences and social change. What significance have the potentials for individual action and behavior patterns beyond the given social structures and developmental context conditions? What are the requisites which correspondingly arise for individual and societal action (e. g. increased efforts with respect to education, personal investment in employability, maintaining good health, private provision for old age, fostering compatibility of gainful employment and family/nursing care)?

Contexts of Aging

The process and outcome of aging is dependent on contexts which, although located on different levels, are intertwined. Particular attention should therefore be paid to the interaction between the different levels. Research projects might, for example, be embedded in the neuronal area and build bridges to contexts of the world of work, home life and public spaces. Is it possible on the microlevel to identify dependencies of cerebral processes and the use of plasticity on varying degrees of stimulating environments? To what extent do such relationships already interrelate in middle age? What stimulates the embracing of new tasks during transitions between different life phases? What support strategies are available? What role in all this is played by traditional family models and new life styles, new technologies and cultural-societal challenges of aging?

Innovation Potentials of Aging Processes

Creative answers to these questions also call for technological and above all organizational innovations. The need for this is apparent e. g. in the sector of health and nursing care, in the organization of firms and work processes as well as in continuing and further education. How are changes on the markets for goods and services connected with the labor market? Under which conditions can the market potential of current and future seniors unfold? What can organizational innovations contribute towards a senior-friendly culture and a public space in which older persons can articulate their needs and realize their capabilities? How can the interests of older persons who are no longer capable of independent decisions be heeded?

IV. Funding Possibilities

The following elements are eligible for funding within this thematic scope, either separately or in conjunction with one another:

- Research projects can be supported with personnel as well as non-personnel funding. Funds can also be provided for junior scholars and for cooperation partners located out of Germany. Professors in Germany who contribute substantially to a project funded within this initiative may apply for a six to twenty-four months research sabbatical ("research professorship").

- Workshops and summer schools for limited numbers of participants (max. 60) may also take place outside of Germany.

In the first round of this call for proposals, special attention will be paid to projects which

- integrate questions raised in different thematic areas

- focus on middle age and "early old age"

- make use of the possibilities offered by secondary and meta-analyses as well as

- clarify the ethical and methodical prerequisites for the participation of seniors in the research process.

The central disciplines from which applications should be drawn are psychology, sociology and economics. Participation from the fields of philosophy, politics and law, medicine, the health and nursing sciences may also be considered. It is expected that project teams and groups of participants may involve different approaches and disciplines.

An international participation in the research process is welcome. Equally desirable is a participation on the part of representatives of relevant fields of practice and "persons concerned", i. e. independent (non-organized) members of the middle and older generation.

In this respect, the Foundation may provide funding for international research groups as well as for the conceptual development and scientific accompaniment of pilot projects involving the participation of "persons concerned".

V. How to apply

Closing date for the submission of project proposals is June 30, 2007. For details on the preparation of an application, please see the attached **checklist**.

The closing date does not apply to **proposals for funding meetings** (workshops and summer schools). They must, however, be submitted **at least four months** before the event is to take place.

International research groups or projects involving the participation of "persons concerned" place a high demand on preparation and preliminary studies. Should these **specific forms of funding** be considered, applicants should first consult with the Foundation on the basis of an appropriate outline.

The Foundation can provide funds only to academic institutions. Applicants who are not members of universities or known research institutions should also supply details on legal status, statutes, trustees and boards, charitable status, budgeting and auditing of the respective institution. If available, applicants are required to supply an annual report or a general description of their institutions.

Applications from abroad are welcome. They should give detailed information on the cooperation with academic institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany in the proposed project or event.

The Foundation does not consider proposals which are pending at another funding institution, neither in the identical nor in a similar form.

VI. Information

Further information concerning this funding initiative can be obtained from the Volkswagen Foundation's office in Hanover.

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How to apply: Check-list

Proposals are to be oriented to the thematic areas mentioned in this Information for Applicants. They should be submitted in the English or German language **until June 30, 2007**. For processing the proposal a signed version via postal mail as well as the corresponding files via e-mail are needed. In accordance with the following structure four or five unencrypted pdf files will be required:

1) **Cover letter**

2) **Text of proposal**

- Title of the project or event

- Summary (up to 3 pages) of the objectives, substantiation and implementation of the project and Abstract (up to 12 lines or 120 words), both written in English **and** German

- Detailed description (up to 20 pages or 40,000 characters) of substantiation and objectives, expected results in relation to the present international state of the art, methods, hypotheses, if applicable

- Name of key participants, their qualification, field of activities, and previous work on the subject

- Details of interdisciplinary and international cooperation

- Details of existing contacts with practitioners and of the participation of "persons concerned"

- Implementation of the project, including working schedule and timing

- Indication of whether this or a similar application has been submitted to any other funding institution

- Intended recipient(s) of grant (institution, name, address)

3) **Budget** in Euro, to be itemized as follows: Personnel funds; recurring non-personnel expenses (e. g. travel expenses or consumables); non-recurring non-personnel expenses (e. g. equipment or literature)

4) Brief **curriculum vitae** and selected **publication list** of key participants

5) **Other enclosures** (e. g., official documents, if applicable)

Applications for the funding of **events** (workshops and summer schools) should contain **additional** information in section 2 "text of proposal" with regard to:

- Place, date and duration of the proposed event

- The scientific agenda including timetable

- The (tentative) list of speakers and participants to be invited, together with reasons for their selection and information on any acceptances (at least of those presenting papers) already received.