



DUTCH OLD MASTERS – AND MISTRESSES

Creative ageing in the Netherlands

by David Cutler

Acknowledgements

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About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation is an independent grantmaker, founded in 1969. Its purpose is to tackle discrimination and disadvantage through strengthening civil society. From 1995 when Baring Bros was bought by ING, we have been based in a Dutch bank's London offices. Although we are deeply grateful to ING for its generosity over this time, writing this publication has been a happy coincidence. Since 2010, the Foundation's arts programme has focused on older people. This has had many aspects, including funding partnerships with all four of the UK's national arts councils and the British Council. Much more about this programme can be found in a new publication *Towards the end* to be published in late 2017.

About the author

David Cutler is Director of the Baring Foundation and runs its arts programme. He has written several publications on aspects of arts and older people, including *Living national treasure – creative ageing in Japan*.

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Photo credit: Groot Letter Festival

Introduction

I became aware of the quality and range of Dutch participative work with older people through our partnership with some Dutch organisations in an initiative they led called *Lang Leve Kunst* – Long Live Arts in English. The programme which ran from 2014-2016 also included partners in Belgium and Germany. The conference and festival staged in The Hague during this partnership was one of the best I had ever been to. I wanted to know more. I would like this short publication to bring what I discovered to a wider audience in the UK. I think we have much to learn from each other.

Who is 'old'?

There is no uncontested definition of 'old age'. At the Baring Foundation we tend to fund work with people over 60, but we are especially interested in work with people over 75 when research shows there is a sharp decline in participation in the arts. While this is doubtless due to a number of factors, the increased likelihood of physical disability and cognitive impairment must play a part. Sometimes rather than concentrating on a chronological definition, the phrase 'third age' is used to mean someone who has reached state pension age and is healthy and vigorous, and 'fourth age' denotes someone experiencing physical or cognitive challenges and who might be described as frail or vulnerable. In writing this, it is acknowledged that we all hate to be reduced to a label of whatever sort.

So why focus on ageing?

Given how uncomfortable most of us are about being pigeonholed, why am I doing that? Although older people in their third age, especially those who are comfortably off, are in a good position to choose whether or not to engage with the arts, those in their fourth age are not. In the UK until the last decade this has not had a great deal of official attention, despite the fact that we are, thankfully, a rapidly ageing society. We need to concentrate on older people's right to be creative in order to address this inequality. I believe these arguments also apply to the Netherlands.

Methodology

This report is based on a small number of visits, telephone conversations and a review of some literature in English. I am sure it barely scratches the surface.

Context – ageing in paradise?

Ageing

An academic research study in 2004 claimed that the Netherlands was the best country in the world at looking after older citizens. Whether this is still true or not, there is still much to admire in the Dutch system.

The Netherlands has a population of almost 17 million and like much of the rest of Europe is defined as ageing. Sixteen per cent of the population are 65 and over and 3.9 per cent are over 80 years of age. The average life spans of men and women are



almost exactly the same as in the UK. Again in a similar pattern to the UK, although a diverse country, demographics and migration patterns mean that Black and Minority Ethnic people are less represented in older age groups – four per cent are 65 and over.

The thing that really stands out about the Netherlands in comparison to the UK is the amount that it is willing to spend on Long Term Medical Conditions and by implication also on social care. This is the highest for an OECD country at 3.7 per cent of GDP. Thirteen per cent of people aged 65 and over receive home care (against an OECD average of 4.9 per cent). Six per cent of people aged 65 and over are in residential care. For a long time residential care was provided by the voluntary sector and paid for by the state but more recently the Government has encouraged increased private sector competition. The Dutch model is one of compulsory and comprehensive health care insurance. There is specific insurance for long term conditions and social care (Wet Langdurwige Zorg). Anecdotally the few care homes I have visited in the Netherlands were larger and in better condition than many I visit in the UK. Certainly care staff are both better paid and enjoy better terms and conditions.

Even so, it has been argued that the Dutch State is moving from a highly 'welfarist' approach which it took post War (as did the UK) to a greater emphasis on personal responsibility and cuts in government financing, including for the care of the elderly.

The Netherlands is also well known for its innovations in social care. Probably the most famous example of this is the specialist retirement village for people living with dementia called **De Hogeweyk**. This is a gated community set out like a village with a town square, supermarket, pub, café, theatre and so on, as well as twenty three houses where six or seven people live. These houses have seven distinct styles, one of which is 'cultureel' for people with an interest in theatre and cinema. These houses have distinctive décor, music and even food. There are many aspects to this model. The 250 care staff wear ordinary clothes rather than distinctive uniforms. As a whole, the model is seen as providing constant reminiscence therapy. Care staff will not correct false recollections by residents but they will truthfully state when asked that this is a care home and not a 'real village'. The cost is not dissimilar to a traditional care home at 5,000 euros per month. Residents are more active with this approach and the use of medication has been reduced.

Another Dutch innovation which has attracted a lot of attention has been by the **Humanitas** care home group, which is giving free accommodation to six university aged students in its Deventer care home. Each student lives on a unit with 26 older people. The students act as a neighbour to residents for at least 30 hours a month, in return for food and lodging. Their contribution includes transferring skills such as the use of social media and skype or even graffiti art. In general the students seem to have an invigorating effect on the community and they have a different relationship



PRA Muziektheater. Photo credit: Joris Jan Bos

with residents than the care staff.

The UK has also begun to experiment with 'shared lived projects' where students and other people are matched to adults with care needs in the community, including older people, and live rent free. Around 12,000 people in the UK are supported in this way. There is also increased interest in Britain in the co-location of other services in care homes. The nursery set up in Nightingale House in London is one such example.

More generally outside residential care there has been a great idea of interest in the Netherlands Neighbourhood Care model (Buurtzorg) started ten years ago by Jos de Blok. It has been suggested that this has reduced the costs of community care (mainly but not exclusively for older people) by up to 40 per cent. In this model community nurses act as 'health mentors' promoting healthy living and prevention as well as delivering health care. A team of 12 nurses work with 60 people. There are now 900 Buurtzorg teams in the Netherlands. Nurses are given a great deal of autonomy and rigid job boundaries are avoided.

As in the UK, loneliness among older people is recognised as a major problem. One entrepreneurial response has been to set up Granny's Finest knitting clubs! In 2011, two young men, Jip Pulles and Niek van Hengel set up a social enterprise which commissions young creatives to create designs which are then made by clubs of older people, usually in care homes. The resulting clothes are made with high quality materials and are sent with a personal card from the maker, so the purchaser can contact them. (The city of Maastricht also used the theme of fashion made by older people in the project *Let's (Ad) Dress the People*.) Another enterprising approach is taken by **SpelenderGrijs (Playful Grey)** which in seven major Dutch cities is offering to improve the quality of leisure activities in care homes by linking them to local students from school and universities, whether that is for lectures, physical activity or the arts, such as musical recitals.

Arts – policy and funding

The Netherlands has a wealth of great art organisations in all disciplines, for example, the Concertgebouw and the Nederlands Dans Theater. The strength of the Netherlands in the visual arts is especially well known, from the Golden Age of Rembrandt through to van Gogh and Mondrian and cutting edge digital arts today, displayed in a series of famous museums such as the Rijksmuseum as well as museums and galleries scattered throughout the country. In the context of this report, many people will have been moved by the image of a terminally ill 78-year old-woman being given a private view of a Rembrandt exhibition from her hospital bed. This was her final wish and was organised by a charity called the **Ambulance Wish Foundation**.

The Netherlands is known the world over for its liberal traditions. This is certainly expressed in the arts. Like the UK, the arts are funded on an 'arms length principle'. The Dutch Prime Minister in 1862 said that the Government should not be a judge of science or the arts – a principle which has been followed ever since. The approach to public subsidy of the arts feels very similar to ours in the UK. The Ministry which has responsibility for the arts is advised by a Council and distributes funds to arts organisations. It creates funding agreements or covenants with local and regional councils. There are specialist funding bodies for art forms such as dance, but the **Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie (Cultural Participation Fund)** or **FCP** has been of particular significance for arts and older people. The Fund has spearheaded the Long Live Arts (*Lang Leve Kunst*)¹ programme and other relevant programmes such as the Age Friendly Culture Cities.

1 <http://baringfoundation.org.uk/long-live-arts-ground-breaking-european-conference-on-older-people-and-cultural-participation/>

The Long Live Arts programme began in 2013 as a public-private partnership between Stichting RCOAK, the Sluylterman van Loo Fund, the National Centre for Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (LKCA), VSB Fonds and the FCP. It arose from a study published the previous year called *Kunstbeoefening met ambitie* (*Practising arts with ambition*). This concluded that older people who cultivate their artistic talents are healthier and happier.

A covenant to secure political support was signed between the Dutch Education, Culture and Science Minister, Jet Bussemaker, State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sports, Martin van Rijn, and the Association of Dutch Voluntary Effort Organisations.

The Long Live Arts partners instituted a grants programme as well as international, national and regional conferences. Two reports were published and the resulting *EU Manifesto*² was signed by 150 European cultural organisations.

² <http://baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Long-Live-Arts-manifesto-feel-the-arts.pdf>

Creative ageing by art form

MUSIC, SINGING, DANCE AND DRAMA

MusicGenerations was founded in 2001 by Connie Groot when Rotterdam was European Capital of Culture. Her intention was to make the Culture Capital programme more inclusive by using the singing talents of first generation migrant seniors. The resulting programme was called *Euro+Songfestival*. Since then the organisation has concentrated on an intergenerational and intercultural approach, bringing together recent young migrants with older people who were born in the Netherlands. The repertoire is varied and includes rap and hip hop. A series of master classes, workshops and rehearsals lead to public performances throughout the Netherlands and beyond. Since 2001, the group has worked with over 2,000



people. Musicians are drawn from music academies in a number of cities.

Care and Culture³ was begun in 2012 by 'serial social entrepreneur', Margreet Melman. Using a professional choir master and musicians, Care and Culture creates a bespoke musical programme in a care home or day centre called the *Care&Culture Choir*. The costs of a programme over seven weeks will be in the region of 5,000 euros. It is an intergenerational project and great care is taken supporting a class of primary school children over a term leading up to a show involving family and friends. This is described as being a valuable term of music tuition for the children. There is always a magic between these generations in any country. In one performance I saw what could only be described as a ten-year-old boy serenading a resident he had struck up a special bond with.



Photo credit: Care and Culture

3 <http://careculture.nl/en/>

A newer programme is called *HuidHonger* which might be described as ‘Skin Hunger’. It is described as being about loving care, intimacy and the importance of touch. A dance show has been created in five care homes.

Act Your Age was a major EU collaborative project on dance and older people and the **Dutch Dance Festival** represented the Netherlands. It created a series of projects led by choreographer Peggy Olislaegers including bringing retired dancers back to the stage and workshops in care homes. *(Old)Fashioned* combined fashion and dance with performance by people aged 70 and over.

Grey Vibes is a project of the Theaterlab Foundation mainly operating in Amsterdam and The Hague. It started life as a dance initiative for people aged 55 and over and winningly describes its approach as ‘with a theatrical wink we dance like today’s youth’, which extends to their choice of repertoire. The company runs termly classes, summer schools and stages performances. It has expanded to include singing and theatre work.

The mission of **Dance Connects** in Amsterdam is to get people dancing who normally feel excluded and to build social cohesion as a result. Their latest programme is for people aged 60 and over. The programme starts with ten weekly modern dance classes led by a professional. These are followed by 15 rehearsals with live music ending in a performance.

PRA Muziektheater is run by artistic director Monique Masselink in collaboration with dancers Andrea Beugger and Dries van der Post. They have created two relevant dance projects and performed in around 75 care homes. ‘These performances create an encounter between generations, backgrounds and environments.’

Look Into My Eyes starts with material created in two separate two day workshops, one for care home residents and one for primary school children. On the third day both generations come together to practise and then perform a piece. Part of the purpose of the piece is to acknowledge ‘Skin Hunger’ – that many older people will only be touched in clinical ways rather than tenderly. PRA Muziektheater writes, ‘we sometimes forget that the elderly still have desires. They want to be touched and embraced. An elderly woman from a closed section in a care home in Zeist had not spoken for months... after our project she talked for two days about her experience and the dance performance. Her family asked – what kind of project is that? ... a miracle happened’. So far the piece has been performed in over 20 care homes.

Subsequently *Simple Desires* has been created as a collaboration with dancing programmes in Codarts, Artez Fontys and the High School for the Arts in Amsterdam. The piece explores themes of desire and courage and brings together dance students with local active seniors and professional dancers and musicians with care home residents.

Monique Masselink writes about the projects: 'the impact on the elderly residents is enormous because it goes beyond language. It is abstract but so clearly felt. Often people experience difficulties at the end of their life, such as loneliness and all the other feelings that are hard to express. They cannot find the words. That is a burden and a lot of people of that generation are not used to talking about feelings. Through dance and performance they get a shape, a form – they experience less loneliness and more togetherness'.

Vitalis, a very large care home provider with 45,000 residents in 20 locations, has a wide ranging and rich arts programme which includes a project called 'What Now?' which culminates in a theatre piece in a care home called *Levensfeest*. Director Maddy Kok brought together residents with older people living in the community in Eindhoven and school students, with the aim of different generations being 'curious about each other'. The same care home group streamed a live performance of *Carmen* from a local theatre into their homes. The red carpet was rolled out, a bar installed and all residents got a programme to create a sense of occasion.

Stichting Liesje Doet in their theatre project *Oudstanding* have wanted to show that older people can have a sense of humour! Working with a diverse group of older people, stand-up comedy routines are created using their life stories. On a more serious note, **Roze Rimpels** has investigated the experience of older Dutch LGBT people in coming out in a theatre piece called *Oudkast*. This is accompanied by a travelling exhibition of photographs, objects and texts of stories.

LITERATURE AND SPOKEN WORD

Vitalis, and a literary production agency **Wintertuin**, which publishes books as well as running a number of literary festivals, have joined forces for a programme called *Platform for the Elderly and their Stories*. The programme is led by the Maaik Mul, Arts Coordinator, a dedicated post at Vitalis, and Noortje Kessels at Wintertuin.

The programme has a number of components. Called *The House of Stories*, creative writing classes take place over a year with residents. The programme's strapline is 'Prose instead of Prozac'. This is seen as a talent development initiative for writers in their 80s and over. They are given younger mentors who are experienced published writers. Great attention is paid to stimulating memories, using photographs, objects and even smells. The work takes place in a specially staged room to create a pre-war living room. The stories are published in a printed volume, as well as a version online. Podcasts are also made of the stories. Care is taken to present this well and the authors are professionally photographed in the same way as a commercially published writer would be. They are also given training in how to present their



Vitalis. Photo credit: Marcel de Buck

writings and stories to an audience.

Another component is the cleverly titled *Large Type Festival* (Groot Letter Festival). There is no obvious equivalent as yet in the UK. There have been two editions of the festival in care homes in Eindhoven and the next edition is planned for 2019 in Rotterdam. Famous writers spend the day at the care home performing for the same kind of glamorous literary festival you might find anywhere in the Netherlands. Music and other entertainments are also on offer. The festival is intergenerational, with a number of young children participating. The programmes were amazingly diverse. As well as readings, there were sessions where participants could imagine different ways of being married for a day, with a local registrar to officiate, temporary literary tattoos, and in the cultural pharmacy literary advisers in white coats wearing stethoscopes wrote you a prescription for your literary ailments.



Groot Letter Festival. Photo credit: Vincent van den Hoogen

Another initiative has been *Q and A with the Grey*. Here older people set up their stall at a literary festival and people can come and ask them any questions they like about getting older – a little like the Living Library initiative in the UK and elsewhere.

Finally, the *Writer in the House* programme places writers literally in residence in a care home for a month (rather than say weekly workshops, which are often referred to as residencies). Writers Willem Claassen and Maartje Wortel both stayed a few weeks in a nursing home. Maartje wrote in the newspaper, *Trouw*: 'The longer I stay at home, the more I find out that the elderly are almost no different from my peers'.

VISUAL ARTS AND MUSEUMS

The **Van Gogh Museum** has been leading a collaboration for several years called *Kunst Maakt de Mens – ouderen ontmoeten Van Gogh* (Arts Makes Man – older people meet Van Gogh). This draws inspiration from the life and art of van Gogh to run workshops in care homes led by a professional artist. In 2016, 1,000 older people participated in six different areas of the country with a link to van Gogh's life.

A research study on the impact of two years of the programme has been published.

The **SMAAK Foundation** in Amersfoort was established in 2015 to champion creative ageing. SMAAK has worked in collaboration with Gallery Oldham, one of the first galleries in the UK to become dementia-friendly. One of the main projects for the Foundation has been setting up *Pop Up Museums*⁴. The Museum is curated entirely by older people to a new theme each year. There are ten older guest curators who make the selection. The theme for 2017 was abstract art with a strand of work called 'art against loneliness' where ten artists sent weekly postcards to people in care homes after forming a relationship with ten residents. Accompanying research takes place into the 'taste' of older people in the arts. The Foundation also engages closely with relevant professionals, such as care home managers.

Museum for 1 Day (MV1D)⁵ takes museum collections into care homes. It was established in 2015 by Angela Manders and Marlies Juffermans. The essence of a good museum is that objects are stimulating to the imagination, reflection and the senses. In this instance, they also provide residents with the opportunity to recognise and reminisce, as well as exposing them to the new.

MV1D works with two groups of people:

- frail older people who can no longer visit a museum
- active older people who act as ambassadors and storytellers, giving them a welcome opportunity to volunteer and contribute, rather than just being recipients.

The volunteers receive training both regarding a particular collection and their presentational skills. It is important to involve everyone in a dialogue about the objects and to recognise the physical and cognitive abilities of the care home residents.

And finally, the ever creative **Vitalis** group sends around a mobile studio to park in a care home garden for six weeks. This is called the *Kunstblok*. The artists accompanying the *Kunstblok* are mainly visual artists and stay with residents producing work with them over a six week period.

⁴ For a case study of Gallery Oldham's work, see *The role of local authorities and creative ageing*, Baring Foundation, 2017.

⁵ See: <http://www.museumvooreendag.nl/english.html>

Cross-cutting approaches

MULTI-ART FORM

The **Foundation for Care in the Arts** (Stichting Zorg in der Kunst) was founded in 2008 by artist and cultural entrepreneur, Vera Boos. The experiences of her family in the residential care system inspired her to create a dedicated arts organisation to increase the use of the arts in care homes. Since then around 40 art projects have been delivered.

Almost half of these have been through Zona's Kiosk. The 'kiosk' is a physical object which travels like a caravan, arriving in a care home along with up to 16 artists across a range of participatory/interactive art forms including the visual arts, dance, film and theatre. Over a period of weeks, the artists work with the residents to create unique works of art and performances to suit each care home. The kiosk will have different modules such as taste, smells, touch and play. It also functions online with a menu of options for care homes.

The essence of *A Table of Four* is that active older people are working with vulnerable older people. The active older volunteers are taught new techniques such as interviewing or the use of games in working with residents. Over the years the Foundation has undertaken many other projects such as *Expedition SNOES*, in effect immersive theatre where visitors go on safaris and expeditions through the care home created by artists. A TANDEM artists' exchange with Equal Arts in Gateshead in the UK resulted in the *NowHere* arts⁶ and dementia project and the transfer of the *Henpower* project⁷ to the Netherlands from the UK.

Another specialist arts organisation focused on older people is **Fit ART Foundation**. Formed in 2014 by two artists, Anita Kunst and Tineke Posthumus, Fit ART is concerned with making quality art projects with older people using professional artists. Serving the areas of Lochem and Zutphen, recent examples of their diverse work include making a film and a radio play, as well as arts classes and choirs in care homes.

Arts centres can provide a splendid focus for creative ageing programmes and this

⁶ <https://www.equalarts.org.uk/projects/tandem-project-nowhere>

⁷ <https://www.equalarts.org.uk/our-work/henpower>

is definitely the case for **Gruitpoort** in Doetinchem. The centre includes a theatre and a cinema. It has embraced the Long Live Arts programme as an opportunity to broaden its appeal to older people working with a number of local partners. This has resulted in a multi-pronged programme going to 30 locations, based around training over 100 volunteers and involving local school students. Projects have included singing in care homes and the 'telephone reading service' giving live readings straight to your armchair.

Festivals are also a way of bringing attention to creative ageing by working across art forms. The province of Drenthe now celebrates *Gekleurd Grijs* (Coloured Grey) across April. A series of events are held in galleries, museums, community centres and care homes, involving a variety of organisations. Two artists in residence were commissioned to work with older people. In one case this resulted in a dance piece created with residents in a care home. In a similar way, **Bij Vridag**, a performance venue and arts education centre in Groningen, holds *Kunst Op Stee* which also runs through April.



Photo credit: Zona's Kiosk Arts in Care

AGE FRIENDLY CULTURE CITIES

The Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie (FCP) has set up a new funding programme to incentivise **Age Friendly Culture Cities**. The programme is running between 2017 and 2020 and works with municipalities and cultural institutions to ensure that active cultural participation by older people is a sustainable part of local cultural and welfare policy. There are three funding rounds, with each edition awarding grants to five to seven cities. An application is made where the city embeds a creative ageing project by an arts organisation within a broader plan of action. The FCP will award 40k Euros over two years which must be matched by the city. A network of organisations is created by the arts organisations drawing in welfare and older people's services as well as the arts. Funding is available for city events and networking between cities.

An additional element is that a panel of judges – chaired by Hedy D'Ancona, a former Dutch Minister who is renowned for her championing of older people's rights – visits all the cities. These assessment visits lead to the award of a prize of an additional 20k Euros. The first prize went to Amsterdam for the photography museum FOAM's intergenerational project *Twee Keer Kijk* (Twice Watched). Older and younger residents jointly photographed and interpreted their environment leading to an exhibition.

DIGITAL ARTS

STRP is a digital arts agency based in Eindhoven, a city dominated by Phillips as an employer. STRP Senior⁸ began in 2013 and is a partnership with **Kunstroute65**, a specialist arts organisation working with older people. Kunstroute65 catalyses a wide range of arts activity with older people in Eindhoven, including for example, beginners 3D digital printing workshops for older people who are less technologically savvy. Its purpose is to combine the technical expertise of older people who have been employed in the electronics and engineering fields with the creativity of young artists. Workshops are organised with intergenerational teams taking on joint creative challenges. These are then showcased in STRP's biennial festivals.

⁸ <https://strp.nl/en/share-2/strp-senior/>

Some concluding thoughts

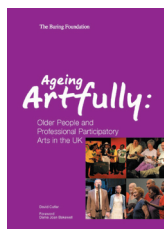
Seeing creative ageing work in the Netherlands is an uplifting experience. It is characterised by both its high quality and a deep ethical commitment by artists to working in partnership with older people. The Dutch spend more on services for older people than we do and this shows, but in other respects their approach to creative ageing is very similar to ours. This means that work is very transferable between our two countries. This has already happened on a number of occasions, for instance between Equal Arts and Stichting Zorg in der Kunst and Gallery Oldham and SMAAK. It is pleasing to see that the work of Manchester City Council on integrating and valuing culture into older people's services and lives has been an inspiration to FCP in its Age Friendly Culture Cities fund. I am sure we should keep learning from each other and hope that this short publication helps in a small way.

A recent best seller in the Netherlands has been *The Secret Diary of Henrik Groening Aged 83 and a Quarter*. It is a comic novel set in a care home. For me the protagonist is too grumpy. He needed some of the life affirming work described here.

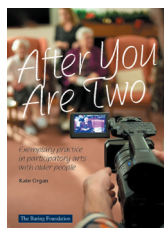


Resources on creative ageing

All resources can be found on our website at www.baringfoundation.org.uk



Ageing artfully: older people and professional participatory arts in the UK (David Cutler, 2009)



After you are two (Kate Organ, 2013)



Living national treasure: arts and older people in Japan (David Cutler, 2015)



A new form of theatre: older people's involvement in theatre and drama (Kate Organ, 2016)



West Yorkshire Playhouse Guide to Dementia Friendly Performances (2016)



Growing the creative ageing movement: international lessons for the UK (Alice Thwaite, 2017)



The role of local authorities in creative ageing (David Cutler, 2017)



Late opening: arts and older people in Scotland (Andrew Eaton-Lewis, 2017)



Creative ageing in Germany: the view from North Rhine-Westphalia (Harriet Lowe, 2017)

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