MEMORABLE

European Compendium of Dementia-Friendly Cultural Practices

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This Compendium is a publication produced within the framework of the Erasmus+ project 'Memorable' (December 2024 – May 2027), which aims to foster a dementia-friendly society. The project focuses on training volunteers, (in)formal carers, artists, and cultural stakeholders to help make cultural institutions more welcoming and accessible to people living with dementia. To inform this initiative, interviews and desk research were carried out in the partner countries—Bulgaria, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Ireland—gathering valuable insights from older individuals who shared their personal experiences.

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01

Executive Summary

This compendium looks at the role of art-based and cultural activities in improving the quality of life of people living with dementia. Drawing on findings from Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal, this publication shows how cultural participation can promote self-expression, strengthen identity and improve the social inclusion of people living with dementia.

The main findings highlight the emotional, cognitive and social benefits of participating in cultural activities. These activities offer alternative means of communication and self-expression, especially when verbal language and conventional cognitive processing decline. Participation in cultural life helps to preserve and affirm identity and creates continuity between personal history and current experiences. It also improves emotional and mental health, reduces social isolation and builds social networks.

This compendium highlights the importance of person-centred, flexible and inclusive approaches to cultural interventions. Successful cultural participation requires activities to be tailored to individual needs, preferences and abilities. Sustainable policy measures and practices are also needed, including the integration of arts and culture into health systems and cultural policy frameworks.

To reach these goals, accessible cultural spaces must be created, targeted training for cultural facilitators and care professionals must be provided, and stable financial support must be ensured.

02

Arts, culture, and dementia – creating meaningful encounters

Culture connects us. It offers joy, inspiration, and a sense of belonging—values that remain essential for people living with dementia. Artistic and cultural activities can provide moments of self-expression, strengthen identity, and open paths to participation and inclusion, even as cognitive abilities change. They also create space for shared experiences between those living with dementia, their families, carers, artists, and cultural practitioners—enriching everyone involved.

This compendium brings together insights from five European countries—Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Portugal—to explore how arts and culture can enhance the quality of life for people living with dementia. Drawing on empirical studies, expert interviews, and examples from practice, this publication highlights the powerful role of creative engagement in fostering well-being, social connection, and dignity.

The findings not only show the positive impact of artistic and cultural activities but also underscore the importance of person-centred, flexible, and inclusive approaches. People living with dementia bring with them diverse life experiences, preferences, and needs—successful cultural participation needs to honour this uniqueness and adapts accordingly.

At the same time, there are practical and organisational aspects to consider: What skills and knowledge are needed by those who accompany people living with dementia in cultural settings—be they family members, volunteers, artists, or cultural staff? What supportive structures make participation easier? What changes in mindset or policy are necessary to make cultural life truly accessible for all?

This compendium addresses these questions by providing an overview of existing challenges and learning requirements, as well as describing promising policy initiatives in the participating countries. Above all, it brings to life examples from the field—projects and ideas that show how cultural participation for people living with dementia can be creatively and successfully realised.

The following chapters are an invitation to reflect, to learn, and to shape a more inclusive and dementia-friendly cultural landscape—where everyone feels welcome and valued.

Dementia is not a specific disease. It is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of symptoms associated with a decline in memory or other cognitive abilities. Symptoms include memory loss, impaired judgement and changes in mood and behaviour. Dementia can have various causes and be associated with different diseases.

The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for 60 to 80% of cases. Symptoms usually begin with mild memory loss and progress to severe impairment. But there could be also other medical reasons. Each form of dementia has different characteristics and patterns of progression, but all lead to cognitive decline. Dementia is frequently mistakenly referred to as 'senility' or 'senile dementia', reflecting the formerly widespread misconception that cognitive decline is an inevitable consequence of ageing.



03

The importance and potential of cultural participation in dementia care

Across diverse contexts—ranging from Germany to Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Bulgaria—findings from the 'Memorable' Project and related studies reveal consistent themes regarding the emotional, cognitive, and social benefits of engaging in cultural activities. These insights not only highlight the potential for personal enrichment among those living with dementia but also point to wider societal opportunities to foster inclusion, reduce stigma, and redefine the public understanding of what it means to live with this condition.

CULTURAL PARTICIPATION AS AN AVENUE FOR CONNECTION AND EXPRESSION

A central thread emerging from the research is that cultural participation offers a valuable alternative means of communication and self-expression. As dementia progresses, verbal language and conventional forms of cognitive processing can become compromised, which in turn affects the ability to maintain social relationships and personal identity (Begley et al., 2023; Leung et al., 2021). However, the arts - be it through music, visual arts, theatre, dance, or storytelling - enable other, non-verbal channels of interaction and meaning-making. This insight, noted prominently in the German context (BMFSFJ, 2020), suggests that even when linguistic capacities decline, individuals can continue to communicate feelings, preferences, and memories through creative means.

Irish findings reinforce this perspective, with facilitators and carers alike describing moments where people living with dementia were able to engage deeply and authentically through music, poetry, or visual arts, often surprising those around them with their emotional presence and responsiveness. These moments of connection do not necessarily require prior artistic training or experience; rather, they affirm the inherent creativity and agency that remain accessible to individuals living with dementia, regardless of their cognitive status. This potential for artistic self-expression is both empowering for participants and enriching for their carers, family members, and communities (Cornejo et al., 2025; Chancellor et al., 2014).

> "Creativity is preserved in dementia – it can be seen, and this confers well-being and dignity."
>
> (Filipa Aniceto, Alzheimer Portugal expert)

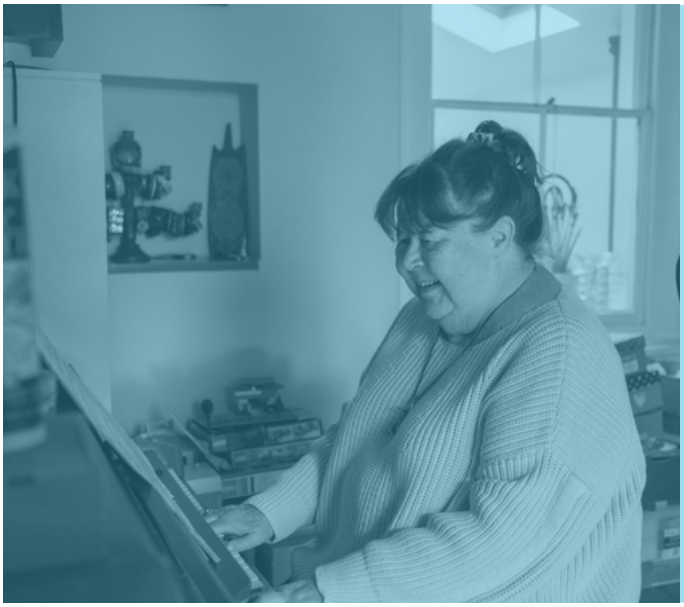
> "Just singing as a group [...] seems to be very effective for the residents themselves or the daycare participants, and if there's any family members there and if there's any staff there, and for us as well."
>
> (Musician and facilitator, male, Ireland)

WELLBEING, IDENTITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Beyond immediate forms of expression, cultural participation plays a vital role in preserving and fostering identity. Dementia often disrupts a person's sense of self, as autobiographical memory, language skills, and daily functioning become fragmented. Yet artistic activities offer ways to reclaim and reaffirm identity, both past and present.

In Ireland, music-making and songwriting projects were described as capturing the heritage and life stories of participants, thus offering continuity between personal history and present experience. Similarly, research from Bulgaria highlights how involvement in familiar cultural and spiritual practices - including traditional music, religious ceremonies, and community storytelling—enables individuals to remain connected to their cultural roots and personal values, sustaining a sense of purpose and belonging (Ilieva et al., 2025).

This function of cultural engagement as a medium of identity continuity is especially significant in dementia care, where maintaining a sense of self is critical to psychological well-being. Such activities also serve to humanise and dignify the experience of living with dementia in the eyes of others. Facilitators, carers, and researchers across countries noted that when people with dementia participate in cultural life—whether through co-creation, performance, or simply meaningful observation—they are publicly visible as contributors, not merely as passive care recipients. In this way, cultural



> "She loved music. For her, who had so many memory problems, it was very comforting to remember the lyrics of the songs... She sang, even danced sometimes, to Ravel's Bolero... We enjoyed it immensely".
>
> (Formal carer, female, Ireland)

participation operates as a tool of social inclusion, breaking down the stigma and marginalisation that so often accompany dementia diagnoses (Phillipson et al., 2019).



"He still has his people [in the choir]. He is delighted. (...) It was obvious that morning: from the moment he joined the choir, my husband was beaming. It was so beautiful."

(Informal carer of her husband, Germany)

ENHANCING EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Another common theme identified was the impact of cultural activities on emotional and mental health. Anxiety, depression, apathy, and agitation are common non-cognitive symptoms in dementia (Leung et al., 2021), and interventions that can alleviate these states are of great value in the absence of curative treatments. Evidence from multiple countries demonstrates that participation in the arts can elevate mood, reduce stress and psychological distress, and increase overall enjoyment and engagement with life. In the Netherlands, for instance, large-scale participatory studies such as 'Kunst in de Zorg' (Groot et al., 2021) revealed that older adults—including many with dementia—experienced joy, relaxation, and vitality when involved in art projects. Similar results were observed in Portuguese museum-based initiatives, where even short sessions of creative engagement led to measurable improvements in mood and well-being, regardless of dementia stage (Gomes et al., n.d.). Importantly, these emotional benefits extend beyond the individuals directly affected by dementia. Carers and family members also report enhanced relationship quality, reduced carer strain, and a renewed sense of shared pleasure when participating in cultural activities alongside their loved ones. This dual benefit underscores the relational nature of cultural participation, providing not only personal enrichment but also opportunities to nurture connection and mutual understanding within the care giving dynamic (Regier, et al., 2017).

BUILDING SOCIAL NETWORKS AND REDUCING ISOLATION

Dementia often leads to social withdrawal, isolation, and exclusion from public life. Cultural interventions, however, have been shown to counteract these tendencies by creating spaces of social interaction, mutual recognition, and community belonging. In Bulgaria, Portugal, the Netherlands and Ireland, facilitators and researchers described how group arts sessions fostered friendships, peer support, and a sense of solidarity among participants and their families. Although these activities were rare, they provided precious opportunities for socialisation, allowing people living with dementia to "feel like everyone else" and to take part in collective life on equal terms.

Inclusive cultural formats also provide opportunities to integrate people with dementia into broader societal contexts. In Germany, the importance of designing cultural offerings that are not segregated or limited to 'special' audiences was stressed. Instead, there is growing recognition that cultural programmes should be conceived with and by people living with dementia, not merely for them. Such inclusive approaches challenge the deficit-focused narratives that too often dominate dementia care, promoting instead an ethos of competence, contribution, and co-creation (BMFSFJ, 2020).

These insights resonate with similar developments in Portugal, where museum initiatives such as 'concurMiD' (a network of Portuguese museums for inclusion in the context of dementia) aim to train cultural staff to engage meaningfully with dementia participants, ensuring that public cultural spaces remain open, welcoming, and accessible to all. This vision of "dementia-friendly" culture, embedded not only in care institutions but in everyday social and civic environments, points towards a broader rethinking of community design, arts policy, and social infrastructure (Boekel et al., 2025).



"I think that we must be careful not to create with our good intentions one society for 'ill people' and another for 'healthy people'. [...] Then you create the same thing as we have done with nursing homes: inclusion within exclusion."

(Teun Toebes, healthcare innovator and care ethicist, the Netherlands)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR TAILORED INTERVENTIONS

Common factor across all contexts is the need to personalise cultural interventions. Experiences of dementia vary greatly depending on individual background, interests, stage of the disease and personality. Therefore, there is no cultural format that is equally suitable for all participants. Respondents to the 'Memorable' project emphasised that the most effective measures were those that considered personal history, cultural preferences and current functional abilities. Some people responded very strongly to music and singing, while others found meaning in visual arts, crafts, theatre or gardening. The already wide range of cultural and artistic activities offers great potential for use in this area.

In the Netherlands, the 'Movisie' report (2018) emphasises the importance of tailoring activities to participants' interests, involving professional artists and providing institutional support for such programmes. Similarly, the findings of Regier, Hodgson and Gitlin (2017) point to the crucial role of appropriate duration, cues and environmental factors in optimising participation at different stages of dementia. Such adaptation not only increases the effectiveness of cultural interventions but also affirms the dignity and personality of participants and recognises them as unique individuals with specific life stories and desires.





TOWARDS A DEMENTIA-INCLUSIVE CULTURAL FUTURE

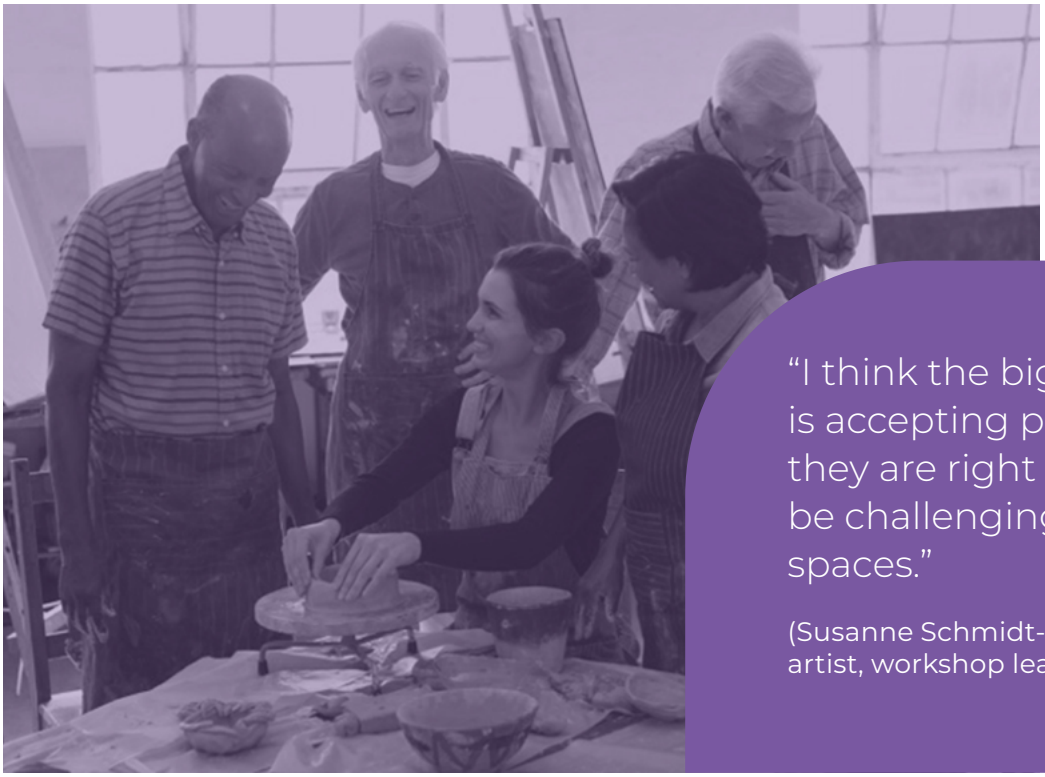
Combined, these findings illustrate the multi-dimensional value of cultural participation in dementia care. Arts and cultural activities offer more than mere diversion or entertainment; they are vehicles of expression, identity, community, and well-being. They enable individuals living with dementia to connect meaningfully with others, to sustain a sense of self, and to take active roles in society, contributions that benefit not only the individuals themselves but also their families, carers, and wider communities.

Building on these promising practices, future efforts should focus on expanding access to cultural participation. This involves embedding inclusive design into mainstream cultural institutions and ensuring that arts-based interventions are not an occasional luxury but a core component of holistic dementia care. This requires coordination between health services, cultural organisations, educational bodies, and policymakers, alongside continued research to refine and evaluate interventions.

Ultimately, the diverse experiences gathered across Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Bulgaria converge on a common insight: people living with dementia, regardless of stage or severity, retain a fundamental need and right to participate in the cultural and creative life of their communities. Supporting this participation is not merely a matter of therapeutic benefit; it is a matter of dignity, justice, and social inclusion.

04

Challenges and requirements



"I think the biggest hurdle is accepting people for who they are right now. That can be challenging in public spaces."

(Susanne Schmidt-Neubauer, counsellor, artist, workshop leader - Austria)

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, artistic and cultural activities can greatly enrich the lives of people living with dementia, offering moments of joy, connection, and self-expression. These experiences are highly valued—not only by those directly affected but also by their families, carers, and society.

However, for cultural participation to maximise its full potential, some important conditions must be met. These relate to the living circumstances of people with dementia and to the structures and approaches within cultural institutions and care settings. It is important to highlight also that different countries are at different stages when it comes to established processes and programs for the creation of dementia-friendly spaces.

LIVING SITUATION AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Opportunities for cultural participation are closely linked to individual living situations and vary accordingly. People living at home may encounter challenges such as reduced mobility, limited support from family members due to time constraints, feelings of isolation, or the impact of societal stigma (Cornejo, C. et al., 2025).



"I don't like going alone; it makes me feel more isolated."

(Person living with dementia, Bulgaria)

In residential care facilities, cultural activities are often part of organised group offers, which can make access easier. However, there is room to further enhance these activities by offering more opportunities for individualised design, personal expression, and flexibility. Staff support and training geared towards personalising cultural experiences can make a valuable difference here (Hatton, 2021).

"The range of different starting points was too wide to do justice to everyone."

(Andrea Braun, Exhibition guide, Germany, on the varying degree of illness being a challenging difficulty, Netzwerk Kultur und Demenz, 2021: 36)

As the illness progresses, cognitive changes may influence how individuals participate socially and culturally. Decisions about activities are sometimes made without involving the person living with dementia, which can unintentionally limit their sense of autonomy and self-determination. At the same time, people in their environment - friends, neighbours, or even professional carers - may feel unsure about how to engage, leading to hesitation or overprotection that can unintentionally reinforce isolation (Holzapfel et al., 2025).

Interviews confirm that many people living with dementia continue to wish for meaningful activities, social connection, and recognition of their identity. Arts and culture can make an important contribution to fulfilling these wishes. For this to happen, however, programmes must be designed to be easily accessible, clearly communicated, and relevant to individual interests and needs.



> "People don't want to be entertained; people want a meaningful life."
>
> (Teun Toebes, healthcare innovator and care ethicist, Netherlands)

PROGRAMME DESIGN, TRAINING AND EVALUATION

While there is a growing awareness of dementia in cultural and care institutions, many opportunities remain to expand knowledge, skills, and cooperation in this area. Staff in nursing and care roles, for example, may benefit from further training in supporting the emotional, communicative, and psychiatric needs of people with dementia. Likewise, cultural professionals can benefit from guidance and resources on how to design and deliver inclusive dementia-friendly experiences.

In some countries, such as Bulgaria, specific training and materials on this topic are not yet systematically integrated into basic education or continuing professional development. This presents a clear opportunity to develop new training programmes and increase awareness across sectors (Ilieva et al., 2025).

A promising approach lies in the development of flexible, person-centred and co-created programmes. People with dementia respond to artistic and cultural activities in very different ways, depending on their interests, life history, mood, and cognitive abilities. Traditional formats such as lengthy concerts or complex exhibitions may not always fit these needs. Instead, short, clearly structured, and adaptable formats offer space for individual experience and expression.

Beyond content design, structural aspects are also important, such as accessible entrances, barrier-free paths, suitable opening hours, and clearly defined roles within teams to support inclusion. Training focused on reducing stigma and improving communication can further build trust and confidence in cultural spaces, making them more inclusive and welcoming for all.

Many relatives and carers express uncertainty about whether cultural services are appropriate and beneficial for their

loved ones, often because information is incomplete or unclear. This presents an opportunity for cultural institutions to communicate more transparently and confidently about what they offer for people living with dementia.

> "One of the challenges would be institutions recognising the amount of time needed or given to training. The training course is three days. … sometimes for an organisation it's five days, depending on the number of participants. There are three days of training, and then there's another session for every staff member where they (the staff) deliver a practice session."
>
> (Programme manager, female, Ireland)

Carers and relatives play an essential dual role in participation: they often make cultural involvement possible through their support, but may also unintentionally limit it due to overprotection or uncertainty (Polden et al., 2025; Kasper et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important that cultural programmes also consider and support the needs of accompanying persons, providing guidance, reassurance, and relieving them of unnecessary responsibility (Liu et al., 2022).

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVE ATMOSPHERE

Carers and professionals report various aspects that influence how easily people with dementia can visit cultural institutions. Physical accessibility remains a key factor, features such as barrier-free toilets, elevators instead of stairs, low-stimulus environments, and helpful aids for mobility or continence greatly enhance comfort and confidence (Hatton, 2021).

> "But I do know one time that we were at a concert and [he] went to the toilet at the wrong moment. That was in a church and then he just wanted to walk back to where we were sitting. But that meant that he had to go through the whole church right in front of the conductor and luckily, he was caught by friends who saw him and who thought it would be better if he stayed with them. So yes, people are a bit unpredictable when they are at a show."
>
> (Informal carer, female, the Netherlands)

Some cultural spaces can be further improved by adjusting lighting, avoiding overwhelming sensory stimuli, and providing clear and easily understandable signage. These adjustments not only benefit

visitors with dementia but improve the environment for all guests.

A music therapist from Ireland noted that inclusion is not only about physical access but also about the atmosphere: *"Sometimes even getting people through the door is a challenge. That's not just physical access; it's also about how welcome they feel in that space."* Creating this sense of welcome requires staff awareness, sensitivity, and open-mindedness, qualities that can be encouraged and strengthened through training and positive leadership.

Transport can also play a decisive role, especially in rural areas where suitable mobility options may be limited. Mobile cultural formats and outreach activities that bring events directly into different communities or care settings are creative ways to bridge these distances (van Boekel et al., 2025). An expert emphasises in an interview in the Netherlands that cultural programmes should always be designed to be barrier-free, easily reachable, and responsive to individual needs. If outside participation is not possible, cultural experiences can be brought directly into care homes.

Volunteers and digital information platforms also have great potential to enhance access by providing orientation, guidance, and practical help. Sharing examples of good practice is essential, as prior knowledge significantly eases the organisation and success of cultural activities (van Boekel et al., 2025).



"Perhaps cultural events should be brought closer to them [...]. An effort could be made to find a venue to host a travelling exhibition that goes around the different towns of Ireland. And the same could be done with music."

(Formal carer, female, Ireland)

RESOURCES, INVESTMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Strengthening the role of cultural participation in dementia care requires commitment at every level of planning and implementation. This includes thoughtful programme design, ongoing staff development, and sustainable financial support. While this can present resource-related challenges, such investment ultimately benefits the entire institution by creating a more inclusive, responsive, and community-oriented offer (Polden et al., 2025).

The quality of cultural programmes depends on the targeted training of cultural mediators and close collaboration with care professionals and other stakeholders. Inclusive programmes should be designed to appeal to all visitors, regardless of dementia, enhancing overall accessibility. For example, libraries illustrate that basic principles of respectful communication, patience, and clarity in addressing visitors improve the experience for everyone, not only for those with dementia (Holzapfel et al., 2025).

The further development of programme formats that meet both cognitive and emotional needs remains an important goal. At present, many cultural offers still provide room for adaptation and innovation in this regard. Systematic professional development and training opportunities can ensure that cultural staff feel confident and prepared to work with diverse audiences.

Financial support is another key factor. Interview partners noted that funding structures can sometimes shape programme content, leading institutions to plan according to available budgets rather than the actual needs of people with dementia. A shift towards needs-based, stable funding can provide more room for creativity and quality. In some partner countries, such as Bulgaria, programmes for people living with dementia are still not established as a regular service and often rely on external projects or voluntary commitment (Ilieva et al., 2025).

> "Very important is tuning in to the person with dementia, aligning with their needs. What group do I have? What group am I bringing here? How far along are they? What can they do and what can't they do? Tune in to them, and not like: 'Hey, I've got something fun. Oh, what can we do with this for people with dementia?' But think the other way around. And that's still quite an issue in nursing homes, they think from their own system, not from the person with dementia."
>
> (Dick Kits, care professional and lecturer, the Netherlands)

Even when offers are free of charge, costs such as transportation or the need for an accompanying person can create obstacles. Social and economic factors may also influence access. Therefore, it is essential to recognise the value of cultural participation

in the context of dementia care and to secure appropriate financial and policy support (Saavedra et al., 2025).

Integrating cultural services into the broader system of dementia care, supported by updated policies and recognised qualifications, is crucial for long-term success.

> "For there has been a real interest in growth, which has been phenomenal over the last couple of years. COVID was transformative in that way. [...] So, for the first time ever, there was funding available beyond one month a year [...]. But now, at the moment, it's only six months. And I'm like, oh, why?"
>
> (Facilitator and programme director, female, Ireland)

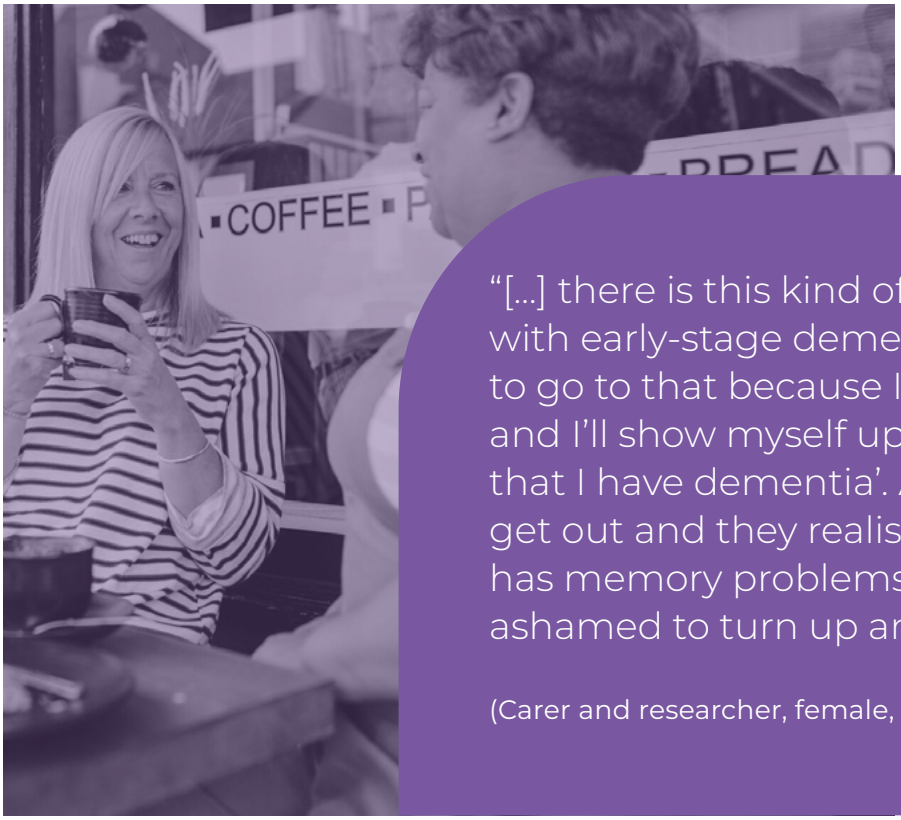
THE NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Despite these promising findings, several challenges and gaps remain. One recurring concern is the need for sustainable infrastructure and funding to support cultural interventions in dementia care. In both the Netherlands and Portugal, reports highlight that while small-scale, well-received projects do exist, they are often dependent on short-term funding or pilot status, risking discontinuation once initial support ends. To realise the full potential of arts and culture in dementia inclusion, there must be greater integration of these practices into healthcare systems, educational curricula, and cultural policy frameworks (van Boekel et al., 2025; Saavedra et al., 2025).

Additionally, as interviewees in the 'Memorable' project observed, broader public awareness and understanding of dementia remain limited in many contexts, contributing to fear, stigma, and exclusion. Cultural participation initiatives have a role not only in individual well-being but also in shifting societal narratives about ageing, memory loss, and cognitive disability. Programmes that bring people living with dementia into public cultural life whether through exhibitions, performances, or co-creative projects serve to challenge stereotypes and expand public conceptions of what living with dementia can entail.

AWARENESS, PERCEPTIONS AND EDUCATION

Public awareness and perception play a central role in whether people with dementia feel invited and encouraged to participate in cultural life. Stigma, uncertainty, and outdated ideas about dementia may lead individuals and families to withdraw from social activities, in fear of rejection or misunderstanding (Baptista, 2023; Evans-Lacko et al., 2024).



"[...] there is this kind of self-stigma. People with early-stage dementia go, 'oh, I don't want to go to that because I might not remember, and I'll show myself up and people will see that I have dementia'. And then, when they get out and they realise everyone who's there has memory problems, then they're not as ashamed to turn up and be part of that gang."

(Carer and researcher, female, Ireland)

Clear information, respectful language, and positive examples can help reshape these perceptions and open cultural spaces to all. When people with dementia are represented in public discourse as active, creative, and capable of experiencing joy and expressing themselves, their confidence in participation grows.

Carers and professionals alike expressed a wish for more opportunities to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and develop a common understanding of what dementia-friendly culture means in practice. Short training sessions or certificates provide a useful starting point, but a deeper, networked, and continuous learning processes are necessary to truly anchor this mindset in institutions (Holzapfel et al., 2025, emphasising Networks and platforms).

Stronger cooperation between culture, care, and community stakeholders is essential. Public discourse on dementia, including the way residential care, ageing, and illness are framed, needs to move towards a view of people with dementia as present, participating, and valued members of society. Only then can the "social invisibility" or so-called "social death" often associated with dementia be overcome (Brannelly, 2011; Liu et al., 2022).



SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Integrating cultural activities into routine dementia care:** Developing and implementing guidelines that include cultural activities as standard components of dementia care programmes.
- **Promoting training and continuing education for care workers:** Implementing obligatory training modules for healthcare providers and care workers on the benefits and implementation of cultural activities in dementia care.
- **Promoting inclusive and dementia-friendly cultural spaces:** Encouraging cultural institutions to develop programmes that are inclusive and open to people with dementia, avoid segregation and promote social inclusion.
- **Increasing funding and resources for cultural programmes:** Providing dedicated funding for cultural programmes to ensure sustainable financial support for ongoing and new initiatives in the field of dementia care.
- **Raising public awareness and reducing stigma:** Promoting public awareness campaigns to inform the population about the benefits of cultural participation for people with dementia and to reduce prejudice and stigma associated with this condition.

i

According to Dick Kits, the Netherlands, care professional and author, it is important to understand how the brain of a person with dementia functions: "If you know that, then you also know that you need to approach these people slowly, avoid asking difficult questions, be calm, etc. Yes, these are very simple things, but they are essential and even in nursing homes, they are sometimes overlooked."

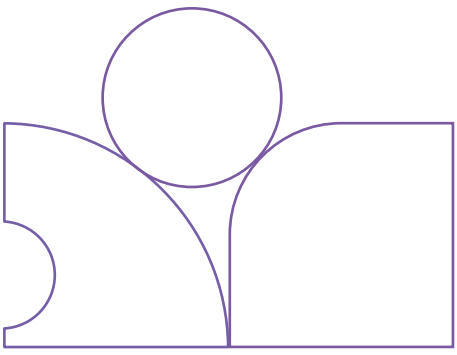
In some cases, such as the example of Bulgaria, public discourse regarding people with dementia and providing support for their social inclusion has been increasing in recent years, exemplified through the growing interest in services such as support groups for people with dementia and for their carers. However, this discourse has not yet led to the development of national or regional policies supporting dementia-friendly cultural spaces. Currently, there is no official national strategy regarding the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of people with dementia in Bulgaria.

05

Current state of dementia-friendly cultural institutions in Europe

In recent years, in response to demographic change, there has been a shift in dementia care towards a more holistic, person-centred approach. Cultural engagement plays a central role in successful social participation. The focus is on inclusive programmes that can promote participation and thus have a positive impact on the well-being and quality of life of people with dementia. Nonetheless, the availability and accessibility of such cultural offerings are still a challenge despite promising initiatives and growing awareness (Cornejo et al., 2025).

There seems to be an awareness at European level, but there are still structural deficits at national level. While public and political/stakeholder awareness has often already been raised, initiatives and impetus have often not yet been consistently implemented. Bulgaria's research and findings, for example, have shown that people with dementia are involved in cultural activities, noting there are too few programmes designed specifically for them (Ilieva et al., 2025).



> "Caregiver organisations should work closely with cultural institutions to ensure that people with dementia and their caregivers are not only welcomed but actively supported in attending events."
>
> (Carer, Bulgaria)

Meaningful participation through inclusive programmes remains a challenge for the cultural sector at the European level. However, initiatives and initial efforts at the micro level, individual cultural programmes, already point to a reflective rethink.

> "At the national level, there are few museum programmes specifically designed for people with dementia and their caregivers".
>
> (Alzheimer Portugal)

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICY LANDSCAPE

Access, participation, and engagement in cultural programmes are gaining increasing prominence as priorities across Europe. In response, national initiatives have emerged in recent years, often through the formation of hybrid policy networks. At a macro level, these initiatives are typically anchored in national strategies led by relevant government departments—such as culture (Ireland), family affairs (Germany), or health (Portugal and the Netherlands).

These strategies share common goals: to improve the quality of life for people living with dementia and their families; to strengthen collaboration between cultural institutions, care providers, and local communities; to promote accessibility and staff training; and to support the development of dementia-friendly environments. Dedicated working groups are frequently established to draft policies and legislative frameworks, setting out principles and guidelines for the implementation of dementia-inclusive cultural strategies.

European examples:

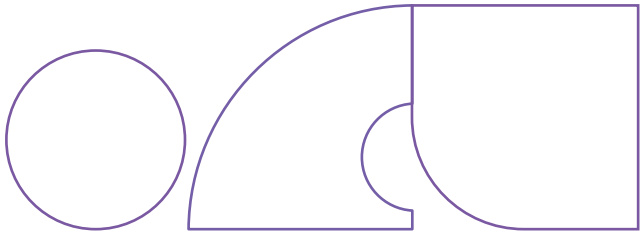
- **Ireland:** 'Arts Council of Ireland' (2010, 2024); 'The Irish National Dementia Strategy' (launched 2014); 'The Dementia: Understand Together Campaign' (launched 2016); 'Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health' (2025)

- **Germany:** 'The German National Dementia Strategy Germany' (2020-2026)

- **Netherlands:** 'The Dutch dementia care standard' (2020-2026); 'The National Dementia Strategy' (2021-2030); 'Wellbeing and art on prescription' (2011, 2018)

- **Portugal:** 'Working Group: Foundations for the Definition of Public Policies in the Field of Dementia' (2016); 'Health Strategy for Dementia' (2018); 'National Dementia Strategy' (2018); 'National Health Plan for Dementia'

Following on from this, it is often semi-state agencies or the federal states that promote **regional initiatives** and implement projects.



A noteworthy example is the initiative that is included in the portuguese 'Regional Plan' for Lisboa and the Vale do Tejo region. A pilot programme in Sintra mapped local initiatives supporting active ageing, including Senior Academies and Universities, as well as the 'Sintra + Saúde' programme, which provides sociocultural activities and health information. Although cultural prescriptions are not explicitly included in the Regional Plan, these initiatives were highlighted at a regional mental health event, where a Mental Health Network website was proposed to inform the public about available activities and partners.

Notably, this aligns with the ongoing development of a regional dementia strategy in Germany, with a particular emphasis on culture, in the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt. The strategy is being coordinated by the Saxony-Anhalt State 'Competence Centre for Dementia' (Landeskompetenzzentrum Demenz Sachsen-Anhalt), which operates within the 'Institute for Health and Nursing Sciences' at the Medical Faculty of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg.

Dialogue **platforms** and **networks** are central because they can act as a pillar of wellbeing and community development, striving for overarching cooperation and more cultural commitment at both national and local level.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, the 'Demenz und Kulturelle Teilhabe' (Dementia and Cultural Participation) network was launched. This network is a collaboration between the 'Regional Office for Ageing, Care and Dementia' in North Rhine-Westphalia and the 'Kompetenzzentrum für Kulturelle Bildung im Alter und inklusive Kultur' (Kubia; Competence Centre for Cultural Education in Old Age and Inclusive Culture). The aim is to connect cultural and care providers and promote dementia-friendly cultural activities. Among other things, the network offers ideas for low-threshold cultural activities and resources for inclusive cultural participation of people living with dementia. Cultural initiatives are also intended for the care of people living with dementia in place or in long-term care facilities.

CULTURAL DEMENTIA-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Cultural institutions, local art organisations and dementia advocacy groups have begun to embrace dementia-inclusive practices, recognising the power of the arts to foster connection, memory, and well-being. Initiatives are often co-designed with healthcare professionals, artists, and people living with dementia, and draw on principles of co-production, accessibility, and reminiscence-based practice. These initiatives may encompass both tailored experiences such as specialised tours, adapted programmes, and sensory activities and capacity-building measures, including training and educational opportunities for staff and volunteers.

The availability and accessibility of education and training programmes for the integration of people living with dementia into cultural practice is an essential factor. These programmes are a heterogeneous field as they are offered by overarching associations ('Kubia', Germany), but also on a micro level by the cultural institutions themselves ('Kunstmuseum Bonn'). There are a variety of ways in which further education programmes can be created. For example, training can be carried out on site, in the care facilities themselves or digitally. They can range from general training on how to talk to people with dementia, to specific training on how to prepare dementia-friendly programmes or how to incorporate cultural activities in care institutions.

Alzheimer Nederland offers the 'samen dementievriendelijk' (together dementia-friendly) training, targeting professionals who may encounter individuals with dementia in their daily work. Participants come from diverse backgrounds, including supermarket employees, bank staff, and volunteers in care institutions. The training focuses on recognising dementia-related behaviours and responding appropriately in various situations. A central component of the training is the GOED method, an acronym for 'Geruststellen' (Reassure), 'Oogcontact maken' (Make eye contact), 'Even meedenken' (Think along), and 'Dankjewel' (Thank you). This approach provides practical steps to interact effectively with people with dementia.

'Age & Opportunity' (Ireland) has been a leading force in creating materials and resources, and has published A Toolkit for Arts & Creativity in Care Settings, a comprehensive guide for artists, carers, and coordinators that includes practical activities, safety guidance, artist collaboration tips, and links to video demonstrations.

06

Examples of best practices of dementia-friendly cultural spaces

This section presents a selection of examples from the European partner countries, each identified through research conducted for the national reports and chosen for inclusion in this compendium. Additional examples can be found in the full national reports (see Resources and Outputs).

MOVEMENT TO MUSIC: INCLUSIVE OF DEMENTIA, DUN LAOGHAIRE

Dance Theatre of Ireland, a leading Contemporary Dance company, offers a wide range of dance and health classes for people of all ages. The company aims to connect people with their creative potential, broaden access to dance for all, including those who might otherwise be excluded, and advance innovation in dance for health, well-being, and self-expression. It also seeks to challenge stereotypes about older adults and people with chronic conditions, while offering high-quality dance experiences through classes, workshops, performances, and participatory activities.

Since 2014, one of their most popular programmes has been 'Well-Dance' for Seniors, an evidence-based initiative that fosters creativity, mobility, social connection, balance, confidence, and overall well-being. Building on this success, Dance Theatre of Ireland developed 'Movement to Music' (previously known as 'Dancing Well with Dementia') and Dancing Well with Parkinson's, a series of innovative classes designed specifically for individuals living with dementia and Parkinson's, together with their care partners.



Dance Theatre of Ireland, Well-Dance: Movement to Music.
Source: Arts and Health / Dance Theatre of Ireland (DTI).

Launched in 2016 in partnership with 'HSE Living Well with Dementia' (LWwD)—'Community Health Organisation (CHO) 6', a programme that supports people with dementia to live at home and stay engaged in their community, 'Movement to Music' is a regular LWwD activity, providing a dance class every Wednesday at Holy Family Parish Hall in Dun Laoghaire for €5 per class. This welcoming activity brings together individuals with dementia and their families or carers, with the assistance

of LWwD volunteers, focusing on musicality, rhythm, and joyful expression to foster well-being and community connection.

The classes typically begin with participants seated and gradually progress to standing and moving, using imagery and visualisation to inspire gentle movement. The carefully chosen music encourages creativity, imagination, and self-expression, whether participants are seated or standing. These classes offer participants the chance to be fully present, engage their senses, and reconnect with their independence and individuality. The result is a lively, sociable atmosphere filled with joy.

In 2018, Saint Joseph's Shankill, Ireland's largest day and residential centre dedicated to dementia care, initiated a year-long pilot program funded by the 'HSE National Lottery Fund' and led by choreographer Robert Connor from the Dance Theatre of Ireland. The program held weekly sessions and served 25 participants, supported by eight dedicated volunteers, exploring how dance and music could enhance well-being.

These classes created a safe, inclusive space where participants felt valued, loved, and connected, addressing their complex social, emotional, psychological, and physical needs. Today, Saint Joseph's continues to offer these dance classes for Day Club clients and Residents in partnership with Dance Theatre of Ireland, with ongoing support made possible through donations.

As a non-profit charity, Dance Theatre of Ireland's work has been supported by the 'Arts Council', 'Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council', the 'HSE', the 'Ireland Funds', the 'Department of Culture', 'Heritage and the Gaeltacht', and private donations. Dance Theatre of Ireland has been a National Lottery Good Causes Awards National Finalist, 2019 and a County Winner, 2021, 2022 and 2024 in the Arts & Culture category.

Sources and additional information: Dance Theatre of Ireland, Living Well with Dementia, Arts and Health, St Joseph Shankill and Dementia: Understand Together.



Dance Theatre of Ireland, Well-Dance: Movement to Music.
Source: Arts and Health / Dance Theatre of Ireland (DTI).

RAP-CD REMINITENZ

The idea of giving people with cognitive impairments a voice through music at 'Dementia Support Stuttgart' arose from contact with a carer and rap musician. In a CD project, people living with dementia contributed their personal stories and thoughts to rap songs, although none of them had any previous experience in such music production. In open discussions with the participants, individual themes such as the joy of life, nature, love and social pressure were explored. Employees from 'Dementia Support Stuttgart' provided support as writing assistants and drafted lyrics, which were revised together. After approval, the lyrics were set to music by the rap musician and collaborated on by other musicians. The result is stunning: a professionally produced audio CD with booklet, lyrics and photos of the participants.

Source: https://demenzjournal.com/magazin/kultur/buehne/personenzentrierte-raps/
Video 'Ich bereue nichts' on KuKuK-TV YouTube Chanel: https://youtu.be/jitO-5XdK-Q.



© Demenz Support Stuttgart and MEIN NAMEIST NASE

SWITCH2MOVE

‘Switch2Move’ is a Dutch initiative offering movement programmes designed for older adults, particularly those living with dementia, Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, or other chronic physical and mental conditions. The programme integrates dance, music, and therapeutic movement to enhance physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being. The methodology is based on scientific studies, and it is grounded in the belief that creative movement fosters social connection, emotional expression, and cognitive engagement.

Switch2Move’ employs the Social Implicit Movement (SIM) programme, which combines elements from dance, physiotherapy, and psychology. Sessions are designed to be accessible, with movements that can be performed while seated or standing, accommodating individuals with various mobility levels. Music plays a central role, aiding in memory recall and emotional engagement. The programme also emphasises implicit learning, allowing participants to engage without the pressure of explicit instructions, which is beneficial for individuals with cognitive impairments.



'Switch2Move' is implemented by trained practitioners across various locations in the Netherlands, including community centres and care facilities. The programme collaborates with organisations such as 'GeheugenVenster' to integrate its offerings into care homes. Additionally, 'Switch2Move' has developed a TV-based home system to facilitate music-supported exercises at home, enhancing accessibility for those unable to attend in-person sessions.

Participants can receive two trial lessons for €10 and unlimited monthly access for €42 (for 2 people, including a partner). Lessons are given weekly, depending on the location. Sessions typically take 45-60 minutes.
While large-scale, long-term studies on 'Switch2Move's' impact are still forthcoming, initial research and participant feedback indicate positive outcomes in terms of engagement, emotional well-being, and physical activity among individuals with dementia. Eindhoven University of Technology published a scientific study on the efficacy of the programme's home-based system, indicating positive effects on initiative and engagement in people with dementia. Participants reported feelings of enjoyment, calmness, and relief during the sessions. 'Switch2Move' offers a post-bachelor training programme called 'Dansant Coaching' for professionals in healthcare, social work, and education. This training equips practitioners with the skills to implement the 'Switch2Move' methodology, promoting scalability and integration into various care settings.

Source: https://switch2move.com.



AZURE PROJECT: DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY TOURS OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

'Azure' 'Azure' is a programme that improves access for people living with dementia and their close ones to galleries and museums across Ireland. It enhances their experience and involvement in cultural institutions through art activities and staff training. Since its inception in 2012, 'Azure' has brought together 'Age & Opportunity', the 'Alzheimer's Society of Ireland', the 'Butler Gallery in Kilkenny', and the 'Irish Museum of Modern Art' (IMMA) in Dublin in a collaborative partnership.

Today, more than 35 galleries, museums, and art centres across Ireland and Northern Ireland have trained staff to offer dementia-inclusive tours.

Inspired by the 'Meet Me at MoMA Project', 'Azure' promotes and normalises the involvement of people with dementia and their carers in everyday community life and makes cultural spaces more dementia-friendly. Participants are invited to observe and discuss artworks in a safe, welcoming environment, supported by trained facilitators who encourage conversation and engagement at each person's own pace and in their way.

Museums offer monthly tours for small groups of up to eight people, designed for individuals with dementia, their families, and friends. Tours are also tailored for nursing homes, care facilities, and dementia or

social support groups. 'Azure' tours are free of charge and can be delivered in person or online. During each tour, participants explore and discuss three to four artworks with a trained facilitator, followed by a chance to chat and share a cup of tea or coffee.

The programme also provides training courses for gallery and museum staff, educators, guides, volunteers, and artists. The training costs €675 per participant and lasts 4 to 5 days. It includes briefings on ageing and dementia awareness (such as types of dementia and recommended language), an introduction to 'Azure's' methodology, facilitation skills, guidance on online facilitation, reflective practice, and practice-led facilitation sessions.

The programme's pilot was evaluated in 2012 using a mixed-methods approach, combining observations, interviews, facilitated sessions, and questionnaires to gather insights from participants with dementia, carers, museum staff, and artists. The evaluation found it to be a positive and meaningful experience, highlighting the potential of facilitated art sessions to engage people with dementia in cultural settings. Participants showed enjoyment, interest, and moments of connection, with observers noting a range of emotional responses and engagement levels, from verbal contributions to subtle non-verbal interactions. Carers and facilitators described the sessions as welcoming and supportive. Challenges included logistical issues such as last-minute cancellations, accessibility barriers, and differences in participants' cognitive and physical abilities, requiring flexible approaches. The evaluation overall recommended providing trained facilitators, carefully selecting venues and artworks, and allowing more time for recruitment.

Sources and further information: https://ageandopportunity.ie/engage/azure-dementia-friendly-tours/

https://www.butlergallery.ie/assets/documents/Azure-Evaluation-2012.pdf

https://ageandopportunity.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Azure-Group-Training-Course-Outline.pdf



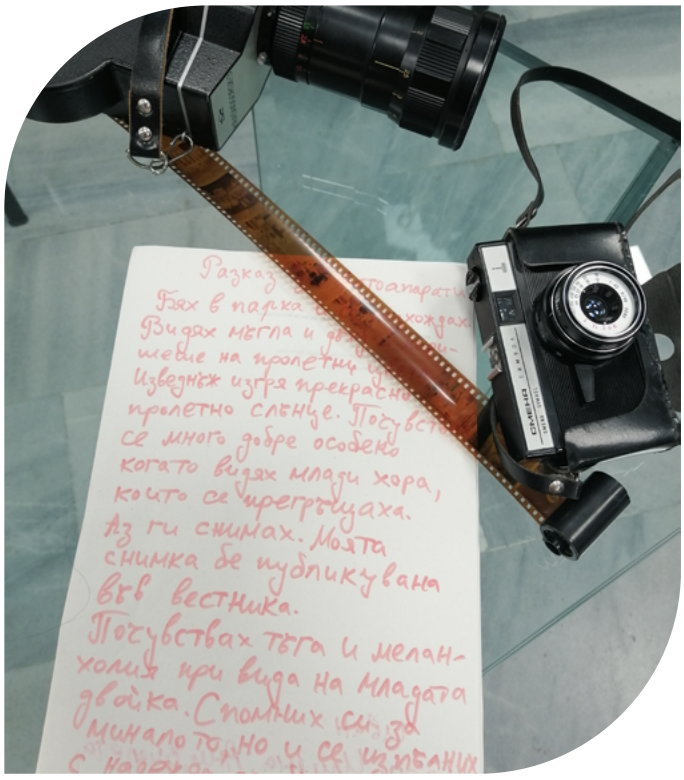
Azure training for art educators and artists. Source: Age & Opportunity.

AIDA PROJECT (ALZHEIMER PATIENTS INTERACTION THROUGH DIGITAL AND ARTS)

The project was funded through the Erasmus+ program and resulted in the development of the 'AIDA' methodology, which includes learning scenarios, practice/activity sheets and a Toolkit for practitioners/educators/operators. Within the project's framework, local cultural activities were facilitated for people living with dementia, with the goal of maintaining their cognitive skills and improving their overall quality of life. These activities took place in cultural institutions, such as museums and galleries, in the partner countries, and were carried out by staff of the 'Alzheimer Bulgaria Association' as well as museum staff. Fifteen different activity scenarios were developed and tested within the project and can be found on the project website.

The pilot phase, during which the methodology was implemented in practice, took place in 2023. In Bulgaria, the activities were carried out in the National Polytechnical Museum. The museum staff received extensive training on the topic of engaging and communicating with people with dementia before the implementation of the pilot phase. In addition to facilitator training, the practice requires accessible venues to accommodate elderly participants. The practice was free of charge for the participants.





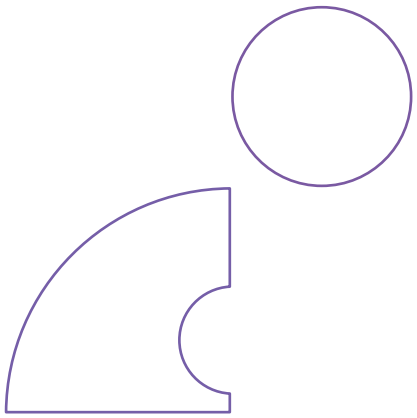
Source: Alzheimer Bulgaria Association

The activities during the pilot phase successfully engaged the participants. The mood of the people with dementia was measured on a scale before and after every session, and the results show improvement of the mood after the sessions. Furthermore, the feedback from participants as well as their caregivers was overwhelmingly positive.

These activities were only implemented within the timeframe of the 'AIDA' project, which concluded in 2023. However, there is potential for replication of these activities. As mentioned above, various scenarios were developed to engage people with dementia. The practice can be developed further through the inclusion of more museum or gallery institutions, providing a variety of cultural experiences for the people with dementia.

'AIDA' was a first-of-its-kind project in the Bulgarian region. The positive feedback from participants and their caregivers, as well as the willingness of cultural experts to facilitate activities of this kind, shows that there is immense potential for the further implementation of these and similar activities for people with dementia.

Additional information: https://artzheimer.eu/





VIRTUAL TOURS OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SITES

In 2023, the 'Compassion Alzheimer Bulgaria Foundation' implemented a cultural initiative designed specifically for people living with dementia. The project aimed to create meaningful and inclusive cultural experiences through guided visits to historical and cultural sites, art therapy sessions and museum reminiscence activities. The initiative was made possible with the financial support of the 'For Our Parents' Fund of the 'BeCause Foundation'. The initiative engaged over 60 residents from dementia care homes in Razgrad and Kazanlak, as well as participants from the Day Centre for people living with dementia in Varna. The participants, who were aged between 55 and 90 and experiencing varying degrees of cognitive decline, took part in 20 sessions led by professionals specialising in art therapy, cultural heritage, and dementia care.

The project addressed the need for cultural participation that was dementia-friendly by offering activities tailored to the cognitive and emotional needs of participants. Through art, music, and reminiscence, the project provided opportunities for self-expression, emotional connection, and memory stimulation. Museum visits enabled participants to engage with visual masterpieces and national heritage, while virtual tours provided an accessible alternative for those unable to travel. The high sensitivity of art created a space in



Source: Foundation Compassion Alzheimer

which everyone could enjoy and interpret the experience in their own way, thereby reinforcing a sense of dignity and inclusion.

The 'Compassion Alzheimer Bulgaria Foundation' organised and led the initiative in close collaboration with local care institutions that facilitated participation and provided logistical support. The programme was fully funded by the 'BeCause Foundation', ensuring it was free of charge for all participants. Required resources included trained staff, accessible venues and technological tools for virtual engagement. Over 60 participants took part in the sessions, and the project contributed to improved well-being, emotional engagement and a more meaningful daily routine for the older people involved.

Although the project's activities were time-limited in 2023, its impact suggests strong potential for continuation or replication in other regions. The project demonstrated that, with the right approach, people living with dementia can participate in and benefit from cultural experiences. Combining cultural tourism, therapeutic art practices, and inclusive design makes this initiative a noteworthy example of how cultural engagement can be adapted for dementia care in a meaningful and sustainable way.

LÄNGER FIT DURCH MUSIK!

As a member and actor of the 'National Dementia Strategy Germany', the 'Bundesmusikverband Chor & Orchester e.V.' (BMCO) has been running the 'Länger fit durch Musik!' funding programme for dementia-sensitive music-making since the beginning of 2023. The project is aimed specifically at clubs, choirs, orchestras and ensembles from the amateur music sector. Over the four-year term of the programme,





Source: Carlo Farner, © Mit-einander Hochrhein

the focus will be on awareness-raising measures, the promotion of model projects and training opportunities. The programme is designed to deliver valuable educational outcomes and, in the long term, share the results of scientific monitoring and the practical experiences of the ensembles with a wide audience. It will be scientifically monitored and will conclude with a specialist congress. The programme comprises four areas of activity: (1) awareness-raising measures, (2) promotion of exemplary projects, (3) qualification offers and (4) scientific monitoring with a concluding congress.

Music ensembles, choirs and orchestras act as places of well-being and co-creation for people living with dementia. Music, therefore, specifically enables participation. The training programme supports the ensemble leaders in their work and provides specialist input from experts. It is part of the funding programme and cannot be attended separately from it. Funds are provided by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Health (BMFSJ) as part of the 'National Dementia Strategy Germany'. The project aims to encourage especially amateur ensembles to apply

for funding. Funding of up to 9500 euros could be applied for. Funding is available for musical projects that actively involve people living with dementia, for example through regular joint rehearsals, workshops or concert series. In the second funding round, 20 model projects are selected and funded for the year 2025.

In 2026, the BMCO will once again be organising an interdisciplinary congress in Karlsruhe under the title 'Musizieren für und mit Menschen mit Demenz – Perspektiven für Chöre und Instrumentalensembles' in cooperation with the Karlsruhe University of Education. The focus will be on music practice, such as dementia-sensitive singing and music-making. The aim is to create new impulses for inclusive work in choirs and orchestras. The congress brings together experiences for a broad public and is therefore aimed at musicians, ensemble leaders, music therapists, carers and all interested people.

Source and further information: https://bundesmusikverband.de/foerderung/lfdm/.



MARCAR O LUGAR - ENCONTROS NO MUSEU

'Marcar o Lugar' is a cultural activity that aims to establish a replicable model for artistic and cultural engagement programs designed to benefit individuals living with dementia and their caregivers within a museum setting. It is a Two-part approach: first, participants engage in the direct observation and appreciation of artistic objects related to predetermined themes, fostering exploration of the connections between these objects and individual perspectives and experiences; second, participants create original artistic works inspired by the themes.

Six weekly sessions, each lasting approximately two hours, for small groups of people with dementia and their caregivers. Key themes are explored, likely to foster greater participant engagement, such as cultures and traditions, spaces and places, identity, everyday objects and life habits, interpersonal relationships, and established bonds.

This project is the result of a co-creation process that brings together all the project's stakeholders: 'Alzheimer Portugal Association', cultural mediators from museums, artists, and participants – people living with dementia and their formal and informal carers. The project also benefited from the collaboration of the Catholic University of Portugal in its evaluation, the results of which helped assess the impact of these programmes on their target audience, as well as identify the key elements to be incorporated into future initiatives. 'Marcar o Lugar – Encontros no Museu' project, (proudly supported by the brand 'A Vida Portuguesa') aims to create a richer and more sensory experience throughout its entire journey.

The program showed an improvement in the bonds established between the person with dementia and their carer, as well as the development of new relationships, increased participation, and social inclusion



Marcar o Lugar at the Museu de Lisboa
Source: © José Frade



Marcar o Lugar at the MAAT, 2022, courtesy of Fundação EDP/MAAT
Source: © Paulo Alexandre Coelho

of its participants. According to the results obtained in the pilot programs, there was evidence of improved mood and well-being of participants, as well as a significant improvement in the quality of life of people with dementia.

To date, four pilot programs have been conducted between 2020 and 2022. The pilot museum sites that implemented this model were MAAT and the Museum of Lisbon. The created model was intended to be sufficiently broad to be used according to each museum's collection and different artistic languages (image, text, sound, and movement), but flexible enough to allow participants' interests and preferences to shape the experience. Therefore, each program is adjusted to the needs and particularities of each group.

Sources: https://alzheimerportugal.org/marcarolugar/, https://www.ccb.pt/programa-marcar-o-lugar-encontros-no-museu/, https://alzheimerportugal.org/museu-de-lisboa-marcar-o-lugar/ , https://acessocultura.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/101_pt.pdf.



THE FORGET ME NOTS CHOIR

The 'Forget Me Nots Organisation' is a dementia-inclusive community choir based in Dublin's Northeast, founded in 2014 with initial support from 'Fingal County Council Arts Office' and Community Affairs. As a registered charity in Ireland, the organisation promotes community engagement through music, with a focus on inclusion, well-being, and intergenerational connections while offering a Quality Arts social outlet.

The organisation aims to create a welcoming choir for older adults, those living with dementia and their families, and the local senior community. It offers access to professionally managed, high-quality musical activities that promote social inclusion and well-being. The initiative also encourages broader community involvement when possible, including local nursing homes, Montessori kids and schools, while documenting participation's personal and collective benefits. By creating a consistent, non-judgmental, and joyful space, the choir allows individuals with memory loss to actively participate, feel valued, and connect emotionally through song. Furthermore, it recognises music as a powerful medium for memory retention, expression, and social bonding.

Music professionals employ sensitive facilitation techniques, while the familiar structure of rehearsals offers cognitive comfort. The musical director is responsible for preparing engaging, well-structured rehearsals that enhance choral qualities and set challenging, yet attainable, musical goals. The sessions include varied warm-ups, the development of technical skills such as tuning and diction through musical arrangements and the use of harmonies, which are also supported by the volunteers, encouraging concentration and engagement through musical exercises and focused rehearsals in preparation for differing themed performances. The repertoire is diverse, balancing new material with nostalgic pieces, while stretch pieces are used to foster continuous improvement.

Rehearsals and performances take place every Tuesday at Baldoyle Community Hall, with over 120 members in the group, and participation is free. During COVID-19, adaptations were made to run weekly Zoom sessions, keeping the community connected during lockdowns. The choir regularly performs at concerts and festivals across Dublin, including iconic venues like Áras an Uachtaráin, the Mansion House, St Patrick's Cathedral, the National Gallery, the Hugh Lane Gallery and the Helix. While also ensuring a mix of local performances in nursing homes, hospitals and rehabilitation facilities.

The 'Forget-Me-Nots Member Survey' (2019) assessed participants' experiences across six areas: choir enjoyment, musical direction, social inclusion, performance enjoyment, volunteer support, and venue facilities, combining ratings with open feedback. Members particularly valued the inclusive atmosphere, emotional uplift, social connection, and musical engagement. Many described the choir as a space where memory loss became less visible,





Dance Theatre of Ireland, Well-Dance: Movement to Music.
Source: Arts and Health / Dance Theatre of Ireland (DTI).

and participation felt meaningful. While suggestions for improvement included better transport, amplified sound, and larger venues due to growing membership, the overall satisfaction remained high (87%).

The 'Forget Me Nots Organisation' is wholly managed and supported by unpaid volunteers from the Dublin Northeast community, while highly experienced choral professionals lead its artistic direction and piano accompaniment. The project is sustained through a combination of financial support, including voluntary subscriptions, grants, donations, and in-kind contributions from individuals and partner organisations. Over the years, supporters such as 'Creative Ireland', 'Fingal County Council', 'Member First Credit Union', the 'HSE', 'Collen Construction', the 'Community Foundation for Ireland', and the 'Ireland Fund' have contributed to its success. All funds raised directly support the choir's activities, including professional music services (direction, composition, accompanists, musicians), event logistics and technical production (transport, sound and video), venue rental, materials, communications, community initiatives, and social events.

> "We are thrilled to be honoured with inclusion in the European Compendium of the Memorable Project! Quality Arts community projects like ours, led by a skilled professional, and supported by enthusiastic local volunteers, enable all participants to thrive together in an inclusive, challenging, and fun environment – learning from and with each other as we work to increase dementia-awareness in the community."
>
> (Statements from participant)

Source and additional information: The Forget Me Nots Choir.



EU NO MUSEU

This cultural activity provides cognitive stimulation that enhances well-being and improves the quality of life for individuals affected by Alzheimer's Disease and related conditions. Facilitate non-formal education for carers through engagement with art, scientific content, and cultural enrichment, thereby promoting active and healthy aging. Foster citizenship and social inclusion for both individuals with dementia and their carers. The 'EU no musEU' project enables individuals with dementia to connect with their personal life stories and find reflections of themselves and their memories within the museum environment.

Approximately 20 to 25 volunteers annually, including formal carers in session and individuals are supporting the activity preparation and other logistical aspects. Facilitation of the sessions is led by a team of seven permanent staff members with expertise in various fields. The program also incorporates sessions led by external specialists and thematic exhibitions. There are monthly sessions for individuals with cognitive impairment along the Alzheimer's Disease spectrum and their carers.

A person-centred methodology is used to facilitate cognitive and cultural stimulation. This approach centres on the appreciation and reflective engagement with artworks, museum spaces, and scientific, ethnographic, or anthropological content, fostering a dialogue with participants' personal life stories. These methods are further enhanced by incorporating interventions from various artistic disciplines. This multi-faceted approach ensures a comprehensive and engaging experience.

Key stakeholders involved and their role in supporting the initiative are 'APOJOVI/APOSENIOR Association'; 'AMIC - Friends League of the National Museum of Machado de Castro'; 'Neurology Service of the Coimbra Hospital and University Center' (CHUC); 'Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Coimbra' (FPCEUC) and 'Center for Neuroscience and Cell Biology of the University of Coimbra' (CNC.IBILI, UC).



Dance, with informal carers – EU at musEU in Viseu, June 2018 (Museu Nacional Grão Vasco) Source: © Alexandra Pessoa, MNGV



Mindfulness Promotion. Joint session - EU no musEU, session 55, July 2017 (Museu Nacional Machado Castro) Source: © Rita Sousa, volunteer

An interest in continuing the program has been reaffirmed by the retention rate of participants (60%). Carers have been the main advocates for its continuity and for the implementation of increasingly creative interventions. A carer stated: *"I run out of words to thank and express the pleasure of learning so much from all of 'our' people!"*. The 'EU no musEU' (ME in the museum) adapted its strategies and routines to different local contexts and realities, to other content of host museums, and to varying average education levels of participants.

Source and additional information: https://alzheimerportugal.org/programa-eu-no-museu-2/.

KENNST DU NOCH?

‘Kennst du noch?‘ (Do you remember?) is a series of projects by the cooperation of the Historisches Museum Frankfurt (Historical Museum Frankfurt) and the association ‘Bürgerinstitut e.V.’ for people living with dementia and their relatives and carers, in which the memories of the participants take centre stage. Memories in a museum, as a place of Frankfurt’s history and the stories of its inhabitants: numerous points of contact with collective and individual remembrance are possible here.



‘Kennst du noch? Erzählcafé‘ (Do you remember? Storytelling café) was a group programme for people living with dementia, led by experts from the ‘Bürgerinstitut’ and the Historical Museum. Memories and biographical, personal experiences should be evoked, as many objects from earlier times have now disappeared from our everyday lives. Nostalgic objects such as records, toys and old household items stimulate memories and thus promote cognitive abilities, independence and quality of life. Remembering should involve all the senses, which is why an accompanying programme supplemented by appropriate music or food, such as snacks, coffee and cake, is offered. The focus of the ‘Erzählcafés’ is not on the dementia itself, but on well-being and the shared dialogue, which is intended to have a stimulating effect. Those affected remain among themselves during this programme: “The independence of the participants is a valuable asset”, said Ann-Katrin Adams, heading the dementia department at the ‘Bürgerinstitut’. Nevertheless, the family members also connected with each other through the storytelling cafés: When dropping off and picking up the participants, moments of dialogue were created.

The first project period ran from 2020 to 2022, and the participation fee was €160 per group programme with 8 dates. The project was sponsored by the ‘Commerzbank Foundation’, the ‘Schambach Family Foundation’ and the ‘ODDO BHF Foundation’. After the project finished by the end of 2022, it has been continued with altered and new formats:

‘Kennst du noch? Erinnerungskoffer‘ (Do you remember? Memory suitcase) is a group programme for care facilities. Thematically packed suitcases contain nostalgic everyday objects, which stimulate memories. As a self-organised meeting in small groups within the care facility, it is a flexible education concept that adapts to the individual needs of the group. Accompanying booklets with application tips and suggestions are also included and provide practical support. ‘Erinnerungskoffer digital’ is the free online alternative aimed at people living with dementia, relatives and carers who are

unable to visit the museum. Once again, the focus here is on nostalgic everyday objects in various subject areas, as memories can also be stimulated online at any time, regardless of location.

Source and additional information: https://www.buergerinstitut.de/kennstdunoch/.

Excursus: An example of raising awareness through culture and art



JE KUNT ME GERUST EEN GEHEIM VERTELLEN

'Je kunt me gerust een geheim vertellen' (You can safely tell me a secret, created by MATZER Theaterproducties, text and direction by Madeleine Matzer, with thanks to Jibbe Willems) is a hopeful and deeply personal theatre production with live music that brings the topic of dementia to the stage in a moving and accessible way. Designed for general audiences, caregivers, family members and healthcare professionals (not meant for people living with dementia themselves), it seeks to open conversations about memory loss, offer moments of humour and consolation, and give audiences an intimate glimpse into the emotional world of both the person with dementia and the family member caring for them. By breaking taboos, increasing understanding, and encouraging dialogue, the play contributes to dementia-friendly cultural participation.

It is based on Matzer's personal experiences with her mother, who had Alzheimer's disease. After each performance, an audience discussion takes places exploring themes such as loss, memory, and communication in dementia. Visitors also receive a booklet containing the full text of the performance and practical tips for dealing with dementia.

The production premiered in October 2021, with its most recent performance taking place in September 2024. It has toured various Dutch theatres, including Theater Bellevue in Amsterdam and Theater Walhalla in Rotterdam. Prices vary by venue, but tickets generally cost around €20. Some venues offer 'Pay What You Can' pricing to ensure broad accessibility.

The performance has received praise from audiences and critics alike. 'Theaterkrant' described it as "a valuable monologue about wandering through the maze of dementia". Brabant Cultureel praised its emotional honesty in showing both the pain and liberation that come with letting go of fears and expectations.

Matzer's impact analysis revealed that their production significantly heightened audience awareness and emotional engagement, with 94% feeling deeply moved and 81% reporting increased awareness of the subject. The performance fostered recognition among 92% of bereaved family members and improved mutual understanding in 72% of cases. Overall, the production was rated 8.8 out of 10 and left 84% of visitors with thought-provoking reflections.

Source: https://matzer.org/voorstellingen/je-kunt-me-gerust-een-geheim-vertellen/.



The theatre piece was created by MATZER Theaterproducties, the text was written by Madeleine Matzer, with thanks to Jibbe Willems. The direction was done by Madeleine Matzer. The production is intended for caregivers, professionals, and others that are close to the person with dementia. The production is not intended for people with dementia themselves, as it might be too confrontational. Photographer: Karin Jonkers, Actress: Juul Vrijdag, Source: MATZER Theaterproducties



Photographer: Karin Jonkers, Actress: Astrid van Eck, Source: MATZER Theaterproducties

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