

Anton Schmid

Citizenship

Illertissen, Germany

My name is Anton Schmid, I am 66 years old and have been retired for a year and previously worked for almost 30 years as the head of a vocational training center for professional associations. Before that, I trained as a chef and industrial clerk, and, as I said, I've been retired for a year. I'm active because I'm rebuilding and renovating my house, so my physical fitness isn't interrupted. I'm not in a sports club or anything like that, but I am actively involved in building my house. It's like building a nest—every bird needs its own nest to fly out of and always come back to.

Are you familiar with the IKIGAI principles?

I briefly skimmed through them while preparing for our preliminary discussion, yes.

How can adults find or rediscover their purpose through civic engagement?

I think we have a very special issue in Germany because we are the world champions in clubs. That is one of the things that has held communities and society as a whole together over the past decades and brought them up to speed, and we need to do much, much more at this point to maintain and support this system, rather than boycotting and counteracting it. Support for every volunteer. Whether this always has to be financial remains to be seen, but it definitely has to be in the legal situation. With the legal situation we are slowly building up at the moment, we will have more and more people whom we are unsettling and alienating rather than supporting.

I believe that we need to support people by simply reducing their uncertainties. What I see as particularly significant are the uncertainties regarding legal certainty that arise as a result. It is unacceptable that a club board member is liable with their own assets, thereby also calling into question certain other financial risks for clubs. You have to make the whole thing more fun and the opportunities more attractive than what is happening at the moment, I am absolutely convinced of that. And we also have to start getting these people involved at a young age, according to the old saying: You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Get them to become active again, which you can see in various cases, what is really happening again in various youth clubs, that they recognize how important it is, also for themselves and for their own children. We have to start doing things. I believe that the older members of our generation no longer

expose themselves to criticism, especially the critical comments that we are constantly served up unfiltered in all the media today. Who wants to be in the media when they say something and then see themselves torn apart for the next three days, with a shitstorm, etc.? In my opinion, there is definitely a lack of legal control and support in this area as well.

Supported or supporting yourself. As I said, I think the point must be to help people with these uncertainties.

What do you think about the European Union's current policy on older people?

It's not necessarily clear at the moment, and it has certainly been very frightening for older people at the moment. In my opinion, it is counterproductive, absolutely counterproductive, to draw up and present the European Commission's new budget proposal in this way in the current climate. The EU's policies are already being heavily scrutinized, and many people cannot understand what the money is being spent on. But a budget increase of this magnitude is no longer acceptable in today's world.

You mean for military spending?

That's where I have over a third more of the budget. That's where I see the limits. We all come together in various countries, even at that point. Who can still afford what? We have 20% pensioners in Germany. How many pensioners will we have in the future who will have to apply for citizen's income because they won't survive otherwise?

The baby boomers.

That won't be enough. Less than 50%. You could have done it yourself. That's over now. Of course, our standard of living and our quality of life have also changed dramatically. Whatever you want, without reducing your pension.

We do our jobs, but not necessarily in the interests of the common good. And I'm also convinced that there are many people our age who go around saying that the common good is actually relative to them. The most important thing is probably my family and my family members. Which brings us back to the lone warrior.

People who live like me, and then you have to ask, how far does that go? Or how far can you really go, or how far are you able to get involved yourself? Or are you really only able to consume at this point? I need the leaders here, leaders in quotation marks. We need to think about altruism and not just

selfishness. I have to bring these people out of their shell and then tackle and support them accordingly. And I don't just take care of my own stuff.

Do you know of any measures and initiatives in other European countries that could perhaps serve as a model?

No, to be honest, I've never been interested in that anywhere. The only thing I always found fascinating back then was Neighbors Watch Up. Groups that always got together in other countries.

Neighborhood assistance, but also more in the direction of the neighbor keeping an eye on things when I'm on vacation. The neighbor checks to see if I'm going anywhere every day. But that's actually how it is. The average neighborhood behavior. I'd say that used to be common.

In rural areas.

Exactly. That proportion has changed there too. I grew up in a village and knew every resident in that village.

Of course, that was also a drifting apart, or is it still the case?

That's right. It might have been better to build a large clubhouse and a large club grounds somewhere in the countryside. The question is: How can this statement that old people are not being heard be factually justified? That's where the first contradiction lies. No one dares to tackle the pension system. Everyone in this world knows that our pension system doesn't work, but no one is doing anything about it. Pensioners are being heard. Namely: "Leave my pension alone." So what? It's more likely to be down to these immobile people. Yes, I'll call them victims, because I can't describe them any other way. If I criticize, then I have to try to do something about it. I also believe that people are being heard. It has been known for 40 years that the pension formula is not stable in the long term.

Exactly. When you think about volunteer work, what are the key points? Not just for older adults, but for aging throughout life.

You have to put a protective shield over the whole thing and say: Okay.

And understand that the government can't take care of schools, education, etc. That can't be the reason for saying it's not feasible when things get tough. It's just difficult.

How can communities encourage older people to break out of their routines and become more active in society?

I think it's really necessary for people of our generation these days. You can already see the nice problem in the churches, the problems they have in getting their own members to be active and not just present. They wouldn't even have to do anything big to activate them. They too have failed to adapt and to take young people with them from an early age, to accompany them and keep them at the helm or on the ball. Sorry, those days are over. I believe that we also have a problem in that, in some very common areas, we have people in these representative bodies, such as parish councils, etc., who are only interested in the title, in being there, and have no idea that you could actually fill that role with life. Instead, it's simply: "I am the parish council chairman, soccer club chairman, or whatever you want to call it." It's all about the position and not about the content. I'm very critical of that. We're back to where we were in big politics. Who else is available? I don't want to be active for this bunch. I don't want to put myself in the crossfire for this bunch. I don't want to stand up in front of this bunch, be insulted, etc. You can already see some of this in children's soccer games, what's going on there, what aggression is going on there. This brings us back to protection and the protective mechanism of the bell, which must be created, and created properly. I really think it has to be done, because otherwise you won't get anyone else there. For the most part, we're sure to come up against the argument of money. For what we have for staffing situations, including accessibility in public spaces, which should be guaranteed. Of course, this has to be supported by staff. But I'll say this: at the moment, I can watch the whole thing with a big grin on my face, because of this special package that has now been put together. He's doing all this with over a billion, and I am also firmly convinced that at least a third of this billion-dollar bid will not be invested in a targeted manner, i.e., in accordance with the actual intention, but will also be invested in areas where it is pointless. That is precisely the responsibility that I find lacking here when it comes to finances. A responsible use of money, namely with borrowed money on the part of our politicians, would be desirable. For me, a wonderful example of this is the former transport minister who then squanders over a million and is not even prosecuted in any way. That cannot be the case. Anyone else would be fired, anyone else would leave, and on top of that, in these dimensions. That also means: Who is responsible for this? Who has this money? With public money, it doesn't matter. I've experienced the same thing in my job, where some people have said, "What do you want? It's not your money. You can knock it out."

What does that mean in this case for older people, because we're talking about active aging, about older people.

That brings us back to the overall infrastructure, and this affects not only older people, but also younger people, who would then also save money in terms of climate protection and would otherwise be just as dependent on public transportation. Similar to the pension system. Forty years ago, we failed to invest in railways. They failed to invest in highways in time. And here we are again, as with building renovation and investment, at the same level. Staying on the ball at the right time. The decisions to privatize the railways and so on. I am convinced that this technology is in the pipeline. But given that we in Germany are not even capable of setting up a stable radio network for telephones. But I think Africa will be digitized before we are digitized in this country.

Would you like to add anything else?

Again, as I said, we're back to the banana republic and others dreaming of flying to the moon. As a Bavarian, I think that's the future at some point. Whether it will be two-dimensional or three-dimensional remains to be seen. So, by road, rail, or air. It will happen, but not in our lifetime. We're far too slow.

Okay. Good. Do you have a positive final approach?

The positive approach is still that I am very grateful to live in Bavaria. I am very grateful to live in Germany and in Europe because, at the end of the day, we live at a very high standard in comparison. Compared to other countries, we have very good provisions. But that doesn't rule out the possibility that they could be improved.

Exactly. And that we make sensible decisions, as you just mentioned. Because selfishness has become extremely pronounced. And everyone lives in their own cocoon.

But of course, this also means that these people are spinning themselves into a cocoon because they are afraid. The example set by, let's say, the financial elite that we also have in these countries, doesn't allow for anything else.

Yes, we need responsible politics.

That is driven by responsibility. If you look at various corporate policies that we have here.

I know that there are some things you don't want to know. Thank you.

Definitely. You're welcome.