

Bernhard Peterke

Civic Engagement

Schrobenhausen, Germany

My name is Bernhard Peterke. I'm not the youngest anymore, I'm now 70 years old and have been retired since 2018. You could say that it's not really retirement, it's more like a restless retirement. I worked in private health insurance for over 45 years. That's why I've always been involved in social issues and now I also volunteer as a consultant on pension matters as an insurance advisor for the German pension insurance system. I have also been 55 years and am also responsible for social welfare at the state and district level. I am the state representative for welfare and social work, and I am also the VDK district chairman here in district of Neuberg-Schrobenhausen and in various other associations. So, civic engagement is naturally very close to my heart, especially how to encourage older people to get involved get involved and remain active. I believe this is a very important issue, especially for people who are retiring and often don't know how to fill their days. And there are many, many possibilities. Because people, let's say, from the out of the hole they've fallen into.

You know, David Brecht, for example, he has this idea and he says he believes opinion that young people should do a year of social service, that you do voluntary work and once a year, when you retire afterwards, it's mandatory again, that it's actually introduced, that's his idea, a mandatory year where I, like you now, work for this or that or the other, so that people might really get involved, because they often have no idea. But that's just as an aside, that also interested me. Yes, the Iki-Gai principles, we talked about them a little earlier a little bit about them earlier. I think that they live by them anyway, when I hear what you do.

The topic of how I can implement certain things, small things, harmony and so on, I think we already talked about that in detail earlier talked about that in detail earlier.

But you're also passionate about it. I have the feeling that it's really important to you to help other people.

Yes, that has always been my, let's say, my outlook and my motto and so on.

Yes, you get a lot back in return, don't you?

Yes, yes, yes, not always. The fact is, it's impossible to please everyone; that's difficult, so that's clear. Some people see everything as a matter of course and so on, and also have certain expectations ideas. It's often the case with insurance advisors, too, that I would have time on Saturday afternoon, or even better on Sunday, or some other time. And it can't be before 7 p.m. And otherwise, people have high expectations.

It's a social development that we have.

Unfortunately, that's true. People only think about themselves anymore. I have the idea that it has to be done, and so on. Not everyone, but it's becoming more and more common. People's sense of entitlement is growing, and they don't care whether you do it on a voluntary basis or in an employed relationship, more or less professionally, people are no longer interested in that.

So I'll just ask, how do you think older adults can find their purpose find or rediscover their purpose through active civic engagement? rediscover their purpose?

I think people need to realize that it makes sense and that they also have a certain fulfillment in doing so, that they also make social contacts. That's often very, very important, because the issue of loneliness is becoming increasingly prevalent in our society, we are increasingly becoming a society of singles, or what happens when a partner suddenly passes away, relatives or children are not always as close as they used to be, maybe they live next door, everything has changed, what is change, people have people have real, real problems, and you say, okay, you also keep yourself mentally and physically fit, and I think that's also a point that needs to be made. And that for the most part, it also makes people happy when you get involved in this way, and it's motivating for yourself when you realize that you can help people and have done a good deed.

And how can we create opportunities that enable older adults to contribute to society in a way that suits their preferences and abilities and meet the needs of the community?

Of course, it always depends on there being appropriate opportunities. I believe that is the be-all and end-all. And that you also have to create opportunities that match their abilities and knowledge. I think that's always very, very important, I believe. You said earlier that one of the digital sectors and has traveled all over

the world, is, of course, the topic of digital, and he can, of course, pass on his knowledge and expertise accordingly. And then, of course, you can even create cultural offerings for everyone, cultural offerings. I think that's also a very, very important point. You say, okay, what can I offer specifically for older people and get them excited about it. It doesn't always have to be a rock concert, because I won't be able to get be able to get parents excited about that, but there are many other suitable offerings. And then I say, okay, how can I also use my knowledge and knowledge to support younger people as well, where the meaningfulness is then present. Our topic, which is also so important, is the On the subject of relieving the burden on family caregivers, I say, okay, what can I do so that family caregivers can also get some relief, so that they can, say, on a free afternoon, maybe go to the or run certain errands. This is becoming increasingly important.

Yes, we're becoming a care society, I heard on the radio, where I actually thought, phew.

I've heard before and so on that this is increasing accordingly. This will cause us huge problems because we already have well over five million people in need of care and the number is rising. Clearly, demographic developments are contributing to this because, thank God, we are getting older and older and need more and more support. It will be difficult to cope with this, especially finding skilled workers, and that will make volunteer work more and more important in terms of how we can provide support and intervene.

I have the feeling, however, that volunteer work by young is not perceived in the same way as it used to be in our generations. in our generations. I was in a club. I did things there. I mean, I have to admit, none of my three children three children are in a club, for example. You learn a lot when you're in clubs, that you take on a position and get involved. I think that's becoming more and more difficult. We also have a lot of volunteers at our adult education center, but actually it's no wonder.

Volunteering has changed. In the past, if you were active in a club, you simply said, okay, I'll take on responsibility, I'm ready to get stuck in, I'll roll up my sleeves," and that's just not the case anymore. You can see it at the Red Cross, where I'm involved in social work throughout Bavaria in the social sector, when new projects come up today, for example, we are now doing daily companions, or two years ago we started to intensively incorporate therapy dogs. We can find people, but the whole thing has to be manageable. I have a maximum of two or three hours a week. But people just don't want to take on responsibility, that's the problem

Can you briefly explain this everyday companion to me? I haven't heard of it yet heard of that before. What is an everyday companion?

Yes, yes, it's mainly there to relieve the burden on family caregivers. They come once a week, chat with the caregiver, or if the weather is nice, they take them for a walk, go for a drive, or read to them just that. That's one thing. But then we also have something that's more like neighborhood assistance, a kind of senior companion who offers a driving service, for example, if they need to be driven to the doctor or something similar.

Yes, great, what about the dogs?

The dogs go to senior citizens' facilities or daycare centers for children, or similar places. They are therapy dogs.

It's like those therapy horses, where you can also do therapy with horses.

I saw it myself back then. It's amazing. When you see it, you can also see it in a retirement home, how the people sit there. Hopefully you won't end up like that, but it can happen to anyone. But then when the dog comes and puts its head on your foot, or people can pet the dog or somehow like on their legs, it's really amazing. So the contact. The body, the contact and so on. And that's becoming more and more important.

And you can actually call the Red Cross and ask about that, right?

Yes, unfortunately we don't have it in Neuburg and Schrobenhausen yet.

Okay, because I was wondering, because I haven't heard anything yet. I had Mr. Stauber, Helmut Stauber, was a speaker at our place, and he trained as a baby nurse. So he's your age now, but for five years, mothers could simply request him to come in the afternoon to take care of a take care of a baby, for example. So he learned how to change diapers, learned everything again, so that mothers could just go out for coffee with a friend. Often, mothers are raising their children alone, which is often a problem. Or something like that, or he was simply told, I'm there in the afternoon and you have the afternoon off." And he did that for five years, which I found really interesting. It made him very happy, and he even did some training for it. So that's really crazy

Offers that are coming more and more, like the everyday companions, because that serves to relieve the burden in the care situation here, and then, as said, the issue we discussed earlier, what if someone is home alone and is always so fit and so on, whether they can do the shopping or bring medication. And that's something that came about quickly during the coronavirus pandemic, for example, such as medication delivery services, grocery shopping, and Shopping. These are all supportive services, and they are becoming increasingly important. That's just the way it is. At FADK, we also have care companions, who are similar to everyday companions. They come once a week for two or three hours and take care of the caregiver, providing care. They are trained for this, they provide instruction, or a bit of conversation guidance, which is a general introduction to communication, for example, how to deal with it and so on. Tips or instructions about certain illnesses, for example, how to behave when someone has dementia and so on, if they say certain things, and general rules of conduct. These are seminars with senior companions, and you do one on a Saturday, a kind of briefing. It is not certified, you can't cancel it through the nursing care insurance. It's a purely voluntary offer.

I'm really excited now. How can the concept of ikigai be integrated into municipal or civic programs to support older people?

From my point of view, it's about creating appropriate senior citizen facilities are created, generally senior-friendly living, special forms of housing, whether it's assisted living, and so on. And then there's also the important point of family centers. What would also be important, let's say, is a place where several families can meet, similar to multigenerational houses. I think that would be a great facility for all generations, young and old, for living and working together.

Yes, because everyone can benefit from each other.

Everyone benefits from each other. And that's, for example, a BAK multi-generational house that we recently looked at, they're in Haßfurt up there, and they have great, great offerings, ranging from dance to sewing classes, to introductions to the digital world, i.e., how to use smartphones. Cooking together and things like that. It could all be found in a facility like this facility in the city.

How big is it? How can I imagine it, for example?

Yes, it's pretty, pretty, pretty big. The basement has a room like that, where they always do dancing and so on. Ground floor and upper floor, so certainly 150 to 200 square meters.

So basically, young and old can use this house, both young and old? Or where do people actually live then?

They live at home. There are just appropriate offers where you can go. And then they go there and it works.

So in our case, I also had a multi-generational house, but in the sense that really more generations in the family, when my parents were still alive, there were four generations. There was a 90-year age difference between the oldest and the youngest. My grandfather, my parents, my husband and I, and our three children all lived together. That's how it used to be. I'm Czech, and that's how extended families tended to be like that. It's also still more common among Italians, but in Germany it's not so common. For example, it enabled me to work even with children because my parents helped out in the house. The children were always just at home. I have to say, that was a huge advantage I must say.

Here, we are now seeing a different trend, with children not so close anymore. This is a problem worldwide.

That's actually due to globalization.

Exactly, that's just the way it is if you're not flexible in your job today. Then you won't get ahead, you have to realize that. If I want to advance a little in my career, I have no other choice.

You have to go along with the companies and take the whole family with you.

I commuted for 32 years.

You commuted to Ingolstadt, I think? No, you were somewhere else entirely. Your daughter said in the north.

In Cologne. Yes, I always commuted between Schrobenhausen and Cologne. I wasn't not always in Cologne, but very often.

Well, always, of course. My father did that too. He spent the last few years back in Czechia, he ran a large company in Czechia and drove there on Sunday evening and came back on Friday.

That was often the case for me too. Exactly, yes.

It wasn't so easy when he stopped working, such committed people. What do you think about the European Union's current policy on older people? Is an opinion being formed here?

Yes, you hear time and again that they want to do something, whether it's health care or social services in general, or how to support active old age. But I don't really see any real savings, so I personally don't. And you don't really know anything about it, except for what you read here and there. These are more negative issues, when I think about this topic, the driver's license regulations, and so on. That doesn't go down particularly well with older people and so on. Yes, that's clear. You realize that, but you have to ask yourself, okay, what are the positives? What can we offer the older generation together? That's not clear today.

Of course, these self-driving vehicles are a cool topic. So if that were optimized, for example, then I would be, because actually, the driver's license is often an issue of loneliness. You're no longer free, you can no longer make your own decisions, you are no longer self-determined, which means you are dependent on others, which is also a problem, and you may not have anyone because your children aren't there and there would be, for example, I think that self-driving vehicles would then perhaps a point where you could just call someone.

Yes, that will come at some point. I do believe that we will have to, that's the whole issue of strengthening public transport, which is becoming increasingly importance, and that we will then have small self-driving buses or something similar.

Yes, that would be great. So that would be where you say, they can take people back and forth. I also think so, and I'm in Germany, I've also considered whether We're going through a lot in Germany right now. When I leave the EU and go to Germany, I have to say, phew.

Not much. Well, it's really the case that the plan is to secure our social security systems. That's an important issue. How can we maintain the pension system, or even maintain it at all. So, when you see that nursing care is going to simply increase, then the whole thing will no longer be financially viable. But, from my point of view, there have also been failures in recent years and decades. We didn't take advantage of the fat years to counteract this, because we might soon have to think about other systems for retirement.

Exactly, a model like that is difficult with what we have now.

But we already knew that in the early 1970s, you have to remember that. Then the so-called pill came along, and we said that it would cause our population was declining. And it was also noted that we were getting older and older. Because in the past, it was simply the case that people lived to a good age in their mid-70s.

That was crazy.

Yes, it was crazy. That was old. Very few people lived to that age. If you look at it, the average age for men was still 70. Yes.

And today, people say that if someone dies at 75, that's very young. Are there certain measures or initiatives in Germany that could serve as a model for other European countries?

In my opinion, yes, but these are countries such as Denmark or all the Scandinavian countries. That also includes the Netherlands, Holland. They are further ahead than we are. They are further ahead, and that includes Austria, for example, especially with Austria's "yes" vote, where pensions are back to over a third of what they were here, and are paid fourteen times more. The question is, why? They simply took the courageous step in 2005 of saying that we need to increase the number of contributors, and from now on, everyone pays in. This includes civil servants, the self-employed, freelancers, and politicians. Everyone. That simply has an effect. And in our country, we simply have to think about stabilizing and financing the pension system by expanding the circle of

contributors at some point. We really, really, really have to think about this, and we always have, of course, a difficult topic at the office difficult issue, I realize, such as civil servants who are already retired or who are about to retire. You just have to say, okay, you make the cut, who is new to the civil service, that they should start paying. Those who have been promised to keep their money and so on. But at some point, you have to start.

No politician dares to tackle that. You can see that with the environmental issue, Mr. Peterke, no one really dares to tackle it.

It keeps getting pushed back again and again, and you just have to when you see, especially in our social security systems, that more or less good times, gifts are given. And now the whole thing is starting to smell.

So we can only look to other countries. I've also thought about it myself, since I studied in Italy. For example, I see that gathering in Italy is quite common, that on Sundays you meet at these marketplaces, where all kinds of people, regardless of generation, whether disabled or not, are all at these big marketplaces and everyone meets there everyone. That's just not our...

Mentality.

Exactly

That's clear now.

Exactly. And that's a shame, isn't it?

Yes, that's where we are, because Germans are too cautious and say, okay, I want to have some peace and quiet and so on, leave it alone, and so on.

Unfortunately, that's the way it is, and of course it's also an issue. Then we have the question of many older adults feeling that they are underrepresented or that their opinions are not taken into account. How can we ensure that their voices and opinions are heard and are important.

Yes, well, that would also be important to me, to say, okay, they need to be involved in be involved in projects. You always have to actively approach people and say, this is a topic that would be interesting for you, someone who has always been active in the field of the environment, or you know they have skills, with individual reflection, for example, or again with volunteer work that correspond to their knowledge and abilities. You have to actively approach people. I believe that's an important point. Waiting for them to come on their own come to you, that won't work. But for me, involvement is also the most important thing. And I would also say that you should always offer social activities where you get people together around the table, exactly that kind of thing. Not necessarily meeting in the market square, but you say, okay, we'll do something in the evening, game nights, or go out together, I don't know, play games or Botscha or something like that, or I make subtle suggestions, often, or we start a walking group or something like that, just in a way that involves people. There is a general lack of meeting places.

We experience that here too. Your daughter also mentioned a great concept, where older people simply come and say, "You know, Ms. Gerstmair, I like coming to your events because I'm alone and I don't like going out, but I like coming to yours because I always meet people I know somehow, and I can chat with them. And I like that." Because actually, there is a barrier when you're alone, or when you're old, this inhibition barrier is just really crazy.

Some people have someone who encourages them and says, "Come on, let's do it, let's go, but if you don't have that, then it's always difficult, then That's a barrier to going out there. That means you really have to push a little harder more pressure.

What are the most important key points to consider when thinking about citizenship, i.e., civic engagement, not only for older adults, but for aging throughout one's entire life?

Yes, if you consider civic engagement, then I believe it all comes back to the relevant opportunities, what I can do, both for younger people and, accordingly, for older people. And then there is the issue of an important one: appreciation, recognition. For me, these are the most important points, which are also very important for volunteer work. If you don't feedback on the work you've done, it's always bad. That's the point you have to see here, appreciation, recognition, I think that's important. It can also be a motivator when I personally realize that my work is appreciated. I say "Okay, great, keep it up, we need you," that has to be the feeling conveyed that you are needed. If that's not the case, then at some point you I say, why bother doing it at all? I don't have to do it.

You know, I feel like we've somehow developed such a bad image for old age somehow? Yes. Do you know what I mean? Well, the old people aren't actually what they used to be, you know, an age, an older person who has experience, who can give advice, who can accompany me, who can me, but it's somehow so negatively associated with being old, right?

Yes, that's clear. People don't see it that way, they don't want to perceive it or take it seriously or even include them. You say, okay, they have the experience, I can involve him. But that's always the one who says, a bit of a generational conflict. You have to take that into account as well. The old guy tends to say, "I've always done it this way. And what you're telling me now is complete nonsense. You have to do that, it's difficult. It's not easy to solve the problem. Sure, it's good that young people have different ideas, different considerations, but whether that goes down well with the older generation is another matter. But basically, it's good. It's also a voluntary position. I notice this time and again. It's just that sometimes with certain projects, "I've always done it this way, why are we looking at something different now, and that's not necessary at all. And that's...

So the old ways versus the new ideas? Although actually, the mix would actually be best most of the time, right?

Yes, of course. It's difficult. It's quite a challenge.

Just a few more questions. Many older adults are affected by social and/or physical isolation. How can communities encourage older adults to break out of their routine and become more active in society?

Yes, that's the issue again, I think, what can the community do, what can the community offer in this regard? Also with the appropriate facilities, that's important, whether it's senior centers or multigenerational houses or meeting places or whatever, I think that's the most important thing, and cultural offerings, especially those tailored to older people. I believe that I believe that the offerings are one of the most important things. If they are suitable, then I can get them out and about. Something every week. And if it's just a group bike ride or a company tour, then that's fine, wonderful, we Let's organize a trip to the theater in Munich or something like that. The offers just have to be right. Then I can get people out of their isolation a little bit out of their isolation a little bit.

But the community has to be active too, right?

The community has to provide connections or have certain organizations. Otherwise, they won't be able to do it.

But in reality, it's the non-profit organizations like the Red Cross, Caritas, Valkuminus, adult education centers. Those are always the ones same ones. And the cities are already relying on them for that on them, right?

Yes, unfortunately, it's the case that you pass the buck a little and say, okay, do it again. How the organization is structured is once again a classic task for you and so on.

You seem to be able to be active and innovative yourself. What kind of programs or initiatives could parish councils or institutions implement to support older adults more support older adults?

Yes, that's how I see it too, that's the issue in general, the issue of senior care. Whether it's excursions, whether it's senior afternoons. Whether it's senior meals and what is available for lunch, which is also available in some cases, I also think it's good that retirement homes or senior centers offer something like that. So it's a kind of meeting place where people first of all know, okay, I'll be back there at half past eleven, then we'll have lunch, so there's no pressure or anything, then we say we say, okay, I'm going out, I'm having lunch with others and I have meet people I can go out with, talk to, and spend a couple of hours among people, so such offers should also be promoted much more by the communities to promote them and encourage more people to take advantage of them. promoting them.

Yes, you know what I found interesting in Italy, for example, is this coffee culture, right? Yes. In Italy, we always go to cafes, where we drink espresso, meet up, chat a bit, regardless of age, and then go again. But at least you've had brief contact. Exactly, exactly, exactly. And we don't have that at all. So I notice that the southern countries simply have a lot more...

Yes, they tick differently there. Yes, yes. The sense of community and so on. It's perceived differently.

Limited accessibility... How big is the problem for older people? What measures can be taken to ensure that public spaces and infrastructures are accessible to seniors?

Yes, accessibility is still an important issue. Exactly. Should be possible for everyone to have access, but unfortunately that's not the case everywhere. That's problem where local authorities and municipalities also have to ensure that public spaces are easily accessible to everyone. It's all pointless if I know what a municipal theater is like here, and then there are ten steps to climb. I don't have an elevator, and we never have a back entrance. It's a nightmare. Not to mention other train stations or anything else, where there is still a lot of catching up to do. Here in Bavaria, they said Bavaria would be barrier-free by 2023, but that's not happening. That was very patronizing.

Yes, my mother was in a wheelchair for 13 years. My mom had a stroke, That's why this multi-generational house was also very good for all of my children and if you're young, you don't realize where the barriers are. But when you actually have someone who is also disabled and gets around in a wheelchair, then you think sometimes think that can't be true. So it's crazy where you actually you notice, ugh. How can urban planning for seniors, older people, help them to stay connected and improve their aging experience?

Yes, but for me, that's also the issue of accessibility that plays a role. Then for me, there's also safe routes through the city center. Because I don't have any well-lit paths or anything like that along the city wall. Without well-lit paths, no one dares to go out at night. That's the issue there. Fortunately, it's not so important for us yet. But in larger cities, safety plays a role. Then there's the issue of public transportation, which is an important issue. If that doesn't work, I know it's difficult. Financially, of course, that's always an issue. It's a huge struggle, even for the municipality, to do that. We already had solutions, which unfortunately fell by the wayside, and then always demonstrated. We were sometimes able to volunteer in such a project with the citizen buses. It would have been such a good solution if we had said, okay, there is a service for the elderly. But let's say something has to happen. Whether that's still be with call taxis or call buses or whatever, then something would have to happen that doesn't more needs to happen, because if mobility is no longer available, then it becomes difficult.

Then it becomes a vicious circle, right?

Exactly, then you just sit at home and can't go out anymore, and that's a real problem. If he's lucky, the neighbor brings him something to eat and does my shopping and stuff, but then it happens and I can always do it myself. That also plays a role in general, the issue of poverty in old age.

And it's still a female issue in Germany.

Exactly, exactly. Today we are in Bavaria. Yes. The fourth woman aged 65 is at risk of threatened by poverty in old age. That's crazy. Almost 25 percent of women in Bavaria over the age of 65 are at risk of poverty in old age.

Is it because some women in Bavaria didn't just raise children? Why is that? Or is it because they didn't pay enough into the system?

That's part of the reason. I said it before, okay, we want children and then, dear wife, you stay at home. Okay. Then they may have worked part-time for a certain period of time, if they were still employed at all, then it doesn't add up to much. Then you also have to consider the widow, who receives a widow's pension, if her husband was, let's say, an average earner, then he might have had a pension of 1600 or 1700 euros, a worker like that, who was at the Bauer company, he doesn't have any more, he doesn't get any more. And then the partner dies, and I get either 55 or 60% of that, so you only have eight hundred euros left. And if I don't have any assets myself, nothing at all, and so do people who don't build up very much, and maybe I only have 300 or 400 euros of my own pension, then what do you have then? You have the 1100, 1200 euro pension, with both pensions, with pension and widow's pension, it's not enough. And if I still have to pay rent, then it gets really tight.

I really wouldn't have thought it was 25%, would you?

It's not uncommon anymore.

What solutions and processes should be considered when thinking about improving public transportation for older people?

I think, in general, you have to consider how you can improve the services? However you look at it. Public transport is of course very expensive, but what alternatives are there? As I said earlier, buses and such. I have to make sure that I say, okay, I have accessible buses. They're small buses. That I can even get on. And that I can perhaps take my walker or wheelchair and so on with me. That's also an issue. And then you have to see how I can perhaps also offer neighborhood assistance, transportation services, or something else as an alternative, so that it's generally a bit coordinated, but that has to be coordinated somehow, what if you have a fancy event today, if you say, okay, I'm at home and I'll do that. A public festival, or perhaps the Schrannefest again—how can you organize transportation services to get people out of

there? Organize transportation services so that people can get there? - That's true. - But that has to all be organized. It can be hard to take, that's... But I think you have to work out certain considerations, because for me that's a very, very important issue. Yes, of course. If there's no more mobility, then it's over. Then they can't get out anymore.

Did anyone even think about the fact that you could actually take people transport services to the Bürgerfest or Schrankenfest. Nobody thinks about that.

Yes, nobody thinks about that. Of course, I'm not blaming anyone. The organizations also have a lot to do. But it would always be the case, I always say, okay, how we could maybe tackle this, so that people agree to say, "Call this number." You don't have to go there and say, "Okay, I have to drive the person home with a blood alcohol level of 2.5. Hahahaha

Do you have anything else to add?

I think everything has been said.