

**CONFERENCE ON “ACTIVE AND HEALTHY AGEING”  
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**Workshop 2 “ Long life learning”**

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Life long learning and the use auf ICT for fostering the social inclusion  
of older adults

**The population is rapidly ageing**

The population of the EU at large is facing to a serious ageing process in the next 20 years. Even now, the over 65 year-olds already constitute 17,4% of the population. Latest Eurostat-prognoses are predicting an increase by 6% to 23,6% until the year 2030.

**Older adults are valuable human capital**

The importance of older adults for all of society is often not considered enough, it is time to regard them as a valuable constituent of society and to foster their competences.

Older adults (55+) can no longer be regarded as a homogenous group of passive people or a burden in need of care. Rather, they are an active age group with various life styles and social milieus differing considerably between and within countries – just like any other part of the population. These heterogeneous persons possess experiences and competences that are valuable to society and to younger generations, e.g. in the fields of personal, social and professional competences. Older workers and their specific knowledge are needed in the labour markets. The active participation and social inclusion of this group of the population fosters civil society and is absolutely necessary for the prosperity of society as a whole.

**In this context, lifelong learning is a necessity, not a luxury**

To fully utilize the potential of older adults, they must have access to lifelong learning offers. As of today, seniors are alarmingly neglected when it comes to educational offers.

This neglect is even apparent in the EU papers: where education is mentioned as a priority, students and scientists are named as the target group. When issues caused by the ageing of society are mentioned, education isn't.

Older adults just need to be stimulated by learning activities. Furthermore, brain research results show that learning improves seniors' health and is thus an important asset in health prevention.

Lifelong learning is the key to assuring that the competences and productivity of older adults aren't lost to society. It is imperative to provide this growing share of population with learning offers that are specially developed for them. Structures such as the Universities of the Third Age must be fostered and developed. Formal learning opportunities must be combined with informal and non-formal learning environments, e.g. in self-organized groups and post-employment activities. The importance of learning outside of formal structures is growing and should be acknowledged in educational policies and funding.

### **Lifelong learning as a bridge between science and society**

In ageing societies, universities can no longer concentrate only on their traditional clientele. Offering opportunities for lifelong learning to adults age 55 and over should become a new priority. University-based lifelong learning has the task of informing people on the basis of scientific facts.

Besides being a societal necessity, such offers directly benefit universities: they create a link between science and society that improves the dissemination of scientific results and the reputation of the university as an institution. By co-operating with NGOs, the positive societal effects can be increased even further.

Structures of university-based lifelong learning already exist in numerous Danube countries, although they differ a great deal. These structures should be fostered and expanded or, where necessary, created. University-based (and other) lifelong learning offers shouldn't only address people with formal educational degrees, but rather all persons wishing to improve their education and wanting to participate actively in the learning process. Seniors can further contribute to intergenerational learning by bringing in their own know-how and experiences and transferring their knowledge to younger generations.

### **New pedagogical methodology**

Older adults' motivation for learning is often the search for new constructive fields of activity and roles in society after a professional career. Older learners are thus usually characterised by a high intrinsic motivation. They associate non-vocational education with the wish to learn in a self-determined way and without pressure, and often have reservations concerning official certifications and formal examinations.

### **ICT offer great opportunities for learning and social participation**

Information and communication technologies (ICT) can be an attractive way of learning together with others and of offering university-based lifelong learning outside of universities. ICT are becoming increasingly important in everyday life, be it at work or in private life. But in the domain of their use, there is a large gap between generations: older people use Internet considerably less than the average of their country. But nowadays, the competence of using Internet in a productive way is a key qualification.

That is why ICT are a necessary part of lifelong learning: they enable older adults to participate actively in society and to take part in e-learning activities. E-learning has the advantages of accessibility for persons in rural areas and for the physically impaired. It also offers the possibility of blending formal and non-formal learning by offering courses while fostering interactivity, communication and the creation of knowledge-based and social communities.

Familiarizing older adults with Internet use in learning activities is an important step towards fostering their preparedness for political and social cooperation and participation. It enables them to make full use their potential.

### **Ways of fostering lifelong learning for older adults in the EU**

By creating a link between universities and society as well as using ICT in lifelong learning, the creation of a democratic knowledge-based civil society will be promoted. An idea to reach such a linkage is the creation of network between universities and NGOs to foster the exchange of good practices in seniors' education.

As we can show, the opportunities of ICT facilitate transnational cooperation and increase the benefits to be drawn from it, e.g. by enabling the involvement of inhabitants of rural areas.

Generally, the EU should acknowledge the growing significance of lifelong learning for older adults by giving political priority to their social inclusion and fostering their empowerment for the development of the civil society in the EU.

### **Measures that need to be taken**

#### **- Measures for the provision of high quality Lifelong Learning (LLL) programs, especially e-learning, for older adults (55+)**

LLL for all ages fosters the development of civil society in the EU. Therefore also the competence and productivity of older people (55+) must be activated and utilised in this process. LLL as a link between university and society supported by the use of the Internet for learning will promote the active participation of elderly.

- promote high quality LLL, especially e-learning, for older adults that builds upon and develops the learners' competences and their social participation
- foster exchange of good practice in general continuing education for older adults amongst LLL providers - universities and NGOs
- create a network of educational providers, experts and other professionals from this education field in the EU
- lay basis for sustainable structures in LLL for 55+ in all the EU countries



In the framework of LLL, the competence of using the Internet in a productive way becomes a key qualification. Internet use will not only help older adults to manage every day life but help their own learning processes and enable the creation of learning and social communities on regional, national and European level.

Implemented will be courses on the basic use of the Internet tools for communication and cooperation. E-learning activities on subjects relevant for seniors and society will be supervised by professional trainers and facilitators.

**- Measures to create sustainable LLL structures for older people (55+) in each countries**

- State of the art analysis
- European conferences on Lifelong learning for 55+
- Transfer of good practice in LLL and e-learning.
- Development of regional Lifelong Learning Centres for older adults (55+)
- Development and an implementation of a cross-national virtual U3A platform
- Development and implementation of “good practice” measures for different target groups
- Development and implementation of qualification and the train-the-trainer course

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