

EU recommendations on Active Ageing

Dear Sir / Madam,

The consortium of SMARTE developed a new **Senior Learning Model** which can be used in setting up a learning area for older people. This innovative model has been used and evaluated in several local learning areas for older people. Based on scientific research concerning success-factors of learning for older people in co-operation with the consortium of EDAM (Education Against Marginalization), the consortium determined 3 main guiding principles: senior learning should focus on participants (e.g. involving older people in developing and constructing the learning areas), on learning as a social process (e.g. taken the social interactions before, in and after the learning activity into account) and focus on the learning environment (e.g. age-friendly environments). When adopting this Senior Learning Model, it is found that the quality of Life Long Learning for older people can be enhanced.

In order to research a **sustainable impact** on older learners, it would be recommended that local and regional projects adopt the principles of the Senior Learning Model in their activities. Although a number of organisations develop (or adopt) specific learning strategies for older adults, it is demonstrated that older learners are still (much) underrepresented in educational participation. Nevertheless, older adults have the desire to keep on learning. Moreover it should be stimulated, since the participation of older adults in educational activities has been related with positive outcomes such as increased quality of life and reduced psychosomatic complaints.

Besides this, European discussions about lifelong learning in later life are predominantly located in the fields of economy and employment (cf. EU 2020). While a great deal of projects on lifelong learning in older adults focuses on work(ing longer), little attention has been given to intergenerational education and cultural activities. Learning is however **more than vocational training**. Older people often live a very active and diversified life (cf. Generali-study¹ and Belgian Ageing Studies²). The Senior Learning Model builds on the learning needs and interests of older people and is a relevant addition to the narrowed current discussion. There are plenty of existing individual initiatives for ageing, but an idea for an European overall lifelong learning concept which fits to various (older) life styles and biographical processes and which shows frames, strategies and practices to solve future challenges is missing. The Senior Learning Model could be a first onset towards this broader lifelong learning framework in old age.

Future challenges and projects

The Belgian Ageing Studies that we analysed in the SMARTE-project clearly demonstrate that taking **diversity among older people** into account is crucial when developing projects for older adults. Although ageing is characterized by diversities and inequalities, very often, older people are homogenously described as "the elderly". First, there is a difference between different cohorts of older people. New generations are coming into older age with different histories, background and lifestyles. Although a general perception seems to exist that future cohorts

¹ Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach (Hrsg.) (2013). Generali Altersstudie 2013. Wie ältere Menschen leben, denken und sich engagieren. Frankfurt/Main: bpb.

² www.belgianageingstudies.be

approaching old age will be 'better-off' than current older people, that the so-called Babyboomers have higher education, more income and more digital skills, there are some recent studies who find evidence that the future cohort approaching retirement may be more socially excluded compared to previous cohorts of the same age. For example, due to the cutback in residential care combined with the increase in ageing population, more and more people with dementia will be cared for in their own home. Also in these cases, social inclusion will deserve continuous attention.

Second, the Generali Age Study, based on a representative survey of 4197 persons at the age of 65 to 85 years in Germany, concludes that the differences within the group of 65 to 85 year-old people are only partially defined by age differences. Differences between older people take place in terms of income, ethnicity, health, gender, living arrangements, and life chances resulting in diversity between older adults from the same birth cohort.

Third, deep inequalities in the experience of ageing take place in the EU, north-south, east-West. In particular there is a need to take into account these differences between European regions.

In this way the Senior Learning Model perfectly connects to the European Year of Active Ageing (and intergenerational solidarity). As a reaction to the merely negative perspective on population ageing, and inspired by the World Health Organization, the European Commission branded 2012 as the **European Year of Active Aging**. By doing so, they aimed to support health, participation and security as people age. The active ageing discourse emphasizes that older adults should be given the chance to participate fully in society. Also the **EY 2013, focusing on European Citizenship** acknowledges the importance of active citizenship of all his residents. In the **Dublin declaration on Age-friendly cities and communities**³ in Europe 2013, the EU demonstrates the importance of including older people and empowering them to remain in charge of their own lives for as long as possible.

The promotion of a culture of lifelong learning among older adults could represent a cornerstone of these policies. The ideas of EY 2012 and 2013 should not be considered as momentums of one year, but have set the base for future developments and future projects. Future projects could build on both ideas and work towards a more inclusive society, where older adults age actively and are recognized as active citizens.

Consequences

Conclusively the SMARTE-consortium would like to make following recommendations for future projects and research:

- Include the topic of Active Ageing in future projects of EU by using Lifelong learning. For example, 83% older people want to stay independent as long as possible and hope not to be dependent on other peoples' help (Generali Study, 2013). Learning can play an important part in staying independent. Such innovative projects would require sustainable funding. Not only experimental projects should be funded, also attention should be paid to sustainable infrastructure on local, regional, national and European level. As prognoses for Europe demonstrate the group of older people is on the rise, investing now will benefit future generations as well.
- Include older people in developing evidence-based policy. The Generali-study (2013) demonstrates that political priorities of older people do not only refer to interests of their own generation. They are rather interested in subjects which ensure a sustainable and fair social development in the future. Older people consider themselves to be still jointly responsible for the development of our country and our society. Older people are very much willing to be involved at the local level, since they believe this is the level can do more for their own concerns than the federal government. As is demonstrated with the Belgian Ageing Studies it

³ <http://www.ahaconference2013.ie>

is possible to develop age-friendly communities using a participatory approach with older people.

- There is a need to include **research on sustainability** of learning projects. In the SMARTE-project the university of Molise (Campobasso, Italy) performed a long-term pilot-evaluation of a learning project 5 years ago. This is unseen, as projects often are funded for a short time, and project (funding) is finished before a long-term evaluation could be performed. Consequently a number of (essential) questions remain: What is the long-term impact of learning projects on older adults? What is the effectiveness of learning projects?
- In the same line of reasoning, more evidence-based knowledge is needed on **how to develop participatory projects with older people**? How can we involve older people when developing lifelong learning programs? What are success factors in involving older people when developing lifelong learning programs? What are imperative conditions? What are the main problems? How can we evaluate such methodologies?
- Not only **research** is needed on the immediate targeted learn effects (e.g. digital skills in a digital skills training), but also **on the side effects** such as social inclusion and social skills, individual competencies, quality of life, etc.
- Finally, it is recommended that professionals, policymakers and researchers recognize this great degree and types of diversity among older people when developing policy and projects. It is important that the diversity of older people's views are incorporated into the design of services as **innovative** interventions, realizing **bottom-up projects**. Older people could be included as experts during the implementation and evaluation of specific projects and interventions. The Senior Learning Model could provide some points of departure herein.

We do hope our recommendations can be used for future projects in Europe focussing on lifelong learning and using the perspective of active ageing.

Don't hesitate to contact us, if you have any questions or need additional comments.

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Kind regards,

The consortium of SMARTE