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Basic Information on the “Exchange of knowledge on the education of seniors in the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain and Sweden” (SET)

Lifelong Learning Programme
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Goal and Result of the Project

Project Goal:

The main goal of this project is the exchange of experience with educating seniors in the third age in 4 partner countries. The partners of the project focused in their countries on the typical forms of organizing life-long education of seniors.

For better illustration, documentaries were filmed in each country which illustrate in other way then the text part of this multi-media CD-ROM the importance of mobilization of the intellectual potential of seniors.

Project Result:

Multi-media CD-ROM “Seniors Education and Training” containing:

- Introduction
- Comparison analysis of the education of seniors in the countries of the project
- Conclusions and recommendations of the comparison analysis of the education of seniors in the countries of the project
- Multi-media manual with examples of courses for seniors
- Documentaries on the experience in educating seniors in the countries of the project.

More at <http://www.free-art.cz/set/>

On Ageing

The art of ageing is closely connected to the art of man to “continue learning” or even to “start learning again.”

- Have you come across a book by J. Améry “On ageing” with the subtitle of “Revolt and Resignation?”
- The book describes the decrease in physical and mental strengths and the life face to face to death.
- The author emphasizes that ageing is painful, stupefying and humiliating and that it is not possible to resist ageing.
- In 5 chapters of the book, 5 views on ageing is described:
 - Passing of time view
 - Physical view
 - Social view
 - Cultural view
 - And death announcing itself view

On Ageing

- The core text is a chapter on social and cultural view of ageing.
- Ageing isn't primarily a question of age, it is given by the embedding of a person in the society.
- Ageing is perceived from the point of view of inability to understand new technologies.
- Ageing cannot be revolted against, that is a fact.
- Old people can only await death.
- As it is commonly known, the passing of time cannot be influenced (slowed down or stopped), but the cultural view on ageing cannot be fully accepted, i.e. it is possible to effectively fight against computer illiteracy and similar.
- There are trends of active ageing against depressing and defeatist approach to ageing as described by J. Améry.

Trends of Active Ageing

- Colin Milner, CEO of the international advisory board of active ageing at the 2nd world congress on active ageing (Lisbon 2009) defined 12 trends of active ageing:

- 1) Sports specific training, rehabilitation and education
- 2) Exercise / Physical Activity as Medicine
- 3) Fall reduction
- 4) Energy Solutions
- 5) Seeking Alternatives
- 6) Dr. Me
- 7) Pre and Anti
- 8) In the Moment
- 9) Brain Fitness
- 10) Transference technology
- 11) Life long learning
- 12) Emotional Health

- Trend no. 11 (life-long education) is a trend which is developed and documented in SET project.

Periodization of Age

In most countries, people's age is divided according to the proposal of the World Health Organization (WHO). This division is based on the so-called fifteen-year periods of a human life.

- Middle or mature age period is considered to be the age range of 45-59 years.
- Early seniority (older age) defines the age range of 60-74 years.
- The beginning of the actual seniority period (advanced, high age) is at the age of 75 and lasts till the age of 89. From this period we can also single out:
 - The period of longevity: 90 years and more.

Defining the Term Senior

There are two kinds of content definition of the term “senior”:

- One used in connection to the national pension systems to identify people who are in the age limit for going into retirement and older;
- Another one defined by UN which recognizes in its materials the limit of 65 years as the seniority limit.

Demographic Data

- In the Czech Republic there was 1,873 thousand people older than 60 years in 2000, which formed 18.2% of the population in the Czech Republic. In 2005 there was 2,077 thousand people older than 60, which formed 20.3% of the population of the Czech Republic and prognostic calculation state that in 2030 there will be 2,962 thousand people older than 60 in the Czech Republic, which will represent 30.6% of the population in the Czech Republic. By the end of 2005 there were 1,445,219 people older than 65 in the Czech Republic.
- By 2050, the number of people in the European Union in productive age (15-64) will decrease to 48 million. By 2050, the number of people older than 65 will double in comparison with the number of people in productive age.
- What consequences will this have on seniors themselves?
We can consider as positive the fact that the average age of people of the EU will extend, e.g. in Sweden the average age will increase from the current 78.1 to 83.6 for men and from the current 82.5 to 86.2 for women in 2050.

Demographic Data

- Another positive factor is the fact that in 2050 the expected 30% share of seniors (65+) in the total number of population of the Union will create an important market argument in a series of products and services offered.
- Negative aspects include the fact that the extension of age brings with it a high illness of the highest age group of seniors (80+), which creates additional costs on financing the health care covered by state.
- In connection to the extension of average age in the countries of EU, we need to support all activities helping to keep and improve the quality life of seniors for the longest possible time. One of the activities which can contribute to active and independent living out the “third age” is the education of seniors.

Quality of Life of Seniors

- Based on demographic data on ageing of population, it seems necessary to deal with the quality of life of seniors.
- Quality of life according to the World Health Organization (WHO) is: “How people perceive their position in their lives in the context of culture in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, life styles and interests.”
- The quality of life of seniors is often perceived as a synonym to the ability to lead an independent life and the methods for evaluation often focus on the ability to perform everyday activities. According to this concept, the one who is happy with his or her life, lives a quality life. And when are people happy? When they have success in reaching goals they set forth.

Life Values of Seniors

Seniors consider the following values as the most important ones:

- State of health (good health)
- Social contacts
- Adequate financial resources
- Self-creation
- Education
- Self-education

Result of Research on Senior Education

- Education is an important factor which influences the quality of the life of seniors.
- Education of seniors cannot be focused on specialized education (i.e. in-depth study of a field as it is at standard university or technical studies). It must focus on personality development with the enjambment to family life and interests of the participants in education.
- The emphasis on personality development must be shown in the theme structure and in the selection of appropriate forms of education activities.
- A possibility to “custom make the education activity” for the given senior is required. In this way the professional, family, free-time and other priorities of the seniors can be taken into account.

Expectations of Seniors and the Actual Teaching at U3A

In the offer of U3A (university of third age) education, there's no discrepancy between the requirements of the applicants for U3A education and its offer. The problem is that sometimes the interest is higher than the actual possibilities of the education subjects, in this case universities.

U3A belongs to the lifestyle of the Czech population, it has a very positive position, and seniors going to university classrooms to participate in the programme of life-long education represent today a vital group with a great social potential.

Seniors consider information one of the most important priorities and they believe that education slows down ageing – which, however, hasn't been proved. Education doesn't slow down ageing, it enables to live through this stage of life actively.

The fact that seniors are still interested in lectures on health topics shows that they are interested in healthy lifestyle and that they are responsible for their health.

Seniors unambiguously prefer education offered by universities. These education institutes have the most complex system of education, lectures are given by qualified lecturers and the offer of learning activities is very varied in art studies and also in natural science studies.

Conclusion of Senior Education Analysis in the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain and Sweden

Czech Republic

- In the Czech Republic, the main provider of senior education are universities of the third age.
- Other short-term senior education courses are provided by high schools, private universities, charity and senior organizations.
- The activities have a local character and there is no centralized and updated database on them.
- Significant feature of the senior education is the fact that 90% of the participants are women: the explanation can be based on a higher average age of women. This explanation however isn't sufficient.

Conclusion of Senior Education Analysis in the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain and Sweden

Austria

- There are no U3A in Austria, universities are in general accessible to people of all ages – in 2005 only 1% of people older than 60 studied there.
- Main providers of senior education are Folk-High-Schools (people's high schools), church, social and charity organizations.
- Seniors are mainly interested in a course on memory skills and also in themes of culture, health care, medicine, health and security, art, music and crafts, environment, history, personal development, looks, basic skills, theatre, psychology, sociology, sport and relaxation.
- There is less interest in PC courses and language courses.
- Courses organised by church institutes are not preferred by seniors.
- High number of women in the senior education participants.

Conclusion of Senior Education Analysis in the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain and Sweden

Spain

- The main senior educator is the Spanish National Association of University Programmes for Seniors via which 51 universities offer special senior education (41 public universities).
- This education is completed with local courses of charity, social and senior organizations supported by local autonomies.
- Basic themes: social sciences and literature, foreign languages, history of art, ICT, health care and quality life, politics, environment, psychology, biology, etc.
- Spanish-specifics: courses for completing basic education (literacy obtaining).
- Approx. 70% of attendants of senior education are women.
- Seniors prefer education offered by universities and senior clubs.

Conclusion of Senior Education Analysis in the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain and Sweden

Sweden

- The main senior educator is the study association and people's schools (Folk-High-Schools); Sweden doesn't know the institute of University of the Third Age.
- Education is financed with the help of grants of regional or local administrations in the total amount of 150,500,000 EUR for study associations and 143,800,000 EUR for people's high schools.
- Basic form of education are study circles where anyone can organize any type of a course that they're interested in under the condition that there are at least 3 attendants and there is a study plan.
- The most favourite subjects are: art, crafts, music, culture, ICT and health/fitness.
- Study associations are in every city, or community – they are close to the attendants.

Conclusion of Senior Education Analysis in the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain and Sweden

Sweden

- Courses for seniors are not university courses and do not enable higher education.
- Favourite source of education in Sweden is a nationwide broadcasting organization for education – UR. This organization includes TV and radio and it provides interactive education by the means of web pages.
- The offer of courses reflects the changes in the Swedish society (new seniors are more educated and the courses focus on keeping the activities of seniors, creative activities and other hobbies rather than gaining basic skills).
- The proportion of men and women attendants is more balanced than in other countries of the project.

Conclusion

Education of seniors should primarily use all forms of informal education (i.e. further education) for which informal meetings with seniors in a pleasant environment is typical. There, according to their interests, they deepen not only their knowledge but also their practical skills and everything that interests them in the world that surrounds them and which they want to understand, even though the outside world doesn't care much about them.

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