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## **Lifelong Education, Work And Development - The Foundations Of Silver Economy**

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### **Introduction**

Erich Fromm's postulation: »If one cannot be constructive, one becomes destructive« can explain many contemporary social phenomena.

In our information and knowledge based societies "social capital" is crucial. Why competent, experienced and personally well developed older people should be excluded?

Lifelong education and lifelong work unite generations into one and healthy society, and the so called silver economy should develop in harmony with social developmental principles. Silver economy, or better what we understand by silver economy, addresses the right to both education and work. It is important for older people, or any generation indeed, to be active, as to be able to co-operate with others, co-operation being conditioned by the fact that we are active. In today's information society the number and the diversity of possibilities for co-operation have considerably increased. Stable jobs of the past » of non-fixed duration« are being replaced by dynamic, flexible forms of work which enable young people to enter the labour market immediately after graduation. They also enable the jobless, to replace their past job by several forms of work. They enable retirees so that their work and their economic function do not need to stop after retirement.

Silver economy is a promising phenomenon which can not be reduced to making profit by stimulating older people's consumerism and considering them as a niche. It is far more. Based on humanistic values, silver economy helps building society for all ages where older people take on a number of roles, those of producers, innovators and consumers. Lifelong education and lifelong work go hand in hand and do not stop in old age.

### **If one cannot be constructive, one becomes destructive**

Many contemporary phenomena can be explained using Erich Fromm's postulation: »If one cannot be constructive, one becomes destructive«. Being inborn, this is a leading principle throughout our lives and accordingly there is every chance that older people who cannot work and do not have access to education, become destructive. Socially excluded, they can not live out their constructive forces outside, in society. Consequently, they may turn their constructive forces into destructive ones targeting others or their own person. This is the reason why older people more often get sick, depressed, suicidal or simply nasty, displaying »older people's maliciousness« readily inflicting injury, harm, or suffering on another.

They become malicious, if they feel they have lost the necessary social backing. It is in society, and only in society, that emotions can be gained to meet the inborn psycho-social needs: the need to belong, to be safe, the need to experience self-esteem, love, the quest for learning, the need to experience beauty, the need to be recognized. In the past, if older people spent just one or two years in such "psychosocial trap" before they died, the number of older people being relatively low, the social stability was not jeopardized as a result of it. Long-lived society, however, cannot be healthy, if social exclusion of older people is not diminished, impacting the co-operation of all generations. In long-lived society, the third age may last up to thirty or forty years.

In our information and knowledge based societies "social capital" is crucial. Each of us is valuable. Why competent, experienced and personally well developed older people should be redundant?

Both lifelong education and lifelong work unite generations into one and healthy society!

### **Social Economy and Principles of Social Development in European Union**

Silver economy should develop in harmony with social developmental principles. Silver economy, or to put it differently, what we understand by silver economy, addresses *the right to lifelong work*. Following the retirement, older people's work adopts new forms, meeting their needs, wishes and engaging their abilities. Traditional jobs have become outdated, turning into new, more flexible, types of work.

There is an important age discrimination on the labour market right now. New technologies and creativity, the foundations of the contemporary work make older people free of the traditional discrimination. Different programmes and applications, the Internet do not need to know how old we are. All they do is to evaluate the quality of our work, the quality of our creative ideas the quality of our thinking. They do not ask about our physical capacities but, on the contrary, they ask about our capability in creativity.

Currently, at Slovenian Third Age University we are running Silver Code, an EU project on coding, computer programming, leading older students through different phases which are not age-labeled or capacity labeled. During the process older people are creators, builders, developers and finally digital makers. They have hardly become digitally literate, but that is not enough. Being familiar with coding and being digital makers ultimately using 3D printers is what older people need to learn like everybody else. This is utopia, some of you might think and say! But let me use the words of Paul Lengrad, the author of the lifelong learning or permanent education theory: It is a utopia, but the kind of utopia we already live.

Longevity is an acquisition of development. If in long-lived society we wanted to abide by the old model of old age with attributes like: dependence, frailty, poverty, aid and maintenance, older people would be an unbearably destructive burden to younger generations. General public and younger generations nurture such old image of old age, that's why the ageing society is a scary society for them. Throughout Europe, the gap between generations is getting wider and the conflict ever more serious.

There are efforts in civil society in the field of active ageing and intergenerational co-operation, fostering the development. There have been numerous initiatives *towards*

*society of all ages and inclusive society*. Lifelong education (and conceptualised older adult education), as well as lifelong work (not jobs!) for older people, are important, as well as the increased number of digital opportunities for older people in our society of informatics. These efforts meet the massive needs older people have and address the social development goals. These efforts are targeting older people, but they also impact positively the life of other generations.

### **Critical perspectives on the Strategy of Lifelong Learning RS**

The development of contemporary information society and knowledge based society is quicker and has made a frog leap over a short period of time. If the development required one century to take place in the past, it requires just one decade today. That's why if badly conceptualised, this strategy, could have a negative impact for decades. The strategy still considers life course to be divided into three ages: the first age - the age of schooling, the second age the age of employment, work and the third age or the age of retirement. In more advanced societies such division was valid till the second half of the sixties of the past century. (A. Toffler, U. Beck). Moreover retirement equated leisure time. But let us face the reality! Do you think that 600 000 retirees (out of the 2 million population) can spend 30 years in retirement without being involved into meaningful activities? Is this belief grounded in reality or is it just another type of exclusion of older people? Such image of old age is in Slovenia a mirror image of retarded social development?

When the Strategy was elaborated and then only we were invited to participate in discussion with the prime minister. With full responsibility we will continue contributing to the shaping of this strategy in writing. It is important that the Strategy be based on new paradigms. Lifelong education, lifelong work, quality of life and cooperation of generations.

### **Older people being active and working is a condition sine qua non for intergenerational co-operation and building inclusive society**

Two Slovenian ministries indulged into massive establishment of intergenerational centres for intergenerational co-operation. These centres are supposed to a meeting point for all generations in the town. Such centres have existed in each single municipality in Canada since the 70' of the last century. They were meant mostly for artist, their activities, socialising and fun. They were open around the clock. They were meant for raising the quality of their life? But what about the rest of the population? More and more massive formats of intergenerational co-operation exist when people connect among themselves through work when their lives are interconnected with the lives of others and nobody is excluded.

It is important to be active as to be able to co-operate and co-operation is conditioned by the fact we are active.

In today's information society the number of possibilities for co-operation are being considerably increased. Rather stable jobs of the past » of non-fixed duration time« are being replaced by dynamic, flexible forms of work. They enable young people to indulge into labour market immediately after having graduated. They enable the jobless, to replace their past job by several forms of work. They allow retirees that their work and their economic function do not stop after retirement and the intensive professional career. Silver economy and older people's education impact on:

- The development of new, au to date flexible forms of work for the benefit of all generations.
- The contribution to the GDP
- The development of inclusive society
- The decreasing of poverty
- The decreasing loss of autonomy of older people and this the decreasing of the burden put on the shoulders of the generations in the middle.
- The prolonging of older people's autonomy
- Contributing to quality work and life of all generations
- The level of sickness and the related health costs

Positive effects of lifelong work if the right to work is not subordinated to discrimination could be enumerated. To sum it up: Our health, physical and psychic health are preserved if we are active. On the contrary, if we are passive our health is seriously threatened. The basic social relationship is about giving and receiving. It is a two-way process. Silver economy can contribute substantially to improving the situation of older people in society and the shaping of new values as well as quality life.

### **Older people should by no means be reduced to mere role of consumers!**

There are several concepts of silver economy in Europe. The most harmful and superficial ones are those defining older people as mere consumers, a new economic niche or possibility for the capital owners to increase their profits. The social power of the group of older people is measured by the power of the capital. The pressure put on older people for that matter might become strong.

Our concept of silver economy is based on humanistic values and new paradigms and development laws. In order to impose our concept of silver economy we have to be strong, self-confident. We have to abide by the positive development social tendencies and the changed image of active ageing. The short-lived concept of silver economy as a possibility for the owners of capital to increase consumerism and environment pollution is to modified.

In our view, silver economy is about voluntary activities and creativity of older people wanting to contribute to the full extent of their abilities, to the social welfare.

### **Conclusion**

Through regional co-operation an extending of our concept to the wider international setting we intend to strengthen the efforts towards more humanistic silver economy. Therefore the results of our first and second symposium on silver economy will be presented to the *PASSITON, E-network for quality ageing*, at the Annual International Conference of EURAG, European organisation of older people in Vienna etc. You are cordially invited to join us in these endeavours and widely spread the knowledge about silver economy through your own channels.

If labour legislation were not to adapt to today's developmental needs, silver economy might end up increasing the grey market economy. The development of silver economy is too promising for individuals and society to be neglected and hazardous.

In practice silver economy is already there, getting ever more massive. Older people have discovered constructive and creative work as their lifelong right. In the following decade an important increase in silver economy will take place.

Education of older adults supports the emergence of silver economy and new forms of work and active ageing. Thus new flexible forms of work come into being for young people and those who are out of work. Silver economy started with projects like Older people for older people, self help groups, cultural mediators in museums, each-one-teach-one, learning assistance to young people etc. Older people's activities are essential for building inclusive society in which all remain included or get included.

Older people should not be subordinated to the outdated image of old age imposed by the old stereotypes, about older people being frail, sick, dependent and dependent on the help of others. Be aware of social development and let us make them equal partners in social interaction and equal collaborators. Let us allow older people to live the time following their retirement to the fullest extent of their abilities.

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