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## **A New Cluster of Educational Programmes at Slovenian Third Age University Leading to Organised Volunteering of Older People**

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### **The volunteering past of Slovenian Third Age University**

Slovenian Third Age university started in Ljubljana with an experimental and research programme, with six older students over 55 and a 32 years old mentor back in 1984. It was not an easy undertaking in the former Yugoslavia where civil society did not have "le droit de cité". Nowadays, there are 35 universities in 34 towns with more than 21.000 students, more than 2000 mentors, a great number of volunteers striving for a better position of all generations in the society, providing educational, training and working opportunities for younger and elderly generations.

At this moment the central Third Age University of Ljubljana has 5700 older students, retirees, 123 mentors of all ages, 256 so called "animators" i.e. volunteers responsible for their study groups and coordinated by the University, about 30 volunteers working for the benefit of the University, 3 volunteering professionals i.e. university teachers responsible for research, developing theory of the education of the elderly and public campaigning, 3 full time employees all of them university graduates. The education of the elderly is but one area of activities and but one research area of the University. There are others. Moreover, as soon as 1992 education for volunteers in the field of the elderly was introduced upon the developing of a training programme and producing a manual entitled "Volunteering of the elderly for the elderly".

Slovenian Third Age University and theory it developed in the field gave birth to another national network in adult education, i.e. *the network of study circles and of its theory* – the network developed within the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education- and *to the Summer School for Adult Educators* set up by the Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana introducing *education for local development and community matters in Slovenia*.

### **Slovenian Third Age University was started on a voluntary basis and has been a voluntary intergenerational programme ever since**

*Intergenerational projects based on reciprocal learning and joint volunteer work of young, middle aged and older generations can contribute towards maintaining and raising the employability of all generations. First, they offer younger generations a quicker access to labour market owing to non- hierarchised work opportunities they get within such projects. Next, they enable middle aged generations to experiment with their work better than they can do it in their professional working environment. Finally, such projects offer possibility*

for the elderly to evaluate their past experience and knowledge through working and learning in intergenerational projects and to upgrade them. In addition to that, all generations involved in intergenerational projects have significant opportunities to learn from each other on condition, however, that those who plan such projects are knowledgeable and able to, shall we say "organise" opportunities for them to do it. A successful intergenerational project is to be carefully planned and conducted taking into account various aspects and goals and more importantly the need for exchange among generations.

Slovenian Third Age University is a good example of a lasting national voluntary intergenerational project. Founded 32 years ago, it started as a voluntary intergenerational project of older retired professionals, active professionals and experts in different fields and young undergraduate students of educational sciences. A project which was, in those days focusing mostly on cultural education. Our initial idea was essentially to enable older people to strengthen their social identity through getting aware of their cultural role in the society and to pass their knowledge, experience and culture onto younger generations. But, it quickly turned out that also younger generations had their knowledge, their own experience and culture. Thus, from the very beginning knowledge, experience and culture were also passed by younger generations on the older ones

Moreover, hand in hand they all started building the third age university. In this common activity past knowledge and skills were revived and new knowledge and all the participants constructed skills. The young students of adult education started study circles together with older people, retired professionals. They all got involved in common learning and organisational activities. They also got involved in common activities for the benefit of the local community. They learned painting and each year they set up an exhibition. They learned translating and they translated interesting texts to improve the life of the older. They translated books dealing with psychological problems of for instance hyperactive children, which was for the benefit of all generations. They studied art history and they took on work of cultural mediators in museums. They learned research methodology and they conducted research work for the national museums. They learned about the media and they produced their own magazine, a series of radio programmes broadcast on the national radio, a series of television programmes... They learned art history and local history and they got involved in cultural tourism... They set up drama groups producing their scripts and they start performing for various institutions in the local community. Which was for the benefit, of course, of everybody in the community. They learned about new technologies and they started producing web pages for different civil organisations. At this university, which has developed in a true social and educational movement, older retired professionals continue teaching their peers and younger people thus maintaining and upgrading their professional knowledge and skills.

So far, there have been numerous activities performed by the young, middle aged and older generations as a result of their joint theoretical and practical learning, their theoretical learning and learning by doing aiming at a tangible result (a survey, a book, an exhibition, a radio or a TV programme, a new temporary or a permanent activity, a service etc.) Many members of the Slovenian Third Age University, regardless of their age- turned their knowledge, skills and competencies they had acquired there into a professional, first or

second career. Many others who got involved in the education for voluntary work set up new civil organisations or joined the existing ones in the local community (help lines) etc.

### **A new cluster of educational programmes for older students is leading to voluntary work within partner organisations**

So far in most of our programmes our students have been gaining knowledge for their personal and professional growth. Many were outcomes and products resulting from them. Moreover, we have been recruiting from among our students-volunteers for other organisations (i.e. Counselling Centre for Parents, UNICEF, The Town Museum, NGOs like help lines, etc.). Nevertheless, directly educating older people for voluntary work, on a basis of a previous agreement with partner organisations and on a basis of these partnership organisations' needs analysis has not been systematically planned and performed yet.

Being influenced by the changes in the legislation pertaining to old age, the Anti Age Discrimination act etc., and the orientation of the Lace project, however, we have recently started developing a cluster of new educational programmes intended for establishing permanent relationships with partner organisations in need of volunteers. (1) The Interactive Art of Story Telling (2) Cultural Mediating and Cultural Mediators. Both of these programmes are experimental programmes enabling us to determine the methodology for setting up such programmes.

#### **The interactive art of story telling**

##### **The rationale and the presentation of the programme**

In industrial and post-industrial societies the third age is the age when one slowly withdraws from the society. Since relationships are based on repetitive interactions, upon retiring when one leaves organised work, the scope of his or her relationships narrows considerably. The research we conducted in the motives of our students to enrol at the Third Age University has shown that the following ones are equal in importance: to get knowledge and to belong to a new social group.

Now, since the most important feature of story telling is the relationship it establishes between the listener and the audience mastering story telling may perfectly meet the needs. "Telling" involves direct, live contact between teller and listener. The teller's role is to prepare and present the necessary language, vocalization, and physicality to effectively and efficiently communicate the images of a story. The listener's role is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events---the reality---of the story in their mind based on the performance by the teller, and on their past experiences, beliefs, and understandings. The completed story happens in the mind of the listener, unique and personal for each individual.

Our older story tellers will be supposed to learn how to create a story i.e., a narrative account of a real or imagined event or events, how to approach different audiences of different age, of different background be social or professional. Since stories are used to pass on accumulated wisdom, beliefs and values, they are, in my view, for that reason particularly adjusted to older people. Through stories it is possible to explain not only how

things are, why they are, but also the storyteller can express its role and purpose. Stories convey knowledge, they the foundation of memory and learning. They link past, present, and future and teach us to anticipate the possible consequences of our actions.

*Direct interaction* between the teller and audience is an essential element of the storytelling experience. The audience responds to the teller's words and actions. The teller uses this generally non-verbal feedback to immediately, spontaneously, and improvisationally adjust the tones, wording, and pace of the story to better meet the needs of the audience.

Since older people in the post- professional period do not have many occasions to produce an impact on their social environment, this direct interaction offered by story telling seemed an important advantage when choosing to introduce this programme

### **Steps and aims**

There have been several steps made so far:

1. Preparation of a tentative programme, description of the contents and aims. Needs Analysis. It was conducted during the period of enrolment Discussing the possible programme with potential students made us enhance the contents anbetter precise the aims.
2. Setting up the criteria for choosing potential partner organisation Establishing contact with the potential partner organisations presenting them the programme under construction and performed a research in their needs and expectations.
3. Contacting three different actors potential mentors, checking on their availability and collecting their ideas about the programme contents and aims. One of them was selected for collaboration.
4. Improving the programme and presenting it to potential students.
5. Recruitment of students from the students of the Third Age University and partner organisations from their retired workers.
6. Preparation of the agreements to be reached with the partner organisation.
7. Students of andragogy will be doing research in various aspects of the programme.
8. The programme will be covered by the media as s model programme for education of older people in the field of story telling and thus training them for voluntary work.
9. According to the agreements reached with partner organisations our students will start working as volunteers. Since story telling is an interactive art, they will be able to work in quite different organisations: kinder-gardens, schools, libraries, NGO's active in the field of mental health, Oncological Institute, companies.

The programme is supposed to encourage older people to return to the labour market working as volunteers, contributing to local community development. The partnership among our different organisations will provide and enrich »social capital« needed for the integration of older people in society. Last, but not least, the programme offers many opportunities for personal growth and enhances their social roles within their families.

## Cultural Mediating and Cultural Mediators

Cultural Mediating and Cultural Mediators is another programme directly aiming at educating and training volunteers. It is meant for establishing a permanent collaboration with the National Museum of Slovenia. Our students will be working there as a sort of voluntary assistant custodians or as a group of enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteer speakers. They will be jointly educated and trained by the Third Age University and the National Museum of Slovenia.

Their talks can cover many different aspects of the National Museum from the History and Identity of Slovenes, to the processes of conservation and preservation of artefacts, etc. Talks can also be tailored to meet particular interests of the museum audience.

Volunteers will be first recruited from the students of the Third Age University who have been attending study programmes specialized in the field of art history, anthropology, calligraphy, and history.

The potential volunteers will attend a special programme, which will be set up jointly with the National Museum.

### Steps and aims

1. Developing a draft programme
2. Contacting the National Museum and some custodians interested in their exhibitions to be presented to the audience in this way.
3. Preparing an agreement with the National Museum.
4. Developing an educational programme.
5. Recruiting students and potential volunteers
6. Conducting an evaluating the programme
7. Setting up a plan for collaboration with the media promoting this type of voluntary work of the older.
8. Establishing a permanent collaboration and preparing education of more cultural mediators for this and other institutions.

### Conclusion

The cluster of programmes meant for educating volunteers will be followed by research work and appropriate methodology will be built and used in setting up ulterior programmes. They will all pursuit two clusters of aims (1) *personal aims*; education for personal growth and volunteering, actualising knowledge and skills gained in the educational programmes, (2) *social aims*; establishing a partnership with local and national community institutions promoting voluntary work of educated older people, changing the way older people are looked upon: demonstrating that being old today is not the same as it was fifty years ago and thus combating stereotypes about the aged, their life style and their role in the society.

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