

IN FOCUS

Associations Like DANET Are Social Investment Including And Engaging Older People And Other Generations

The Ljubljana EURAG Conference Is Approaching

Two days ago at Slovenian Third Age University took place They are us. (slov. Oni smo mi), a round table on migrants and migrations. The round table was about migrants and how they are welcomed but as a matter of fact, it was also about older people since it was focused on inclusion, integration, social engagement and their impact on societies. Migrants or older people need to be included. But not one by one...What is needed are systems and organisations.

Based in Ulm, DANET (<http://danube-networkers.eu/>) is a European association and a network of organisations for learning in later life, social participation and intergenerational dialogue along the Danube. It is in itself social investment creating bridges among different cultures, organisations, institutions, among generations and older people themselves. To put it differently it is in itself social capital or social investment bringing together older people and professionals' knowledge, skills, experience and culture.

I am going to introduce DANET at the EURAG Conference that will be held in my hometown Ljubljana from 6.-8. May, the conference being devoted to the role of organisations of and for older people or mixed organisations and their impact on society. Such organisations are what sociologists call. social capital. Without them human and cultural capital would be lost, societies would be less effective.

Currently the term social capital is being widely used by sociologists and other professionals, though for a long time it was burdened with economic connotations. But social capital is nothing really new. It is like old wine in a new bottle. (Field, 2008). The central thesis of social capital can be summarised: relationships matter and relationships transform the actors and transform society.

In my contribution to the EURAG conference I will be introducing DANET, its political and pragmatic role in the countries along the Danube. I will be touching upon its past and its current experience uniting older people (notwithstanding the level of their formal education and their social background) and their communities.



Carmen Stadelhoffer, the president of DANET and our hosts from Vukova zadužbina in Belgrade 1st-3rd December 2015

DANET Board Meeting Took Place at the Confluence of Two Rivers

Belgrade 1st-3rd December 2015

DANET for Europe is a European association for learning in later life, social participation and intergenerational dialogue based in Ulm, Germany. It was established by the will of its expert members and their organisations who had been collaborating in a series of Danube networkers' European projects. These had been supporting the development of inhabitants and their localities in Danubian countries. Moreover, the association is meant to give an impetus to the implementation of the European Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR).

Belgrade lies on the Danube river, therefore the recent DANET Board meeting took place there from the 1st to the 3rd December 2015. Moreover, there is a fair number of organisations in Serbia which are active towards the development of the Danubian region in its inhabitants.

The participants of the Belgrade meeting are being involved in preparing a common voluntary project (no less European, nevertheless) called *Wine, Bread and Herbs in the Danubian region*. Thus bread will be discussed from the point of view of several disciplines or study fields. From the sociological point of view, bread will be presented as a product, both uniting and dividing society: what kind of bread certain communities eat, how long do they have to work to buy a kilo of bread etc. A stress will be put on the formative role of communities concerning the attitude towards bread.

Older people baking bread will go public. A web exhibition of their portraits, recipes but also of their perceptions of old age will be shaped. From the point of view of circular economy a zero waste bread campaign will be launched etc.

DANET Board meeting was hosted by the Institute for supporting the development of culture and the Fund of Vuk Karadžić.



Language, knowledge, culture, a panel in the town book store

Language, knowledge, culture

Ljubljana, 1st December 2015

On December the 1st Slovenian Third Age University organised a panel with the above title. It took place in the framework of the monthly *School in the library*, an event that is regularly organised in one of the town book stores. The panel was on the definition and characteristics of language/languages. The role of rare languages, the ancient lingua franca in the Mediterranean region and the today's English serving as a language for communicating. It was about teaching and learning foreign languages at Slovenian Third Age University etc. Andrej Šolar said that grammar, morphology etc., learning the system of language is important precisely when one is in the phase of learning a language. It helps learning but not that much when language is used in everyday life.



Foto: Jure Eržen / Delo

I was told that in Europe they do not shoot people

Ljubljana, November 2015

Adult education programme for understanding the culture of migrants and refugees from Syria and other Mediterranean countries. Migrating into cultures should be valued and understood. We, Europeans, will share our lives with migrants longer than we expect. Consequently, we have to understand their otherness as to enrich our own culture. This is the reason why this programme has been devised.

"People guarantee a refuge to foreigners, if they do not enjoy freedom in their own country," was written in the article 20 of the French Constitution from the year 1793. This is how shaping the modern concept of asylum started. But the authors of this text drew the reader's attention to the fact that this is an abstract definition of

asylum, that a compromise should be sought among this concept, the limited generosity of the State and the need to preserve national identity. Thus opposition was created resulting in today's opposition between the doubts expressed by States and citizens' as to asylum seekers. They are many, coming mostly from poor countries. They are demanded to prove that in their countries they were tortured, persecuted, which is mostly difficult to prove and makes them face once again their traumatic experiences. Is it all right that the policy of limited generosity and limited humanity and the humiliating doubts about foreigners are to be carried on. Moreover, is it possible to address the issue of human rights while democracy is being degraded?

Objectives:

- Understanding refugees' culture (arts, literature, history, institutions).
- Understanding the history of political and social developments in the Mediterranean.
- Being able to tell the difference between Islam and Islamism.
- Getting familiar with refugee psychology (feeling guilty, experiencing uncertainty, facing otherness).
- Setting up an initiative group for creating a network of hosting families.



Slovenian Third Age University and DANET at the 10th Bled Strategic Forum

Civic education for financial literacy is needed. Older people should be freed of dependency discourse. The need for a UN Convention on Older Persons' rights.

At the 10th Bled strategic forum *Dušana Findeisen* from Slovenian Third Age University and vice president of DANET, moderated the panel *Ageing Society and Development: Is progress without change possible?* The discussion of the panellists was largely directed towards what is Slovenian Third Age University and DANET's and mission: social participation of older people, their contribution to social and economic development, dialogue and cooperation of generations as well as global cross-cultural dialogue. It goes without saying that the panellists were willing to consider also the issues of older adult education and intergenerational learning enabling the contributory role of older people.

Elsa Forneri, former minister of labour in the Mario Monti Government and *Anja Kopač Mrak* current Slovenian minister of labour, social affairs, family and equal rights addressed the issue of the need to reform state pension schemes, to

supplement state pensions by private insurance benefits. The transfer from the rich to the poor is recommended, pensions are not to be downsized, but citizens should work longer. More importantly *Elsa Fornero* pointed out that reforms were a social investment and should be regarded as such. They have to be understood, therefore financial literacy civic education programmes are needed.

Vitalia Gaucaite Wittich, chief of Population Unit (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) European Committee on Ageing was addressing intergenerational cooperation. EUCEN launched a project in Georgia. Everybody beyond retirement age in Georgia was invited to participate in a contest submitting an essay of up to five pages about: *...What is it like to age in Georgia, ...the lessons of life and the advice to give to today's younger generation, ...what to change about the policy-framework on ageing in Georgia*. DANET could eventually run a similar project for the Danube region. Artistic photos of the older writers were contributed by a young talented photographer. To what extent the older people's statement could be taken into account in creating a policy on age and ageing in this country, is difficult to say. But all panellists agreed that older people should be given a voice, should be listened to in our economy of knowledge where knowledge is produced together and shared.

The year 2015 is expected to be a landmark in social development

2015 should be a landmark in social development. European Social Charter has turned 50, UN social agenda for the times beyond 2015 is being in preparation and the whole year 2015 is the year of development. The panel was underlining the need for a *UN Convention on Older Persons' Rights*. If it were adopted, it would be, of course, legally binding.

James Collins, the chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing at the United Nations in New York pointed out that ageism, social construction of ageing and discrimination on the ground of age do not appear in any human rights convention, but they should! Consequences of ageism can be felt everywhere in medical and social services, education, economy, policies, media, arts etc. Older people have specific needs and should have specific rights. Moreover, what should be addressed is social justice on the distributive, but also on social, cultural and symbolic level. All too often older people are treated as invisible in our societies. Social construction of age remains important and ageism will not just go away unless we combat towards this goal.

Particular attention is to be paid to older people within conflict situations, refugees shifts or within economic migration. Cross cultural education seems to be particularly important in connection with this.

James Collins and *Alexander Sidorenko* pointed out the need for a UN Convention on Older Persons's rights. Are the needs of older persons so unique that they should be addressed separately? It seems that the answer is yes. In no Human rights convention discrimination on the ground of age and ageism are mentioned, though

the consequences of ageism can be felt everywhere: in health services, educational structures, in the media and arts, in policies and legal instruments. There is still important work to be done changing the mind set through public campaign, lectures, educational programmes etc.

Are older people object or subject of silver economy?

Older people are still being regarded as object of economic endeavours, as object of silver economy, as those to whom technological knowledge should be transmitted, and as consumers boosting economy. But no, older people to have an active role to play in silver economy as innovators and contributors as transmitters and receivers of technological knowledge and skills. (Zoran Stančič, Deputy Director- General, Directorate- General for Communications Networks, Content and technology, European Commission).

There was a general conclusion. Older people contribute and will be contributing to the development, on condition cultural changes in the attitude towards them were achieved. Older people have the right to socio-economic fairness, cultural and symbolic fairness notwithstanding their social status or age. Moreover, paradigmatic thinking about old age and older people has been operated, it is now high time it were translated it into action, concluded *Alexander Sidorenko*, global ambassador on ageing. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDO10GUZYX4>