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**Older People Need New Knowledge – Education of Older People is a Constituent  
Part of Lifelong Education and Active Ageing**

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Photo study circle's field work

**Older people and society**

The third age lasting up to thirty years and more, ageing society should be considered as an advantage and, no doubt, a civilisation achievement. Within information society, due to major social changes, education of older people has become a constituent part of lifelong education. *Lifelong learning and lifelong working are paralel closely interconnected processes*, enabling older people to age

actively and co-operate with younger generations. In comparison with the past image of old age, its today's image has undergone considerable changes which has been unavoidable, since generations in the middle had to be taken off some of their too heavy burden. Ageing actively makes it possible for individuals to remain or to get included in society. The out-dated ways of approaching old age (social stereotypes) do not correspond to the today's reality and inclusive society should encompass all generations. By all means, older people should not be left behind This leads us to conclusion that *when discussing one generation, one has to discuss other generations as well.*

### **Characteristics of the third age**

In the third age, social pressure put on generations in the middle (job, family, public functions), is getting decreased, their individual freedom is greater, possibilities for self-actualisation more numerous. Following the retirement. one disposes freely of one's time. One can employ it as one pleases, following one's own interests, wishes and meeting one's own needs. After they get retired, older people crave for activities to which they have not have had access before. They keep coming back to their unfulfilled wishes and plans, feeling they have sleeping abilities. In order to take on new activities, learning is indispensable. One of the many basic needs one has is to structure one's time. Upon retirement, the structure of time is no more imposed, one has to create one's own and impose it on oneself. Upon retirement, one's aims, social relationships from job and social belonging get lost. One's inborn emotional needs are not met, if one does not set up one's own structure of time, if one does not set new aims to follows. Empty family nest impacts one's need to meet new people and create new relationships. A well organised social structure, like Slovenian Third Age University, offers possibilities for remaining included and for getting eventually re—included in society. Meaningful activities, like education, act as social glue. Social status lost upon retirement is now getting shaped in a different way.

### **Slovenian Third Age University**

Founded back in 1984, Slovenian Third Age University has a long tradition and has experienced long and intensive development. Currently it is a network of 51 universities in 47 localities spread all over the country with approximately 21 000 students from 55 to 95 of age. Slovenian Third Age University is a non governmental organisation with a clearly defined public mission. It is supposed to meet individual and social needs concerning older people's education.

According to the EUROSTAT data, participation in older adult education in Slovenia is high, ranking second among the 18 studied countries. Older adult education at Slovenian Third Age University is a response to the needs and wishes of the students and society. One might say that it comes from older people and is meant for them. Studies last over a year. Study circles (12 – 15 members) are the basic format and unit in each U3A. They are monitored by professionals, mentors, but also by students called animators. In addition to study attainments there are also important psycho-social processes going on in these study circles.



Slovenian Third Age University network

### **Aims of older adult education – new knowledge and active living**

Wishing to have new knowledge, is not enough, nor is enough having rich experience. Knowledge and experience get socially recognised on condition they can be utilized. Therefore, study programmes pursue a double aim: gaining new knowledge and being active (development of individual active ageing). Older people display high primary

motivation and a thirst for knowledge. Their wish is to utilize their knowledge and to meet new people. Intergenerational co-operation is possible only when based on common activities.

The multifold aim: to know, to know how and to be able to apply knowledge has always been present in study circles. Therefore those who are involved in older adult education try to make older students' knowledge applicable (second career, artistic creativity, journalism, gardening, horticulture, participation in family companies and support for obtaining quality products, ICT, author work). The development of active ageing is considerably hindered by outdated and colliding laws, limiting older people's constitutional right to work, notwithstanding the fact that till death one remains »homo economicus« Older people's possibility to work being limited, there are huge obstacles to shaping a new old active age image.

### **For curious minds, there is never enough knowledge**

Characteristics of older adult education differ much from those of younger generations' education. Preferably older students remain together in study circles up to twenty-two years. Those who have a curious mind, never quench their thirst for knowledge. Since learning is a life-long process, one can always learn new things. U3As functions on this presumption.

Getting educated, older people can meet their inborn psycho-social needs, the type of needs that cannot be met elsewhere in other settings. Older people keep experiencing personal growth and maintain their abilities and vitality when they are surrounded by other people and are with other people. Solitude is not an advantage in this respect. Other people set limits, thus helping the person to develop (to think about new things or to think differently about old things, Thus older men and older women, being supported by the others, improve their ability to take decisions and to act. Their self-confidence and competencies and their sense of social belonging increase or decrease. Study circles function as a primary social group (family), a safe "social nest" which older students are not ready to leave since in society, except for associations of pensionees, there are few social structures where older people can find what they need, »a new social nest«.

