

Slovenian Third Age University Students Redefine Age-friendly Community Approaches

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Age –friendly communities are becoming the epicentre of interests of those dealing with population trends, growing urbanisation , older age, communities, inclusion, environmental questions to name just a few of them. The “age-friendly city” term appeared for the first time in 2005, when WHO launched the Global Age-Friendly Cities Project (1). In the meantime the terms “livable community” in the United States and “lifetime neighbourhood” in the UK become some of the terms describing the environments better suitable for the older population. (2).

But it is not the naming, but rather the term by which such a development of a community is achieved, that should be of great interest. Basically there are two approaches: top down governance where local authorities and policy makers tend to implement age friendly changes in their development plans and bottom up governance, where different programmes help older people gain more community participation skills (3). Slovenian Third Age University is empowering its students for volunteering, greater social inclusion, participation in the local community through many of its educative programmes and so works at the bottom-up part of the age-friendly community involvement trajectory. Yet this time a small project has emerged, putting elderly U3 students into a new perspective. This time the students of the “Designing gardens” U3 study circle decided to become volunteers designing a garden for a local community, namely for the municipality Ljubljana owned “Centre for the help for the elderly”.

The idea from the institution “Centre for the help for the elderly” was to engage local community to reconstruct its small garden to become not their older visitors friendly, but to become a part of public open places as well, its small green lawn to invite walkers to sit down for a moment . U3 mentor Mitja Škerjanec and his “Designing gardens” study circle students took a chance to participate in the project, which gave them the opportunity to have some practical lessons outside the classroom proving their theoretical knowledge and to help building age-friendly community. Moreover, some other U3 student groups got involved by now: Garden volunteers are ready to help planting the new garden while Ceramics circle students are designing some ceramics pieces to decorate the garden.

This project is an example that there are not only two approaches towards building an age-friendly community, namely top down or bottom up one. Sometimes good approaches evolve just from the people’s strong feeling that something should be done and at that point it is perfect when bottom up or upper-down governance are no hindrance to the idea that had evolved out from the needs and wishes . Needless to say, learning and education in later life do have something in common with such an approach.

References

(1), (2) Lui, Everingham, Wartburton, Cuthill, Bertlett. What makes a community age –friendly: A review of international literature. Australian Journal on Ageing. Vol. 28 No September 2009, 116-12

U3 students scanning the situation



Working on the ideas for the age-friendly garden



Some sketches to become age-friendly community open place

