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## Understanding Community, Generations, Intergenerational Learning and Practices

Both learning in later life and intergenerational learning are ways towards changing individual life and fostering active ageing in intergenerational community.

### Active ageing, open social networks, needs, learning and relationships

In the same lines, active ageing means that an older person has to remain in continuous contact and co-operation with other younger generations. Namely, it is impossible to imagine active older people (who continue learning, having new goals, meeting new people, participating in society) separated from other generations, closed up in social networks of peers, with all their culture and knowledge, already validated by experience, not used and waiting in vain to be transmitted. A precious possession, of which they can, and should, make a present to peers and those who are mostly younger than themselves. It can be concluded that *intergenerational learning occurs when one generation needs and appreciates what another generation has to offer*: youth work, grand parenting, learning support to school dropouts and young people with specific learning difficulties, cultural guidance and support for young Erasmus students, mentoring young workers at work, teaching young people new skills, etc. But of course, intergenerational learning occurs also *when all generations involved have needs*. By meeting them, they all construct new knowledge and outcomes together.

One can not make a present to somebody without having established contact with him or her, without having entered into a dialogue with him or her. Since today's society is getting ever more fragmented, it is also more difficult to establish natural intergenerational dialogue. The type of dialogue where generations "truly watch and truly see each other, truly listen to each other and truly hear each other". This cannot be done without a motive, topic, opportunities and support. This is what DANET intends to do: *to multiply opportunities and encourage creation of supportive structures for generations to meet and to work together for individual and above all common benefit*. They will be created on local, national and preferably on European level.

It is often believed that older people are interested only in their tiny personal issues, that young people are not committed. That is far from being true! If they are offered opportunities to create together, to give each other, their giving means standing for common interest. Both giving and receiving establish *relationships*.

Today, generations may be more autonomous. But, the greater their autonomy and freedom, the less they feel indebted to anterior generations and the less they are sensible to the fate of the coming generations which in turn makes society less cohesive. *Intergenerational learning is about getting to know each other, learning*

*together, co-operating and thus creating intergenerational ties and more cohesive society.*

As a response to the today's crisis of solidarity-in spite of what has been said eCommunity seems to be slowly regaining popularity. Namely, *throughout history relating to others, belonging to community of all generations has been a way to get protection against hardships and to get recognition from others, to shape one's identity and to learn from each other.*

In intergenerational dialogue and practices generations are brought together. How to bring them, together is a matter of good will and knowledge. DANET intends to develop and apply this kind of knowledge by educating trainers and group leaders, by supporting intergenerational initiatives, projects and practices particularly in the Danube region.

### **Definition and common characteristics of generation**

Contrary to what may be expected, generation is not a chronological but a sociological phenomenon. Thus generations are shaped by historical, political, social, economic events and changes. By contrast, understanding generations basically means understanding social changes and three central aspects of social change can be highlighted:

- social differentiation, inequalities between generations and within generations themselves;
- changes in the mode/modes of socialization and integration, as well as the destabilization of the model of adult age;
- political relationships and the issue of generational justice which seem to have been lacking over the last twenty years;

Generations exist due to something in the background, something with a structuring effect like specific experience. To illustrate this point: generations whose members were twenty years old in 1968 experienced student revolutionary movements and collective actions all over Europe, stepping out of the private sphere into the public sphere, whereas young people who are twenty years old in 2015 are highly dependent on private sphere, their parents, their mother and do not believe that they could have an impact on society. Moreover, there are active and there are rather passive generations. They have to get familiar with each other, they have a lot to learn from each other *what can be best achieved through creative and shared processes.*

Generations can have, or do not have common characteristics, similarities and dissimilarities which have to be taken into account while structuring intergenerational dialogue, learning, co-operation or co-habitation.

Intergenerational education/learning offers room to different generations. By means of intergenerational practices they make processes of their socialization and integration visible and help understanding their similarities and dissimilarities.

### **Theoretical and conceptual background of intergenerational learning and dialogue**

There are several socio-cultural or community and community education or community development theories and social capital theories that can be transposed to intergenerational social participation and learning. (Bourdieu, 1983, Putnam, R. D., 2000).

One should not forget that the French concept and practice of socio-cultural animation have been ideologically inherited from the *social movement of popular education* (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century) aiming at enabling adults to get in touch with culture and to make them responsible and critical citizens. Pedagogically socio-cultural animation comes from *psychosocial theories focused on groups*, groups as a place of expression and creativity. Sociologically socio-cultural animation reflects the rising of the *civilization of leisure*. *Culturally speaking* socio-cultural animation is best adopted by *classes in the middle* in the 60' and 70'. *Socio-cultural animation is about social development, social participation and culture*. As practice, socio-cultural animation *is connected with the past and opened up to the future* (Besnard, 1990).

There are numerous theories describing community and community building. Community is often associated with hope and wish of reviving closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people (Elias 1974, quoted by Hoggett 1997

Thus community can be approached as *a value* (Frazer 2000, Lindeman, 1910). In that case it may rest upon solidarity, trust, norms, commitment. Some definitions of community focus on community as a geographical area; some on a group of people living in a particular place; and others look to community as an area of common life. When community is related to the geographical area theories of urban space are useful to understand the different function urban community has.

To sum up, communities can be based on ethnicity, religion, class, or politics, territory, cultural heritage, interests, as they can be based on learning and education. The nature of intergenerational community is a creation of its members, and it can not be imposed on them. Therefore community is to be understood more as *a symbolic structure*, and attention has been shifted from traditional community as a form of social interaction based on locality to a concern with meaning and identity. (Cohen, 1985).

Consequently, intergenerational learning and practices are mostly based on groups, mutual needs and common commitment.

### **Intergenerational learning, learning about generations and intergenerational practice**

Each intergenerational practice should comprise *intergenerational learning*, but also *learning about generations*, which are two different things.

*Intergenerational practices* should preferably be sustainable structures for intergenerational learning and education about generations aiming at consolidating intergenerational ties and communities.

Like education of older people and older people's learning, intergenerational learning has clearly *a social mission*. Intergenerational learning is never neutral. It is not just about studying an academic topic. On the contrary, it is meant to improve the position of generations by creating intergenerational ties.

## Conclusion

There is no active ageing without co-operation of generations and open social networks, generations being more a sociological concept than a chronological phenomenon.

Theoretical and conceptual background of intergenerational learning and dialogue is rich: socio-cultural animation theories, community education, community theories etc. Intergenerational learning is namely a matter of community, community of generations.

Intergenerational learning occurs when one generation needs what another generation has to offer.

Intergenerational learning is by no means neutral or just about studying an academic topic. On the contrary, it has a clear social mission and is meant to improve the position of generations by creating intergenerational ties.

If generations are offered opportunities to create together, to learn together, to give each other, their giving means standing for common interest. Both giving and receiving establish relationships. Intergenerational practices should preferably be sustainable structures for intergenerational learning and education about generations

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