

SITUATIONS & STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH ACTIVE AGEING

1

European Cinema for Active Ageing

CINAGE

LIGHTS,
CAMERA,
ACTION!

65+

Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Portugal)

Several times I have been asked myself about the key issue discussed here: What events led me today to this person and not another? What have given my choice of this way of life, rather than another? To what extent the experiences and youth influences affect the way we live and age? I suppose there were two or three facts that were remarkable for that route. Starting at the beginning: I was born and grew up in a small provincial town, with the virtues and constraints of all small towns. Everyone knows each other, there is a huge solidarity between people but, on the other hand, life becomes stifling and dull. At 6 years old I lost my mother. My father remarried and I grew up in a family of the petite bourgeoisie, without great existential concerns. When I was sixteen, my father died. The shock was huge. We lost the conciliator element of conflict; our family unit was reduced to brothers and my stepmother. I believe that there begins the great transformation of my life. On the one hand I became a young introverted and somewhat disgusted. The "choir boy" begins to doubt the religious and unquestionable truths. Slowly, strengthen my spirit in the atheistic convictions that will guide my adult life. To this contributes living with one of the most remarkable people in my formation: a respected lawyer, clandestine member of the Portuguese Communist Party, which starts me in reading Sartre, on discussion of current topics, and especially that inculcates me principles of civic coexistence and solidarity. Curious irony: will the conviviality that I and other young we kept with him, which will lead to the second factor, in my opinion, will condition my formation: this close relationship does not escape the eyes and ears of the PIDE that, a few months after my 20th birthday, decides to arrest me, and the two other companions in an attempt to know more about our mentor and to what extent we ourselves were already involved in activities against state security (this was the epithet used...). This episode, rather than intended by the established power, has strengthened my democratic convictions and turned out to be crucial in my future policy options. Another person who was a great influence in my formation was the old professor of Portuguese. Apparently opposite to the previous character, he was a former seminarian and supporter of the regime. He had, however, a deeply Aristotelian background, with a huge desire to know and a total detachment to worldly vanities. He was a man who collected courses without ever having completed any of them. From him I learned the taste for writing and the fascination of philosophy. I believe these were the episodes that marked my adult life, including professional activities that followed. It was the thirst for knowledge that led me to attend one of the first computer courses open at the institution where I worked; were civic and solidarity principles that led me to participate in various civic organisations. More recently, and after the retirement of professional activity, I could finally find the time that failed for several decades to devote myself to the great passion: Photography. Then it was the discovery of UNISBEN and magnetism of the photography classes. I can finally pass on to others something of my experience and knowledge that life has given me. This, for me, the fundamental concept of active ageing: continue to learn and pass on to others the best of what life has given us. Basically, involve me and participate in an active form, in the inevitable ageing process.

(Armando, 68 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

This life story highlights the role model of significant figures throughout our growth and structure process and as solidarity and the like to share the knowledge with others is strengthened in the fight against anti-democratic regimes, castrating the full personal fulfilment.

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2

European Cinema for Active Ageing

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Portugal)

When I was born, I went to live in a family owned hotel, where my parents worked. I grew up in the midst of many people and especially playing with boys. I felt the lack of a traditional home and family care, however, I was spoiled by a small world of people. My clothes came from my rich cousins, but I felt good in them ... My meals were mostly taken alone, since when I came back from classes everyone had already had lunch.

I started working at 18, in the same hotel where I grew up. Married at age 20. Until then, there was no visiting clubs or attending gatherings with teenagers. My husband was my colleague in the company and I met him when he started working there, I was nine years old and he was 14. I was the mother of a boy by the age of 22. Divorced at 25 years. In the marriage, I did not find the warmth of family. But the friendship has always remained.

The fact that I had a shared childhood, lack of socializing and family support made me perhaps a person who was rebellious, needy and sometimes lonely. After the separation, I returned with my son to my parent's house. My mother died when I was 28 and my father remarried.

When my son was 9, and I 31, I restarted my studies and created new friendships. I entered the Faculty of Law, via ad-hoc. I lived with younger people, dated, danced, laughed. It was my experience of adolescence "out of time". Professionally, I followed step-by-step progression in the company office. The death of two family members led to its partial sale, giving me the opportunity to be Secretary to one of the Directors. I was invited to create and lead the credit management section of a chain of four hotels. It was the peak of my career and personal fulfillment. My time at the law school concluded by the 3rd year.

A few years later, the entire company was sold to a group that was accompanied by administrative staff of their trust. Directors and managers, were on the "shelf".

I left, I tried to continue my studies, but economic difficulties forced me quickly to seek new employment. Three days after the interview, I started working at the Department of Vocational Training, which I liked a lot. But the lack of positive working conditions, the poor surroundings and being in an environment that did not value my work, took me to a depressive state. It was 18 years of frustration. I needed to leave, to reserve my values and live in the present, investing in myself and, again, feel the pleasure of being alive, making new friends, without falling into the emptiness of the 44 years of work and "ageing" that was approaching.

The psychologist, who assisted me in my distressed state, knew I had other motivations in order to change that path, but needed a solution for a new beginning. He told me about the existence of UNISBEN, suggested I look into it, and it was so that I decided to retire with sanction and sign up. I felt a strong desire to feel alive again, retake my joy, meet beautiful and interesting people and make my life a new stage that I'm committed with.

It has been UNISBEN which has forced me to leave home, to live, to laugh, learn and work by choice and conviction. To be me and the reflection of the people I meet, and to have more health, because healthy environments give us a better quality of life. Integrating into a Senior University was finding that ageing is not a life with the aim of departure, but rather be the starting aim to have life.

(Maria Antonia, 65 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

Learning in later life as a privileged way to create a new life with new meanings, greater emotional balance and a better quality of life.

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3

European Cinema for Active Ageing

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Portugal)

I was born in Lisbon in 1933. Coming from a bourgeois family, made my initial studies in Lisbon, some of them in the School Voz do Operário. Traditional family on the maternal side but, with some members, the father's side, Republican nature and Communist influence. In the decades of 30 and 40, some of these family members were arrested and suffered great torture by the Political policy of the fascist regime. Meantime, I joined an official school in the capital, where I had his first political contacts and having joined the MUD – Youth. Later, in the Commercial Institute of Lisbon, I joined the Portuguese Communist Party. I collaborated in the "Republic" newspaper, became a member of the Music Amateurs Choir (directed by Fernando Lopes Graça). Remained active in the 1957 and 1958 election campaigns and was a member of the General Humberto Delgado campaign. Arrested in September 1958, tortured and sentenced to two years and two months, was imprisoned about six years. Deported, with fixed residence in Cape Verde (St. Vincent), I joined the activities of the PAIGC and was subsequently sent back, with fixed residence, to Lisbon, from where I ran away. In Paris, I completed my higher studies and joined several anti-fascist manifestations, inclusive in Budapest and Moscow. Back in Portugal (in the so-called Marcelista Spring), changed my professional life, entering an Economists company (almost all "registered" by political reasons). With the April 25, 1974, I was invited as professor at the Faculty of Law of Lisbon, at the University MUD and ESAI. I was candidate for councilman of the City Hall of Lisbon, and developed various cultural tasks. At present, I am linked to the movement of Universities Seniors, being the President of UNISBEN.

(Carlos, 81 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

A hard life, with deportations and torture that reinforce the political convictions of solidarity and struggle for better living conditions and cultural and civic participation. A reference in the movement of third age universities in Portugal, whose example of active ageing, of searching and sharing knowledge and experiences and committed and collective leadership shapes and undoubtedly inspires the action of many older people in the country.

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4

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (UK)

A hospital in a field. Towering above and around everything is a huge swan. There, but nebulous. Wings outstretched. A mountain of pharmaceutical drugs is continuously being increased by a queue of dumper trucks stretching to the horizon. A group of Doctors stand around, eager to practice, appropriate implements to hand. Henry, 75, interesting, frail, scruffy, sits at a card table with a chessboard laid out. He wears a red silk scarf, has a nebulizer to hand, spectacles and a heavy Bronze Mask of Tragedy hangs around his neck. Some distance away is Min, 70, quirky, wearing black boots, a military anorak over a floral ankle-length frock. She watches Henry through her binoculars. Henry's right hand rests on a Zimmer frame. A nurse spoons pills into Henry's mouth, wiping drool from his chin. Another nurse takes blood. Henry spits out the pills then stands up, removing all the tubes from his body. He throws away the Zimmer frame, and stomps off. Min has the swan on a lead now. She is seated at the chess table and moves White Knight to B5. No Black pieces are on the board except for the King. Henry wears the Mask of Comedy now. He kisses Min on the cheeks, mounts a bicycle and speeds down the hill. Min watches as he flies towards the cliff edge. He raises his arms as if to fly and is joined by the swan, wings outstretched. Henry on his bike soars into the sky and the swan's enveloping cloudy wings. One white feather floats down to the sea.

(Story told by Ray, 73 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

The key strategy here is of health, but also of emotional wellbeing. The recognition that dealing with ageing is about not just accepting passively what is considered to be best for one, but to actively continue to make choices about health, about friendship and about your own emotional needs. Learning is also essential in this, lifelong learning is exactly that, it is about life, as well as length, and the length of life is a choice that can be made.

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European Cinema for Active Ageing

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5

65+

Elder's narration about Active Ageing (UK)

I was watching the television. Local TV. There was some bloke making a speech, he was retiring. Talking about his book on terrorism, based on his experience as a policeman. Watching suspects, "the enemy within". I looked at him again. It couldn't be. But it was. It was my ex. Mark, passed away on 15th May 1987. Except there he was, large as life, boasting about how he'd infiltrated terrorist sects and organisations. Terrorists. That's a laugh. We weren't terrorists. We were protestors, agitprop. Campaigning against nuclear weapons, foreign wars. Being citizens, concerned with what was happening to our country. We thought he was one of us. I thought he was one of us. He was one of us. He lived with me, we had two children. And then he disappeared. And I mean disappeared. Just vanished. One of his mates, another cop I suppose, told me later he'd died in a car accident somewhere abroad. Just another cover story. Still. I got him back didn't I? Even though I was 70. My sister told me to forget it, I was too old to start getting involved in politics again. But I wouldn't let him get away with it. Not just me, my kids as well. So I wrote my book – about what it's like being infiltrated. Having some bastard take away your identity. And now he's no longer a hero. But me, I am a heroine. It's never too late. To do what's right.

(Story told by Jean, 75 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

The key strategies were being developing a sense of strong emotional well being, the need to continue to engage in civic and community matters, and the recognition that continuing emotional wellbeing is about engaging with one's past as well as continuing to look forwards the future.

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6

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (UK)

Eighty years old and I still go swimming. Sometimes I am aware of how old my body is, how crinkly it looks, and how everyone stares at me as I stand on the edge of the pool summoning the nerve to jump in. Not because I am afraid, but because I am getting ready for the shock of the cold water. The youngsters look at me, and as I stand there just beginning to shiver, a beautiful young woman walks along the side of the pool, stands, poises, and dives in, swimming the length of the pool with easy strokes. I lower myself into the pool, I can't dive any more. And swim to the end. The young woman watches me and when I reach her she tells me her name. I used to teach her at school. Taught her to read, she says. She will always remember me. She turns and swims away. I watch her go, and then swim slowly after her.

(Story told by Liz, 86 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

This is partly about maintaining health through sport. But it's also about engaging with the community. It is good to go to a swimming pool that is used by lots of ages. Meeting and engaging with people, whether completely new, or people from the past, provide a sense of emotional wellbeing and achievement.

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7

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Italy)

Mara (81), describes herself as the symbol of active ageing, without actually being fully aware of what active ageing really means. In fact, she has always been "active" for her entire life and cannot imagine another way of being.

She was born and raised in an unconventional family populated with many different cultures and persons, despite the increasingly individualistic attitude of the European society in those years. She married an Indian musician and spent a long period of her life in many different places.

Although she was very much involved in community and social activities when her husband was alive, when she lost him, in order to remain active she did what she knew best : helping and assisting those who are in difficulty.

Always smiling, always running, at the age of 81 Mara is convinced that stereotypes can be overcome only if one talks about them, and this is particularly true with reference to different cultures living together.

(Mara, 81 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

Informal learning is a key aspect of active ageing. Treasuring what you have learned from your family and previous life environments can be a good strategy to remain active by contributing to the improvement of your present community.

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8

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Italy)

Ernesto (69) is a man who has a recently lost his wife and, without being able to react to the loss, he is rapidly degenerating from both a physical and mental point of view. He is gaining weight, seated all day in front of the television, not caring anymore about his health problems and social life. His only daughter, Cristina, moved abroad more than 20 years ago and, after a period spent at home to be close to her father, she proposed that she follow her and move into a flat closer to her house. Ernesto initially refused, but after some weeks, while he was visiting her and his grandchildren for the Christmas holidays, by good fortune he met an old friend (Giulio 79) who also moved to the same city where his daughter is living many years ago. They decide to go out for dinner before Ernesto leaves and when Giulio picks him up some days later, Ernesto discovers that Giulio has a new partner much younger than him, Yelena (55 years from Russia), who he met after the loss of his wife Maria. Rather than going to the restaurant, Giulio brings the other two to a dance hall and, although at first Ernesto is a bit reluctant, they have a nice time together dancing and remembering the old times. It is when they start discussing about Ernesto's present life that he starts to feel sad and guilty towards his disappeared wife. He leaves the friends at the dancing hall and moves to the bar with the hope of staying by himself for a while. But as soon as he sits at the table, he notices that a lady close to him, almost his age, doesn't look to be very well and he asks her if she needs something to drink. Adelaide (69) has forgotten her medicines for cardiac arrhythmia, the same that Ernesto takes twice a day. They start talking and they are now living together in Italy, spending the days taking care of the garden of their country house... when they are not visiting their 12 grandchildren all over Europe!

(Ernesto, 68 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

Active ageing means welcoming the support and suggestions of the people who surround us when we are facing problems and we are not strong enough to face them by ourselves. This can present an exit strategy from painful situations that can bring us down too quickly, banning us from living the best period of our life.

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9

European Cinema for Active Ageing

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Italy)

Alfredo (68) knows that soon he will have to stop being a football coach of youth teams and he is not very happy about that. Football is his biggest passion and, especially during the last 10 years, he has always felt younger than he actually was, mostly because of the fact that he was spending a lot of time with young people. His biggest concern, anyway, is that of not having done something important for someone else, like what happened to him when he was a younger man who emigrated to Milan for work. In fact, at the time, Alfredo was moving from a tiny country village and he was not really well equipped to live in a big city like Milan. He didn't know many things, only two: how to work as a carpenter and play football. And guess what? His favourite football team was Milan! Thanks to his sportive passion he managed to make some friends, at least to play a weekly match in the field nearby his accommodation. This helped him to expand his network of contacts and, eventually, to find a job and increase his self confidence. However, the turning point for his full realization was the meeting with an older man, who watched him playing and asked him if he was interested in coaching a team of youths in his free time. Alfredo accepted and in less than two years, he won the regional championship. He was so beloved by all the members of the sport club that, on that occasion, the young football players decided to recognize his fundamental contribution to the achievement of such an important result by giving him a jumper with his football nickname written on it. Alfredo continued to play and coach football for many years and in one of the last matches of his team, he decided to give the jumper to a young talented player with economical and familiar problems. Moreover, Alfredo organized an audition for him at the Milan youth club, where he was selected and he is currently playing. Although he will not be able to directly teach how to play football, Alfredo decided that he will continue to be active in this field, by becoming a talent scout of young players with fewer opportunities.

(Alfredo, 68 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

Ageing, sometimes, does not allow you to continue doing what you have done for many years. However, remember that there are always alternative ways to remain active by exploiting what you have learned, also by supporting other people in finding their direction and inspiration for their future life.

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10

European Cinema for Active Ageing

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Slovenia)

For seven years, Peter (81) was caring for Ani, his wife (78), an ex-actress diagnosed with advanced Alzheimer's disease. He was hoping she should be admitted to a specialized institution, but at the same time he was afraid that she would feel abandoned in the hands of professional helpers. After a lot of hesitation, he decided that he himself would take care of her together with a hired helper and Ani would stay at home. He organized his whole family's life around her. Her memory retained images and impressions only for some short moments. So, Peter was taking photos of his wife all the time in order to support her immediate memory. She was dizzy, but he made her spend each day at least some time walking, leaning on his arm, searching for stability. Though she did not like it, they went for a walk every day and each time Peter was desperately trying to find something that would attract her attention: books, music, magazines, films she used to like. Whenever they met an acquaintance he would help her to recognize him or her, telling her his or her name. He took her to the theatre, choosing carefully the performances. Peter was asking himself whether Ani was conscious of her state. To stimulate her, he kept asking her "Do you remember the story of bananas? (...) Do you remember the story of the woman who was talking all the time?" From time to time Ani seemed present, she seemed to remember, but mostly she sank into her own world separated from Peter's and the world of other people. Peter suffered seeing his wife, whom he had admired a lot, losing her memory, the most important asset an actor has. At the beginning she forgot a title of a book, a film. Then she forgot some basic gestures and she would not be able to climb out of the sea onto the rocks around, which she had known perfectly for two decades and more. She did not have geographical anchors. It happened that she thought she was in Moscow, while she was in Ljubljana. It happened that she was searching for the entrance door where the door was not. Peter spent a lot of time observing his wife. He studied books and scientific articles on Alzheimer's. He became a member of a society supporting relatives and patients. He went to conferences; he participated in negotiations with politicians regarding the new national policy on Alzheimer's disease. His whole life was organized around Ani and her illness and her better living. What was meant to be tragedy for him, turned into a chance, a chance to age actively, to be engaged with his wife and community.

Peter could have decided to have Ani admitted to an institution, but he did not. He was getting old and the situation was getting ever more difficult for him, but nevertheless he spent his time learning, working, socializing with other members of the Alzheimer's society. His days, his weeks, his months were structured and this gave sense to his life. Relationships were important for him. Caring for Ani caused his personal growth, and boosted his confidence.

(Peter, 81 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

Active ageing is not possible without one being engaged in relationships of giving and receiving, without one's learning, working to overcome oneself and one's own condition.

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11

European Cinema for Active Ageing

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Slovenia)

After I was retired I did not know what to do, I felt lost. Then my brother, who was unemployed, suggested we should establish an association and work on community gardens. Thus a new association was set up. We create community gardens; we cultivate them, we, all members of our ecological association, where we organize lectures, meetings. We are all volunteers, of course, sharing our knowledge and joy with the inhabitants of our local community. Our members have regained their sense of living, working habits, have started "to think clearly" again. Moreover, they get ideas for paid work, new jobs. We share products of our work, hoping that this community garden would be real community gardens, – that there would be education, training events, and intergenerational co-operation and above all feeling of belonging to a community.

(Zdenka, 60 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

Shaping local community:

- Involving other inhabitants to become active, discovering their own needs, meeting them and co-shaping their community, not being just passive users of community services;
- taking together relevant decisions shaping their environment and community;
- supporting local community and its development vision;
- intergenerational learning and cooperation.

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European Cinema for Active Ageing

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Elder's narration about Active Ageing (Slovenia)

When I was employed, I had many leisure time activities and interests so, after retirement I immediately enrolled at U3A, where my mother used to be a student and I also had a lot of interesting interviews with them when I was employed at the national TV. I have always liked learning. Learning and studying at U3A was for me also learning about being in dialogue, respecting differences in people, learning about trusting. I found out that communicating is a lifelong process, that we never stop learning about this topic. I took part in the study circle on mediation. I learned about constructive and non constructive communication, solving conflicts etc. But gaining knowledge without having a possibility of using it does not make sense. Thus I started using it at the court where I am active as a mediator between the judge and the accused. I help them to come to a common understanding.

(Jasna, 65 years)

Strategy to cope with Active Ageing

- Public activities are needed for structuring one's life;
- Volunteering, individual and social responsibility;
- Intergenerational co-operation.