

## FORAGE IS FOR BETTER LEARNING AND BETTER LIFELONG AGEING

**A EUROPEAN NETWORK OF NETWORKS THAT WILL SUPPORT EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN LATER  
LIFE AND INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING WITH »ALL ITS MIND«**

*Institute for Lifelong Learning of Leicester University coordinates Forage (4-age) for learning, the network of networks in the field of learning and education in later life, the partnership of the founding networking organisations (Age Platform Europe being one of them) currently representing twenty European countries. From the very beginning, owing to the planning efforts of the coordinator- Jim Soulsby and its team-, the partnership itself has been organised as a well functioning network structured into smaller task oriented groups of experts led by a responsible leader; an organisation and structure that are typical of networking and post -modern times.*

### **A simple initial survey has turned out to be a rich source of data**

The Forage partnership being a high profile one (almost all partners have had a long and productive past in the field of education of older people) the contents, tasks and objectives of the network are rather ambitious. The network has started its work by an initial survey produced by the coordinator, addressing the participants in the first meeting in Leicester, their expertise, achievements, concerns in the field of education of older people and their expectations concerning FORAGE. Since the participants are among the main actors in the field of education in later life, and some also in the field of intergenerational education, this alone has provided a rich initial insight into the situation of learning and education in later life in Europe. More importantly, the survey has disclosed principles and values underpinning European education of older people which may vary considerably from country to country. Namely, education in later life in Europe can be anything from leisure time education, education for better employability and maintenance of older workers on

the labour market, education for personal growth, education for (healthy) living, education for paid and voluntary work, for active citizenship, education for coping with everyday situations ... up to intergenerational education and collective liberation of older people by means of education, a way to greater equality and social justice. But, everywhere in Europe wider effects of older people's learning for themselves and community are getting into focus.

### **Aims and objectives: that is the question**

The initial survey conducted among the partners has shown the way to a number of key issues, aims and objectives of FORAGE: creating a data base of research and policy findings for the general target audience and primarily for the research community and policy makers. The initial findings will help the partnership to develop the data base and create a website which are both planned to become interactive enabling up-to-date recording of the European good practice in the field of education in later life. Since Association of Education and Ageing (UK) is among the FORAGE partners, there will be ample possibility to disseminate findings to the audience of professionals and experts. Namely, the association publishes *Journal of Education and Ageing* dealing with the topics mentioned in its title, its articles being written from national, European and also global perspective.

The members of the emerging network have identified and shaped a number of additional FORAGE aims and objectives. They will throw light on innovative and progressive ideas in the field. FORAGE will also create an archive of past projects, relevant policy and research, statistical evidence and examples of best practice. The project partners will contribute their own reports, comments and will launch discussion topics on an interactive website which they will have created. In addition to that, they will lobby policy makers on all levels. Moreover, they will present FORAGE and its outcomes at their annual conferences and other events. Finally, the partnership has agreed to write a glossary of the education in later life concepts, which is an important step forward in every respect. However, one of the basic concerns of the project partners remains the fact that there is an extremely small amount of collected quality European data on education in later life, an issue the network will be addressing as one of its priorities.

The partners of the network will be committed to enlarging the network, disseminating the results of their common work, (re) establishing and maintaining contact with national and European Governments and all other relevant agencies, in the European Year For Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations 2012 this being particularly welcome.

The emerging network has also an internal evaluator who is supposed to take care of the quality assurance for the activities and outputs of the network. During the first meeting at the University of Leicester, the participants got familiar also with the hosts, i.e. The University of Leicester and its strengths, particularly in the field of inclusion. They got an insight into the situation of adult education in Great Britain, self-organised and informal learning, adult education policies, as well as results of the Eurobarometer on Active Ageing.

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