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LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS: FORMS, PROVIDERS AND POLICIES

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ESREA
European Society for Research on the Education of Adults

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Foreword

The on-going population ageing process is considerably transforming populations in terms of their size, age composition, and structure of needs. Population ageing is a global phenomenon affecting every person, family, community and society. But countries even in European Union are at quite different stages of this process, and the intensity of change differs greatly.

As it was indicated by Dr. Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha in grounding statements of network on *Education and Learning of Older Adults* (ELOA), which belongs to the European Society for Research on Adult Education (ESREA), population ageing has profound implication for adult education: "the first, is the potential for innovation in reception and support for the increasing number of older workers; and the second, is that educational training programs can and have to contribute to staying healthy and independent up until very old age in order to prevent the over-burdening of the system". So the development of the process and the system of adult education has gained a particular importance in the world where demographic factors, namely, population ageing determine that people stay in the labour market longer, and the rapid development of technologies and information requires continuous learning.

The network ELOA / ESREA emerged as a discussion forum where a diverse range of issues regarding the knowledge on the education of the elderly and related experiences are shared. Similar ideas are actualized in strategy *Europe 2020*, in which it is recognised that lifelong learning and development of skills are key elements to the countries' economic and social situation and their ageing populations. Adult education is an effective mean giving people an opportunity to improve or to renovate their skills, contributing to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.

Starting from July 1, 2013, Lithuania takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Now it is Lithuanian turn to ensure a smooth decision-making process, achieve progress on issues of great importance to Europe and Lithuania as its integral part. Therefore it is symbolic, that the 4th Conference of ESREA Network on Education and Learning of Older Adults *Learning Opportunities for Older Adults: Forms, Providers and Policies* take place in Vilnius. Within this framework, the international conference in Vilnius becomes a stage for discussion of all interested groups: scientists, politicians, older learners, providers of adult education. We seek, that meeting in Vilnius will promote exchange of experience from all around Europe on issues pertaining to learning opportunities for older adults, their forms, providers and related policies; will report on current European projects and stimulate research in this particular research area; and to inform policymakers about the meaning of learning in every age.

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New Challenges, New Possibilities: Intergenerational Learning and ICT for an Ageing Society

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Introduction

Nowadays there is an increasing attentiveness to change in demography in european and worldwide countries. Ageing population and low birth rates are redesigning demographic trends in Europe. The age structure of the population in the EU-27 is becoming older, due to increasing life expectancy and consistently low levels of fertility over the past decades. Population ageing is a general process across the EU Member States and is expected to continue in the coming decades (European Commission, 2013).

This has a considerable impact in all aspects of life. Europe economic, social and political policy changed the education and training vision, with regard to the strategic importance of lifelong learning "in meeting the challenges of globalization and the emergence of knowledge economies, promoting the competitiveness of national economies, creating jobs and reducing unemployment, and securing the social inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion" (Hake, 2006). Lifelong learning is a continuous life wide process and adult education is including older people. Thus, lifelong learning is covering all ages and contexts. It was emphasized by Schuller et al. (2009) "Lifelong learning includes people of all ages learning in a variety of contexts – in educational institutions, at work, at home and through leisure activities. It focuses mainly on adults returning to organised learning rather than on the initial period of education or on incidental learning".

Elderly are a vulnerable group (European Commission, 2012a) which, on the one hand, create an increased challenge in times of crisis and, on the other hand, represent a valuable resource in intergenerational educational process (Sanchez, 2006). Intergenerational learning is an essential part of lifelong learning. In 2007 the United Nations highlighted the importance of intergenerational solidarity and the belief that it

"lets you carry the knowledge and culture through generational interdependence and interactions across age, particularly among young people and adults or seniors".

The Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth recognizes that lifelong learning and skills development are key elements to the current economic and social crisis and an ageing population. Adult education gives people an opportunity to improve or to renovate their skills, contributing to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development (European Commission, 2010).

The Adult Education Unit of the European Commission in the context of the European Year 2012 of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, emphasised intergenerational learning has an important role to play in supporting the active participation of the elderly in society. The intergenerational learning is essential in fostering positive relations among people of different ages and life situations and supporting the transmission and exchange of human capital, life skills, culture, values and knowledge within society (Bachmann & Säävälä 2012).

European Union education policy response to an ageing society

The lifelong learning perspective has been actively promoted in the Europe Union policy over the last decade. Since the European Year 2006 of Lifelong Learning, the European Commission started publishing documents on lifelong learning. "Lifelong learning will facilitate an enhancement of citizenship through the sharing of common values, and the development of a sense of belonging to a common social and economic area. It must encourage a broader-based understanding of citizenship, founded on active solidarity and on mutual understanding of the cultural diversities that constitute Europe's originality and richness" (European Commission, 1997).

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) and Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality (2001) defined lifelong learning as "all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and / or employment related perspective".

The Resolution on lifelong learning, adopted in 2002 by the European Council of Heads of State and Governments, the guiding policy for the reform of education and training in the member states, claimed that lifelong learning is an "indispensable means for promoting social cohesion, active citizenship, personal and professional fulfilment, adaptability and employability" and "should enable all persons to acquire the necessary knowledge to take part as active citizens in the knowledge society and the labour market" (CEC, 2002).

The European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning provided a statement of knowledge, skills and attitudes that could be expected from learning and intergenerational learning (European Communities, 2007).

The First Communication specifically on adult learning It's never too late to learn (2006) and the Action Plan on Adult Learning It's always a good time to learn (2007) tried to develop a global approach of older adult learning.

In November 2011, the Council of European Union (JO, 2011) formally adopted the European Agenda for Adult Education where a vision of education of adults in 2020 was defined in order to enable all adults to develop and refine their skills and competences throughout life. This Agenda foresees that the adult learning sector in 2020 Europe should achieve: "well-developed learning provision for seniors, in order to promote active, autonomous, and healthy ageing, and which uses their knowledge, experience, social and cultural capital for the benefit of society as a whole; a strong commitment to promoting adult learning as a means of fostering solidarity between different age groups (for example, by means of an "intergenerational pact") and between cultures and people of all backgrounds".

Among the Agenda priorities set for 2012-14, underlines the need for "enhancing learning opportunities for older adults in the context of active ageing, including volunteering and the promotion of innovative forms of intergenerational learning and initiatives to exploit the knowledge, skills and competences of older people for the benefit of society as a whole".

The renewed European Agenda for Adult Education was launched on the 28th February 2012, in Brussels, highlighting the importance of learning provision for older people. It focuses on attracting and supporting more adults back into lifelong learning, on providing second-chance opportunities for low qualified adults to strengthen their basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy and digital knowledge (European Commission, 2012b).

European Commission's Lifelong Programme includes many projects to develop learning provision for older people and sharing good practice. The Grundtvig[6] programme aims to provide adults with more ways to improve their knowledge and skills, to facilitate their personal development and to boost their employment prospects. It also helps to tackle problems associated with Europe's ageing population.

On the 23th November 2011, the European Commission proposed the new EU programme for education, training, youth and sport - Erasmus+[7], previously known as Erasmus for All or YES Europe. It is planned to start in 2014 and will significantly

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[6] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/grundtvig_en.htm
[7] http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all

increase the funds allocated for the development of knowledge and skills. The new programme will have an integrated structure and focus on three Key Actions: Learning Mobility, Co-Operation and Policy Reform. Erasmus+ will focus on mobility, cooperation and policy reform. Improvements will be made to support international study, training, teaching and volunteering opportunities. These improvements will benefit higher education and vocational students, trainees, teachers, trainers and youth workers. 'Erasmus Training' is the Erasmus+ education sector, including vocational education and training as well as adult learning.

Intergenerational learning contexts and ICT

Intergenerational learning involves people of different generations engaged in learning together and sharing knowledge. Through intergenerational learning, younger generations can help older people to update theirs skills and learn new skills, including ICT skills or abilities. ICT permeates our lives. We use ICT in the work place, in school and in private life, for leisure, entertainment, to communicate and to participate society. We have contact with ICT every day and we are required to have the necessary digital skills, being able to use them effectively, benefiting from the Information and Knowledge Society and responding to new and interesting challenges. New technologies fast development and progressive ageing of population mean a growing risk of a wider gap between generations.

The acquisition of digital competence is an important element of supporting active ageing, opening up new learning opportunities for this group, either in formal or in informal settings. Using ICT is also a privileged means of learning while creating benefits across different generations, bringing young people and seniors together and tackling the digital divide (European Commission, 2012c).

The European lifelong learning programme has opportunities for intergenerational learning and ICT, as well as to promote active ageing through learning in later life, in particular through programmes such as Grundtvig, a project to respond to the educational challenges of ageing population in Europe and to help in providing adults with pathways to improve their knowledge and competences. Their priorities, among others: acquisition of key competences through adult education; the role of adult education in strengthening social inclusion and gender equality; creativity and innovation, including intergenerational learning, learning for senior citizens and family learning. We also highlight the objectives to provide seniors with the skills they need in order to remain active in society or that strengthen the contribution of older people to the learning of younger generations. Some examples illustrating the EU contribute and support to intergenerational learning and active ageing through the use of digital skills:

Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences[8], BASIC-LIFE - Basic Web 2.0 Skills by Learning in Family Environment[9], Detales - Digital Education Through Adult Learners[10]; eScouts - Intergenerational Learning Circle for Community Service[11] and Intergenerational ICT Skills[12].

Key Activity 3-ICT is a transversal programme in the education sector that aim to support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning. Project examples include BRIDGE - Bridging The Digital Gap For Elders[13] or G&G - Grandparents and Grandchildren[14]. This kind of projects may include a range of practice examples of learning and can take place outside the formal education system (non-formal and informal learning) in a variety of contexts and in all stages of life.

At a time when the European Union is confronted with a serious of economic crisis which has caused a surge in unemployment, especially among young people, and in the context of an ageing population, the validation of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified (JO, 2012).

The European Council recommendation of the 20th December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, apply the following definitions: (i) formal learning means learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education; (ii) non-formal learning means learning which takes place through planned activities where some form of learning support is present; it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning, and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public; (iii) informal learning means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of

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[8] http://www.alice-llp.eu

[9] http://www.srep.ro/basic-life/

[10] http://www.detales.net/wp/

[11] http://escouts.eu

[12] http://www.intergenerational-ictskills.eu/cms/

[13] http://www.seniors-bridge.eu

[14] http://www.geengee.eu/geengee/index.jsp

objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home.

The issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been an important part of the European policy agenda since 2001, when in its communication Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality the Commission defined lifelong learning as all learning activity undertaken throughout life and recognized that people learn in organized formal and non-formal education and also informally by themselves and in interaction with other people.

Intergenerational learning takes places in a wide variety of settings, for example community centres, public spaces, in educational situations or in the workplace. It is mainly non-formal and informal. Intergenerational learning in educational and training settings (schools, higher education, colleges or pre-school) involves volunteers and uses mentoring as the means to share skills, knowledge and experience by both the younger people and older people who participate (Newman, 2000). Outside the classroom, intergenerational learning takes place in public spaces, such as community centres, sports clubs or cultural spaces, and of a volunteering activities, like arts and crafts, music, gardening, ICT, etc. These activities contributed to share skills and knowledge and to promote increased understanding between generations. Grundtvig project SILVER[15] (Stimulating ICT Learning for active EU elders) involved school students teaching older people how to use ICT. This provided older people with the competences and resources to benefit from ICT. School students gained communication skills, as well as lessons in social responsibility and intergenerational understanding.

Intergenerational learning, as a means to responding to labour market inequality, increases cross-age participation in training and in the labour market (EAGLE, 2007). ICT can provide the tools for greater independence and a more active life for the older adults and for intergenerational learning.

In 2012, 49% of European citizens (28 countries) aged 55-74 have never used the Internet and only 33% access daily to the Internet (Eurostat, 2013).

Age is the main factor with aged 65-74 having never used the Internet. Their reasons for not having an Internet connection are lack of interest, lack of need to have Internet access at home because the content was not useful or not interesting. Older people and those with disabilities use the Internet less frequently than other groups of users. In

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[15] http://www.silver.mondodigitale.org

2012 only 28% of persons aged 65-74 went online at least once a week compared to 76% of persons aged 25-54. Only 16% of 65-74 year olds used the Internet to access government services, compared to 49% of 25-54 year olds. In 2011, among persons who had used the Internet and did not submit any electronic forms 17% of those aged 65 to 74 years considered electronic procedures as being too complicated or not having enough knowledge as opposed to only 8% of person aged 25 to 54 years (European Commission, 2012d).

ICT can make positive contribution to the economy, society and personal quality of life (COM, 2005). ICT can help older individuals to improve their quality of life, continue working, remain active in their community, stay healthier and live independently longer (European Commission, 2007b). Research shows that the Internet: help to reduce social isolation among older adults (Swindell 2000; Lansdale 2002; Rice & Katz 2003; Xie 2008); can improve the daily life of older adults by promoting an active aging (McMellon & Schiffman 2002; Rice & Katz 2003; Torp et al. 2008); has positive effects on sociability, social capital, and well-being (Katz & Rice 2002; Kouvo & Räsänen 2005; Boase et al. 2006; Robinson & Martin 2010; Neves 2012).

There are different ways in which Internet and computer skills are obtained. Among them, self-study (learning by doing), informal assistance from friends and relatives, training courses or education centres and formal education institution (school, university). According to the Digital Agenda for Europe Scoreboard 2012 (European Commission, 2012d), the most popular ways of obtaining digital skills among senior people, above 55 years of age, are informal assistance from colleagues, relatives or friends (34%) and self-study (learning by doing) (32%). Training courses and adult education centres, either on demand of the employer or by own initiative, and self-study using books, CD-ROMs, etc., come second, while obtaining digital skills by a formal educational institution is trivial in this age group.

It is evident that non-formal and informal learning can be more attractive to older people. They won't attend courses but still need to learn, thus it is important to develop informal learning opportunities for learning to use ICT. Older people are less likely than younger people to participate in formal learning, particularly in the workplace, but there is a significant take up of non-formal and informal learning by older people (Danish Technological Institute, 2012).

Intergenerational learning is a strategy that increases lifelong learning, active ageing and solidarity between generations, providing many benefits in ageing societies. According to the Final Report Learning for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity, intergenerational learning offers a means for skills, values and knowledge to be passed between generations, as well as an opportunity to foster mutual understanding to support wider objectives of community cohesion. Conversely it can be used to meet

older people's needs to keep in touch with constant changes such as those affecting technology and having a better understanding of an increased interaction with children and young people (Danish Technological Institute, 2012).

Discussion

Parallel to EU-level overarching initiatives to address demographic change, the period since 2000 has seen the emergence of a diverse range of policies and initiatives for the same purpose across a variety of policy fields, including: employment and pensions; anti-discrimination and access to services; volunteering; health; ICT; intergenerational solidarity; and lifelong learning (ENIL, 2012).

Policy initiatives highlight the need to promote a 'cradle to grave' culture of learning in European society, which will support a seamless transition from school through higher education and onto adult and informal learning. Closely allied to this vision of continuous learning are other policy agendas associated with skills acquisition and development and with social inclusion, particularly focusing on promoting the inclusion of older people within economic, social and cultural life (Fischer & Kugemann, 2008).

Is important recognising the problem of low literacy among adults and older people in society and individually. This is of particular importance for engaging adults and older people in learning. Some older people are not motivated to learn owing for negative past experiences of learning (Withnall, 2006). Many adults and older people believe they are too old to learn. Others are afraid of failing, or consider improvement to be impossible. Most elderly have not been in education and training for some time, they have negative views of learning and many older people do not recognise that they have needs and benefits in learning. Providing more evidence for the wider benefits of learning and focus on the learners' needs is important, such as staying healthy and active, managing finances, learning about new skills or sharing skills, talk or engaging in a discussion and getting digital competences.

Intergenerational and lifelong learning can be a powerful force to motivate adults and elders to learn. Leisure and enjoyment can enhance older adult people enthusiastic of knowledge because they are interested in improving their confidence and feeling more positive about theirs lives through the social aspects of the learning activity. For many older people, the common learning purpose enables them to interact with other people, make friends or seeing old friends and create new interests is what drives them to join an activity and to keep returning to it (Kim & Merriam, 2010). It also provides confidence to take up further learning and to recognise the knowledge and skills, which they do have (Cutler, 2009).

Learning ICT skills decreases the digital divide for the adult and older people and related advantages of independent and healthy living, active ageing and citizenship and social inclusion. Gaining digital competences can, in turn, lead to accessing further learning activities (such as online courses) and other jobs (Risi, 2009).

Currently it is largely agreed that intergenerational learning have significant potential and is important to continue investing and developing lifelong learning ICT programmes in an intergenerational context in order to make them easy and accessible and allow seniors to find the advantages of ICT use. However, global trends in intergenerational are required. Research suggests ideas and orientations in this area: putting the learner at the centre and speaking their language; stimulating needs; new places of learning; flexible and active learning, supported by new technology and social media; valuing prior learning and skills; starting with learning basic skills; opening activities to all generations; ensuring appropriate and interesting activities for all; seeking online solutions for providing lifelong learning programmes to seniors who cannot leave their home; using innovative pedagogy, teaching aids and techniques; extending and increasing public funds among others; government support and encouragement to new projects; European institutions expected to establish a clear policy definition for intergenerational learning.

Conclusion

We observed significant developments in EU policies to address the current challenges and recognize the progress achieved. However, innovative and intelligent investment and financing are necessary in order to better meet current and future requirements. In addition, modernization policies are required, particularly on education and training, for effective and efficient implementation of intergenerational and lifelong learning, with a focus on social cohesion, in order to respond to new ageing challenges.

Making lifelong and intergenerational learning available to an ageing society requires understanding that learning is a right for all and it is important to take into account the complex societal dimension of population needs, interests and particularities, where diversity (age, cultures, gender) is an opportunity.

Intergenerational learning can improve dialogue between generations and, at the same time, can enrich processes of learning towards the achievement of key lifelong learning competences.

Our theoretical and practical research in intergenerational learning allows us present some ideas and suggestions that can contribute for the future of intergenerational learning for ageing society. We emphasize a perspective on intergenerational learning and focus attention in the personal, cultural and social aspects of life, enabling the inclusion of alternative scenarios (informal, non-formal or formal contexts; in academic, professional and personal practice; in different types of interaction, such as physical, virtual, mobile or outdoor activity) and languages (arts, narratives, storytelling games, news technologies, social media) for learning in order to provide best opportunities to all generations learning together. When social media and new technologies support intergenerational activities, the learning process is more creative, stimulating and expressive. Consequently, intergenerational learning requires an innovative pedagogical practice. Adult educators, professional or voluntaries trainers need qualifications and skills for implementing intergenerational learning opportunities. The huge diversity of adult and older people learning in Europe increases the need to continuing professional (or voluntary) development for adult education and empowers trainers to reflect on their own role. It is equally important to recognize the competences gained though work and the value of experience.

Much is known about good ways to improve ICT with intergenerational and lifelong learning through local and national programs and individual projects, including projects funded by the European Commission. This knowledge needs to be more widely shared, disseminated, analysed, discussed and reflected so that good practice has a true impact in future developments.

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