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ERASMUS+60 Third-Age educational offers integrating intergenerational learning perspectives

Hackathon report

Erasmus+60 Third-Age educational offers for lifelong learning activities

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1. Introduction

Third-Age Learning Perspectives in modern society

Why is lifelong learning necessary? It can be concluded that in the past, when the world's economic development was stable and it was quite easy to predict what changes were expected, people went to the labour market after graduating from school/university/vocational education, where they gained a certain place and developed it to the end of their lives. Currently, when the world economy is experiencing various kinds of turbulence and future needs are challenging to predict, it is rare who, having graduated from a school/university/vocational education institution, is immediately entering the labour market. People often develop their skills to match market demand. There is a shift towards a skills education model, which means that people must learn different competencies throughout their lives in order to be able to participate not only in the labor market but also in a changing world.

As life expectancy increases and the proportion of seniors increases, one of the biggest challenges in Europe is the ageing of society. Demographic projections show that European society will never be as young as it used to be, and the ageing population will accelerate in the coming decades, with the proportion of older people growing rapidly. "In a 10-year perspective, the age of the average European has increased by two years (Eurostat, 2022)". In 2020, 90.4 million people in Europe were over 65 years old, which is 39.7% of the total European population. As a result of the ageing of society, several social problems arise, which must be solved at the national and the supranational-global levels. For example, at the national level, the social problems of an ageing society can be solved by redistributing funding and ensuring the availability of medical and social assistance in the long term. However, this does not diminish other risks that seniors face. Based on the results of the study, seniors are more exposed to risks such as social isolation, loneliness, depression, and diseases related to disorders of the nervous system than representatives of other age groups. Those involved in social activities, maintain a high level of interaction, feel better, and are more satisfied with their quality of life. Conversely,

seniors lacking social contact are more likely to feel lonely and suffer from social isolation.

At the global level, the understanding of age is changing. In the past years, the stereotype of old age as "spending the last years of life" is outdated in today's view, and a new idea of retirement years, as an active, varied, and meaningful stage of life must be created. As a result, it is noted that one of the main conditions for the well-being of older people is regular social contact. To promote these social contacts, lifelong learning for seniors is offered as one of the solutions. The myth that a person is less and less able to acquire new knowledge and skills as they age has been completely overturned, and there has long been talk of continuous education throughout life. In some cases, participation in lifelong learning programs is linked to the desire to continue a working career, but in several countries of the world, special educational institutions have appeared for seniors who do not plan to work in the future. Based on international lifelong learning third-age research – [learning] has been found to raise older persons' social integration, personal fulfilment, and quality of life, thereby leading them to optimum levels of active and successful ageing (Formosa, 2011). Based on definitions, lifelong learning is a voluntary, independent, and persistent internal motivation to learn something new (most often, this motivation is informal). Lifelong learning is not just about entering the labour market. Lifelong learning is about maintaining mental health, establishing new contacts, and promoting emotional well-being. Consequently, lifelong learning is essential for the target group of seniors.

Especially acutely, senior lifelong learning was actualized during the COVID pandemic. On the one hand, according to the results of the research, "the number of people over excited by the virtual environment has increased during the pandemic (rising from 10% to 17%) […]. The most rapid growth among young people (18-24 years old) has been estimated, but experts point out that more and more seniors are also going into virtual environment dependencies (1% rise from 4% to 5% among older people) (Medicine.lv, 2021). This means that more and more seniors are slipping into "virtual reality" under the influence of the pandemic. Since seniors are a "risk group" whose virtual competence is not sufficiently developed, for example,

according to the results of the "Centre for Ageing Better Study: "5 million of people over 55 years of age do not have digital skills and do not use online services" (Bashford, 2021), it is important to develop such older people. The skills and competencies of seniors, which in this case serve as resources to facilitate the involvement of seniors in the lifelong learning process. The use of a virtual environment reduces social exclusion, which has a positive impact on the well-being of seniors in general. Thus, because of the pre-research of rough analysis of the existing situation, the project partners have agreed on the following questions to be discussed with the planned Hackhaton: 1. Wellbeing factors of Studying for Senior; 2. Lifelong learning resources (opportunities and effective resources and tools for learning); 3. Motivation (how we can engage seniors in lifelong learning).

1. 1. Well-being factors of studying for seniors (knowledge and future skills to be developed)

From an academic perspective, there are a lot of factors that affect seniors' well-being. For example, these factors are financial factors, neighborhood, living areas and social participation. Based on our hackathon aims, the main focus of senior well-being factors during this Hackathon will be social participation. The meaning of social participation by World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) as involving or working closely with communities, informing people with information, consulting people to provide feedback, collaborating by partnering with communities in making decisions and empowering by ensuring the decision controlled by the communities had influenced their well-being. Meanwhile, Levasseur et al. (2015) claimed social participation is the part of the needs of life for every person. Their study on social participation in ageing literature had identified the level of the participation which are (1) connecting with people by doing an activity, (2) being close to people, (3) interacting without doing any activity, (4) doing an activity together with other people, (5) lend a hand to other people and (6) contributing to the community. Social participation also refers to the social contacts, social activities,

and voluntary works done by an individual in a community (Hietanen, Aartsen, Kiuru, Lyyra and Read, 2016).

"Wellbeing" as a concept (under this topic) will be closely related to cognitive and physical health. From a subjective perspective, "well-being" is concerned with an individual's subjective experience of their own lives (Diener, M Suh, 1999). Cognitive health – the ability to clearly think, learn, and remember – is an important component of performing everyday activities (National Institute of Aging, 2023). Physical health refers to the overall well-being and functioning of the body's physical aspects, including its systems, organs, and structures. It involves maintaining a state of optimal physical fitness, strength, endurance, flexibility, and coordination. Factors such as regular exercise, proper nutrition and adequate rest and sleep are essential for promoting physical health. Regular exercise helps improve cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles and bones, enhance flexibility, and boost overall energy levels. It can also contribute to maintaining a healthy weight and reducing the risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Proper nutrition involves consuming a well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. This provides the necessary nutrients, vitamins, and minerals for the body to function optimally and support its growth, repair, and immune system.Overall, physical health is a state of well-being that encompasses multiple dimensions, including cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, body composition, and overall vitality. It is important to prioritize and maintain physical health as it significantly contributes to an individual's overall quality of life and longevity.

The aim of this topic is to underline well-being factors of studying for seniors. The main needs and skills that need to be developed in the future. The discussion will be based on evidence-based studies that will be shared with our participants.

1.2. Lifelong learning resources (opportunities and effective resources/tools)

Lifelong learning for seniors includes any task that challenges your thinking and requires regular engagement. It involves expanding your knowledge and skills through creative, stimulating activities, and even sharing your knowledge with others. The aim of this topic is to find out the more effective strategy for lifelong learning for seniors. The strategy will be based on *always learning.*

1.3. Motivation (how can we engage seniors in lifelong learning?)

The best way to incorporate learning and education into the lives of a senior you care about is through personal engagement. Whether it's with a family member, friend, or caregiver, trying new skills and hobbies together will help the seniors in your life experience the benefits of lifelong learning. The aim of this topic is to find out some effective motivation factors (evidence-based) for seniors and lifelong learning teachers and get an answer to the question – How can we engage seniors in lifelong learning?

2. ANALYSIS OF HACKATHON RESULTS

Hackathon's results are analyzed using the sequenced or converged research design strategy. A mixed research method has been used for a sequential research design. In practice it means that quantitative and qualitative data are collected separately, but in one sample. First, priority qualitative data is collected, then quantitative data collection and analysis follow. As a result, the two data sets are integrated into the interpretation phase of the results of the research. In practical terms, the design of the study involves the use of qualitative data, while quantitative data complement the interpretation of qualitative data results (Creswell, 2012). The choice of the design strategy for the research is the aim of the Hackathon is to stage a large effort to collect feedback (about senior's lifelong learning activities) from

stakeholders such as HEIs as well as local, regional, national, and international educational authorities and other organizations reflecting the partners' countries.

To promote a high-quality exchange of opinions, Iveta Cīrule, who is the founder of the Senior University in Latvia[1], participated with her presentation at the beginning of the Hackathon. In her presentation, Iveta introduced the event participants to the concept of open innovation in senior training not only in Latvia but also on a global scale. During her presentation, Iveta Cīrule emphasized that open innovation, as an operational strategy that creates a positive impact on the lifelong learning process for seniors in the future, is a complicated concept made up of competencies, motivation, strategy, partners, and recognition of difficulties.

The second keynote speaker was Tatyana Azamatova, who is the founder of a School for Seniors. In her presentation, Tatjana emphasized the positive impact of seniors' learning. She highlighted the fact that the population is rapidly ageing, and a large part of seniors feel excluded from society and seniors' lifelong learning is an aspect that will help fight these negative consequences.

After the keynote speakers, Hackathon moderators introduce all participants to all topics and then ask them to underline the main challenges, opportunities, and solutions in the lifelong learning process for the seniors. The result analysis is based on quantitative research methods.

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[1]More information about Senior University in Latvia is available here:
http://www.senioruuniversitate.lv/lv/s%C4%81kums

2.1. Well-being factors of studying for seniors (knowledge and future skills to be developed)

Moderator: lect. Sandra Kalnina (University of Latvia, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Arts)[2]

The discussion in this group was subordinated to five elements of the wellbeing concept defined by Rathm and Harter (2010): 1. Career wellbeing; 2. Social-wellbeing 3. Financial wellbeing; 4. Physical wellbeing; 5. Community wellbeing. According to these elements, a person (individual) can only feel full, when one's mind works, one is a member of the community, and feels financially and economically secure. The discussion was based on three main questions:

1. *Which of the well-being factors do you think are the most important for seniors?*
2. *What are your moments of happiness and satisfaction (well-being) in your life (professional life, studying/learning)?*
3. *How can I improve my well-being (What moments in your professional experience and studying would you specify as the moments of wisdom? And why?).*

Based on these issues, the participants highlighted problems at the beginning of the discussion that have a negative impact on senior well-being. First, seniors don't feel social belonging to the community. In their view, seniors are a group that is ring-fenced from the rest of society. The problem why seniors don't have lifelong learning activities is that they feel excluded from society. In addition, this problem is closely linked to insufficient digital skills, particularly for seniors coming from regions. Secondly, seniors have no sense of security. Mostly, it is a concern that seniors, on the training path (particularly when training is done digitally), will do something awry.

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[2] Sandra Kalnina is a Deputy Director of the Center of Adult Education and lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art. She has proposed several lectures and study courses for the future teachers.

This designation of the problem is closely consistent with a third problem identified as a lack of self-autonomy as a learner. Seniors are concerned about the fact that, as digitalization grows, it is impossible to track the offer of training or to learn the content of the training courses offered, due to the lack of digital skills. As a result, according to the participants, all of this has a negative impact on senior well-being.

Social learning was offered as one of the well-being options. Members with social learning understand the introduction of community-level and intergenerational learning approaches in the training of seniors. This approach to training for seniors will contribute to emotional, social, and physical security. As a result, possible solutions were offered during the discussion to improve senior well-being factors of studying:

- People have different skills and knowledge. If these are recognized in a region, it provides an opportunity to promote social learning, i.e. people sharing their skills and knowledge with others, improving opportunities for the whole community;

- Social learning can take place both among peers and between generations, i.e., not only helping to learn a skill but also providing emotional support in different situations. Thus contributing to a sense of belonging to a community and increasing its wellbeing;

- Social learning opens opportunities for collective problem-solving. Community members coming together to share their experiences and knowledge can creatively and effectively identify problems and offer a variety of solutions;

- Social learning in the regions can be a powerful tool for promoting the wellbeing of the local community. It allows people to interact with each other, to build positive interdependence and a sense of belonging to the region.

2.2. Lifelong learning resources opportunities and effective resources (tools)

Moderator: Assoc.prof. Dr. paed. Sanita Baranova (University of Latvia, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Arts)[3]

The discussion was based on three main questions:

1. *What one understands by life-long learning resources* and *which life-long resources have been used in the learning experience?;*
2. *How to promote senior participation in mobility programs* and *what kind of mobility programs are suitable for the learning needs of seniors*?;
3. *Identify effective life-long learning resources after the age of 60* (content, organizational forms, methods, digital tools, etc.).

Hackathon participants have identified the following life-long learning resources: *books, libraries, digital platforms, and other digital tools*. Experience has also been identified as a learning resource as it promotes learning and willingness to share obtained experiences. Communication plays a significant role as well - *interaction with younger generations* (intergeneration learning), for example, joint projects, research, etc. widens one's horizon, allows the share the experience, keeps one up-to-date, and younger adults can develop communication skills for effective communication with seniors (according to the needs of the learner - e.g. patience in communication and teaching process). Suggestions for facilitating the learning process would propose including seniors in a classroom on a certain topic together with regular students or students teaching digital skills for seniors thus bringing the best results via the interaction. However, lack of infrastructure (e.g. poor internet)

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[3]Sanita Baranova is an assoc.professor at the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art. She has proposed several life-long learning resources: lectures, various courses in municipalities, in different organizations, video learning websites, open educational resources, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), University of the Third Age (U3A) (Universität des 3. Lebensalter), Erasmus+ Mobility Program (seminars, workshops, courses, practical training, etc.).

and digital technologies have been mentioned as obstacles to the learning process of the seniors living outside the big cities.

Participation in mobility programs faces various **challenges** like language barrier, additional financial costs, stress from travelling, and other psychological aspects. Therefore, a clear purpose, the usefulness of the knowledge, and the benefit of mobility should be addressed to the seniors. Whether it is an opportunity to get to know other cultures, discover new perspectives for life, open one's mind or reduce stereotypes, etc. - the purpose is the same – facilitating the wellbeing of seniors. Learning mobility in another Third-Age University for one week or cooperation between 2 or 3 universities in organizing mobility groups would be a good start in promoting mobility and encouraging seniors. Even if the mobility is organized within the country or abroad, it would be advisable to meet the other mobility participants and/or organizers online before the actual start of physical mobility. In addition, mentoring support of younger colleagues or PhD students in solving organizational issues would be highly appreciated. It has been identified that seniors look for one-to-one contact, so they are treated as individuals and can become more self-confident. A common online platform containing all mobility opportunities for seniors (coordinated by the universities or other institutions) would facilitate the information flow, and visibility and attract new participants.

Effective life-long learning resources for senior life-long learners rely on various aspects like content, organizational forms, methods, digital tools, etc. The learning opportunities should reach and engage people from different socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic locations. Clear and structured content, choice of appropriate terminology, use of seniors' friendly language, and appropriate choice of examples are among the main communication tools. The offer should be diversified for different levels and should attract the target audience. The learning process should be interactive and organized as engaged learning involving not only seniors but also younger people thus promoting research-based intergenerational learning. Senior learning should be needs based on obtaining practical and useful skills to improve their quality of life and having the possibility to share the experience. The

learning process should be differentiated, and individualized with personalized learning content, methods, and tools, and include both formal and non-formal education in the classroom and on field trips.

2.1.3. Motivation: how can we engage seniors in lifelong learning?

Moderator: PhD student Gundega Kanepaja (University of Latvia, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Arts)[4]

At the beginning of the discussion, the moderator highlighted the theoretical boundaries of the concept of motivation. It was explained to the participants that the motivation covered both practical and social motives. The concept of motivation is very broad. It embraces ideas as effort, will, wish, expectation, interest, goal, etc. You cannot observe motivation directly. (Hubackova, Semicova, 2014). In view of the complex nature of the concept of motivation, the discussion was underpinned by three questions:

1. *What factors motivate and contribute to the desire (or need) to learn?*
2. *Does improving quality of life motivate learning and vice versa?*
3. *Does mediated communication (in the present and past) stimulate or limit motivation to learn?*

Following the discussion, the participants highlighted **challenges**, which negatively influence seniors' motivation to engage in lifelong learning activities. The first problem is the content of the proposed training courses. As noted by seniors, training courses are most often offered with low added value, i.e. training courses are theoretical rather than practical. The second problem is to address the target group. Often, training offers are unattainable for those who want and are motivated

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[4] Gundega Kanepaja is a University of Latvia PhD student at the Faculty of Education, Psychology, and Arts. Her research interest is close related to motivation, intergenerational learning, and ageism.

to learn (no access to the e-environment). The third problem is the choice of training resources. According to the elderly, the use of resources that are not isolated from reality is a positive influence on motivation, i.e., closely linked to today's changing realities (efficient use of e-mails, digital platforms, etc.).

Solutions that have been proposed are very complex and involve different levels of governance and the involvement of multiple actors. In practice, this means that during the discussion, participants have taken the motivating factors not only at the individual level but also at the collective level, providing broad insights into the promotion of motivation under the bottom-up approach.

- Motivating factors for reference among seniors are downstream to their grandfathers. You cannot make an equal sign between seniors of all ages and their motivating factors after reference. The common denominator: social learning;
- Clear definition of the value of learning: any treatment must bring added value to senior life. The outcome must be positive: learning new skills, learning language skills, learning critical thinking, learning your own body, etc.;
- Abandonment of the classical training approach (teacher-trainee), the possibility of an intergenerational approach when a senior learns from a lecturer, a lecturer from a senior and, in the end, both assess what they have learned and what the benefits are;

3.CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we would like to offer a SWOT[5] analysis for the Erasmus+60 Third-Age educational offers for lifelong learning activities.

INTERNAL FACTORS	
STRENGTHS	**WEAKNESSES**
Lifelong learning activities can maintain independence in senior age;	The low added value of lifelong learning activities (theoretical courses);
Strengths a senior's wellbeing and "usefulness";	Lack of motivation;
Be part of a community (social learning);	Living in stereotypes as "life ends at age 55" (most related to a person with a Communist regime background);
Share own experience with others;	Loneliness and social isolation;
Informal teaching methods with the aim of improving the senior's independence (intergenerational learning).	Formal attitude: the teacher and scholar as a result have no interest in learning.

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[5] SWOT analysis for self-assessment of critical thinking: **Strengths** — those characteristics of students and staff that can help them achieve the set goal (to think critically); **W**eaknesses - those characteristics of students and staff that can hinder the achievement of the given goal (to think critically); **O**pportunities - those external factors that can help students and staff achieve the set goal (to think critically); **Threats** - those external factors that can prevent students and staff from achieving a certain goal (to think critically);

EXTERNAL FACTORS

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Positive attitudes toward the use of digital tools for lifelong learning;	Cybersecurity and technical difficulties;
Digital participation: make a worldwide contact network;	No access to the internet;
Improve language and intercultural communication skills;	Language barrier;
Using digital (social media and other online communication services) for family and community connections;	Ambivalent attitudes toward the use of new technology;
Improve wellbeing (Active ageing);	Difficulties with intergenerational interactions;
Reduction of inequalities for seniors in society;	Economic and social-economic context of the place of residence;
Acquisition of digital literacy, critical thinking, and other important competencies;	Lack of motivation to learn something new;
Social interaction.	Senior's personality aspects.

4. DATA ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK FORM

Participants were asked to share feedback to identify what they have discovered, learned, or **found useful during the online event**, and they have listed the following:

· Had a clear concept of the Erasmus+60 project;

· Discovered a variety of life-long resources;

· Enhanced understanding of third-age learners' needs;

· Received clear ideas for increasing seniors' participation in teaching and learning processes.

Participants have listed the following aspects they **plan to integrate into their daily activities**:

· Focus on psychological support;

· Focus on well-being aspects;

· Use appropriate communication style and tools.

Participants have listed the following topics of their interests they would like to **discuss further**:

· ChatGPT for psychological support to distance/online learners;

· Financial support for seniors' life-long learning;

· Intergenerational learning;

· Digital solutions for senior learning;

· Mapping of best practices and course offers within Europe;

· Comparison of governmental attitudes and policies regarding life-long learning and its funding;

· Learning activities for seniors with low social context.

· Senior education opportunities in retirement homes and care institutions.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Target group/audience: given that not all seniors are active on the internet, developers of lifelong learning activities should consider how to reach the target group (i.e. the channels for dissemination).

Social learning – learning together creates a sense of security that has a positive impact on senior wellbeing, leading to the conclusion that it should be social learning in the planning of any third-age lifelong learning activity.

Integrational studies – the intergenerational approach is better perceived by seniors since it provides an opportunity not only to learn but to share your experience.

Efficient use of resources – lessons need to be practical and go hand in hand with modern actuals. Older people have a strong need to learn digital and critical thinking skills. Offers need to be connected to reality because seniors need to have "usefulness still being a part of always changing society".

Reducing the language barrier: more receptive to third-age lifelong learning activities are those developed in the national language, so there should be a focus on both national and internationalization.

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