

LEARNING IN LATER LIFE
NEW CHALLENGES FOR ADULT EDUCATION
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The “Learning in Later Life” seminar was organized by the Cyprus Adult Education Association in the framework of the European project “LLP-Grundtvig PEFETE”, a project aiming at fostering the active citizenship of older people.

In the European social, political and economic framework, adult education has achieved a very fundamental role. Indeed, the average European age is constantly raising and this trend is becoming a very specific prerogative especially in our continent. The policies pursued by several governments to raise the retirement age and the active ageing of population, emphasizes how the promotion and improvement of lifelong learning strategies are an urgent need.

Training can play an important role for those senior citizens belonging to a category considered at risk. Hence, thanks to appropriate educational programs, these citizens could develop further competencies and skills in order to face the rapid changes occurring in the current society and job market.

The improvement of training activities could promote a better integration of seniors in the economic and social development process at local, national and international level.

In recent years, several initiatives to attract citizens toward training offers have been undertaken, according to the peculiarities of each geographical area.

In Northern Europe, the new projects are enforced in the normative structure of the social welfare. In Western Europe the old social welfare system is being gradually replaced by the new initiatives strongly focused on interaction and cooperation between social organizations, local authorities and enterprises. In the Mediterranean area instead, we assist to a peculiar combination between family based learning and social charity work, that is particularly interesting for local communities. Last but not least, in the Eastern countries, the development of new methods of non-formal learning aims to promote a wider inclusion of adult population.

The main objective is to find a meeting point among these different strategies, in order to avoid fruitless resources investments, improve seniors empowerment, enhance and create new partnerships and infrastructures for a wider senior participation. One of the pressing

problems to solve in Europe is the lack of cooperation among the stakeholders of the countries involved in the adult training system. Starting from this general framework, the seminar analyzed the following themes through a global approach:

- Valuing ageing and older people through learning.
- Active ageing and self- directed learning.
- Intergenerational learning.

The previous analysis lead to the identification of the problems itemized below:

- High number of providers in the public, private and volunteering sector which independently use formative programs without a common vision. This creates fragmentation and a low impact situation.
- The adoption of a formative school model which limits the definition of curricula and teaching programs.
- Limited accessibility to learning opportunities for rural population.
- Limited funding availability for this sector's development.
- Limited number of specialized trainers for adults.

The following priorities should be considered in order to improve and develop adult training:

- Adequate legislation to promote adult training.
- Creation of a central national authority for adult training.
- Improvement of local, national and European funding.
- Vocational refreshing for those responsible of the adult training centres.
- Lifelong learning promotion.
- Sharing of the different countries' experiences on policies and initiatives undertaken in this field.
- Formal and official recognition of adult training as inseparable part of the educational system.
- Development of European multi-actor networks for sharing and transferring best practices and methodologies on adult education.

Taking into account those priorities, Unimarconi's suggestions mostly focused on the need to develop innovative curricula for adult learners and trainers and on the importance to raise awareness of professional re-training and ICTs' use in later life.

Moreover, it is worthy highlighting the great interest that was generated in seminar's audience by the presentation of Unimarconi's project e-IDE@ - Intergenerational Dialogue against Exclusion. That proposal was submitted in 2008 under Lifelong Learning Programme - Transversal Programme - Key Activity 3 - ICT and even though it was not selected for funding, it obtained a very good evaluation by the European Commission which invited the established consortium to apply again for the next call for proposals.

E-Ide@ was extremely relevant to the seminar discussion since it tried to meet most of the debated issues. Indeed, its main objective was to provide older people with new and flexible learning opportunities by means of ICTs in order to enable them to be better integrated in the knowledge society, promote their active European citizenship, and encourage their dialogue and interaction with young generations.

