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The Slovenian Third Age University

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The Slovenian Third Age University

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning. I am confident this camp is a great opportunity for all of us to share our knowledge, experience and culture, and therefore I would like to thank the organizer for having invited Mrs Rajka Bracun and myself to talk to you about a Slovenian nation-wide civil organisation meant for the education of the elderly-and much more- namely the Slovenian Third Age University.

So, my intention today is to introduce you to some of the present motives behind the education of the elderly and to talk to you about the Slovenian Third Age University. Later my colleague will present an example of innovative work and learning at this University.

Motives

Now, to go back to some of the motives behind the education of the elderly:

Increasing the participation of older workers in the labour market is part of the Lisbon Strategy and one of its strategic goals. Europe, as you know, should become a dynamic knowledge- based economy with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion and life long education has a lot to do with it. In March the Stockholm Council set up the following target: the employment rate of older workers (people aged from 55 to 64 years should be raised to 50 % by 2010 in the European Union.

What about the figures in Slovenia? In my age group from 58 to 64 only ten per cent of women are employed and only 22 % of men. And no wonder that this age group of active, curious, dynamic elderly people who have been squeezed out of the labour market, is the most numerous group at the Slovenian Third Age University. So the European political goal is to increase the level of participation of the elderly in the society- among others through education- and so is ours- and has always been.

About the Slovenian Third Age University

Now to begin with The Slovenian Third Age University is a nation wide civil organisation which was promoted by an idea I had back in 1984 namely, to reintroduce culture into education (which was squeezed out from schools and was so to say non-existent in adult education- I wanted to achieve this goal through developing a culture based programme for elderly adults learning French. It was not a usual language programme- it was a programme whose contents were related not only to learning the system of French language but also to the re-introduction of my elderly students to contemporary French culture in comparison with the Slovenian culture, and above all, this programme was meant to make us all think about the position of the elderly in the society and possible improvements.

Moreover, I carried out this project on a voluntary basis- and again there was practically no volunteering in public institutions in those days- jointly with my only 6 first students- and later with collaboration of some institutions. Simultaneously, I was researching the project and I accompanied it by many public appearances in which my students were involved. We also travelled together to Toulouse to Pierre Vellas the founder of the first Third Age University in France. The idea of the University was born. I researched the institutional environment met some professionals who were ready to join me among which prof. dr. Ana Krajnc.

So, later this and many other enterprises gave rise to the first concept, structure and official foundation of the Slovenian Third age University in 1986- it all happened in the time when adult education was related to work or society: political adult education, language and second chance adult education were predominant, but there was very little liberal adult education in the country and what is more civil society and its voluntary endeavours were practically non-existent. So this enterprise was facing many obstacles and challenges.

Very soon it became clear that education of the elderly cannot be just education. It should bring about transformative learning of individuals, local community and – Slovenia is a small country- society as a whole. This has happened to some extent. Education of the elderly is today considered as a right and as a must and we believe it has improved understanding in this country of the concept of life-long education and of the later European political concept of life-long learning.

From the very beginning the Slovenian Third Age University has had multifold functions and areas of activity

- promoting education of the elderly, creating new universities, developing new programmes, researching issues of the elderly,
- Education of the elderly for personal growth- to know more, to know better, to be more confident, tolerant, to better understand the changing world and one's position in this world, But this education should bring about results not only for the individual but also on community level: research works conducted by the elderly, monographs, guides, educational plays and stage performances, cultural events, new permanent activities, new organizations of civil society and recently also professional volunteering and second careers
- Education of the professionals dealing with elderly people
- Raising public awareness about the position and cooperation and solidarity of generations
- Stimulation of voluntary and paid work – even second career-of the elderly
- andragogical education of retired professional and younger professionals who are ready to take part in our project.

Now some numbers:

In 1984 there were 6 students and one mentor.

Today there are more than 21 000 students and more than 2000 mentors and more than 2000 volunteers working on a permanent basis with us.

In 1984 there was one as we call it study circle. With 6students

In 1986 was founded the first university in Ljubljana with now more than 5000 students, 20 000 educational periods a year, 31 different programmes. The university is run by only three full time employees.

Today there are two universities in former Slovenian republics and 35 universities in Slovenia and the participation of the elderly in education in Slovenia is very high According to the statistics of EUROSTAT among 18 countries Slovenia is the second country with highest participation of the elderly in education. But the Slovenian Third

Age University is not only about education: it is about researching the issues of the elderly, lobbying, political and civil engagement for the benefit of the elderly and all other generations.

Research and innovative work

There is also research and innovative work going on at the Slovenian Third Age as a reaction to social changes and as an anticipated response to the emerging individual and social needs.

Now I would like to give the floor to my Mrs Bracun who is an art historian, specialized in museum management – you will understand later why this is important to be told- who will be presenting one of the models we have been introducing, researching and putting into practice over the last year. Thank you very much for your attention.

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Rajka Bračun

The Slovenian Third Age University

**Voluntary Cultural Mediators in Slovenian Museums:
promoting active citizenship and cultural inclusion**

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Good morning to you all. May I first of all thank the organizer for inviting me to represent you a very special project on engaging elderly volunteers in museums, which The Slovenian Third Age University developed in partnership with The National Museum of Slovenia. I hope the topic will encourage you to fruitful debate after my presentation – I will be happy to answer your questions.

Few museums could manage without the help of any volunteers at all, though the way in which volunteers are involved varies greatly from museum to museum and from country to country. In Slovenia organized volunteering is not common in the cultural sector and happens very rarely in museums. The programme *Cultural Mediating* is one of the pilot projects in the field of implementing organized voluntary work of the elderly into museums, and is based on the principle of access to learning and knowledge.

Voluntary Cultural Mediating – Programme Description

The programme directly aims at educating and training elderly students of the Slovenian Third Age University to work on a voluntary basis in museums, galleries and similar public cultural settings. The pilot project was done in collaboration with the National Museum of Slovenia, one of the leading museums in Slovenia. The National Museum of Slovenia was founded in 1821 which makes it the oldest museum in this country. It is a public entity, which holds in trust for the nation and the world a collection of Slovenian art and antiques from ancient times to the present day. We believe that elderly volunteers could play a vital role in supporting the work of the Museum and in fulfilling the Museum's public mission.

A group of knowledgeable and formally high educated students of history, art history and anthropology at the Slovenian Third Age University was educated and trained to

work as voluntary assistant guides at the museum exhibition *Slovenian Language: Identity and Symbol – A Short History of Slovenians*. The historical exhibition traces the earliest use of the Slovenian language in public and explores the status and role of the Slovenian language from the 6th century to present times. Other possible areas of museum activities and tasks are since being identified in collaboration of The Slovenian Third Age University, the volunteers and The National Museum of Slovenia. In the future, their talks could cover many different aspects of the Museum, from the History and Identity of Slovenians to the processes of conservation and preservation of artefacts. Not only do cultural mediators involve with museum visitors, they also act as a kind of cultural ambassadors to the local community, their families, friends, and study groups at The Third Age University.

The aim of the project is manifold: (1) to enable the students gain knowledge and skills and to share it within their social networks and museum visitors; (2) to expose the students to transformative learning leading to their empowerment and social engagement; (3) to develop a new meaningful role that the elderly can play as volunteers and thus contribute to the society (we deliberately named this role »cultural mediator«); (4) to establish permanent conceptual links with selected partner organisations and to "educate" them for working with volunteers; (5) to exert an impact on public opinion concerning the contribution of the elderly to the economic and social development by means of wide public campaigning.

Since the project is of transformative nature we thought that the collaboration of all participants in all stages of the project and of the curriculum development has been crucial, although conceptually led by the project coordinator and the experts of The Slovenian Third Age University. The proposal of the contents and the aims of the programme was presented to the students-volunteers and the partner organisation. The concept was further upgraded and laid out in the form of written agreements between both institutions on one hand, and between the institutions and the volunteers on the other hand.

Training

The recruitment of potential volunteers was strategic. Volunteers were first recruited from the students of the Third Age University who have been attending study circles specialized in the field of art history, history, anthropology etc. The first introductory meeting between future volunteers and project coordinators was held at the Third Age University. This was followed by a special one-day training programme, which was set up jointly by the Slovenian Third Age University, the National Museum of

Slovenia and the Slovene Philanthropy. Since organized volunteering is not common in museums and galleries of Slovenia, the project coordinator decided to develop a holistic training programme which covers different aspects of volunteerism, particularly in the fields of culture and art. The training was therefore intended for both, the volunteers and the museum staff, and it covered the following topics: Social Mission of Volunteerism of the Elderly, Organized Voluntary Work and Ethics, Presentation of the National Museum of Slovenia in Theory and Practice: mission, exhibitions, departments, Guided tour of the exhibition *Slovenian Language: Identity and Symbol – a Short History of Slovenians*, Visit to Museum Departments (the Conservation Dep., the Library, the Museum Store). Each participant received the *Code of Ethics of Organized Volunteering*.

The one-day training was followed by educational sessions, mentored by a museum professional, the author of the exhibition, and co-mentored by the project coordinator, the representative of The Slovenian Third Age University. Different learning and teaching methods were applied when approaching volunteers: group sessions led by the mentor and project coordinator, group discussions, individual study of literature (volunteers had free access to the Museum Library), reciprocal learning (sharing knowledge and learning from each other), guided tours and lectures given by museum professionals, and simulation of voluntary work. Training, supervision and intervention on a regular basis enable continuous upgrade of volunteers' knowledge and skills. Empowerment sessions for volunteers and museum staff are an important part of their training. As volunteering clearly is one of the means by which people participate in non-formal and informal learning it needs to be considered in the framework of lifelong learning.

Research and Public Campaign

In order to raise public awareness about the benefits of voluntary work all voluntary activities carried out by the students of the Third Age University are put into public domain. Articles in national newspapers, national radio broadcasts, lectures and presentations, articles in professional and scientific magazines. Here you can see a photo of how we were making a TV show about voluntary activities that elderly students can take up.

Traditionally the programmes and the activities of the Third Age University have been followed by research works and so has been the programme *Cultural Mediating*.

On the basis of the induced practice of this project and some others a draft model for thematic education of the elderly and education of the elderly for volunteering, as well as education for public institutions for working with volunteers has been developed. We hope to transfer the model to other Third Age Universities and museums in Slovenia. The model comprises 9 crucial steps:

1. Approach the organisation that actively or potentially engages volunteers, and define the role of the voluntary work in the organisation's social mission. Needs analysis.
2. Both sides make a written agreement and a voluntary work policy.
3. Develop the educational programme and define its aims.
4. Represent the programme to students of the Third Age University – strategic promotion of the project and recruitment of volunteers.
5. Introductory meeting between the coordinators and potential volunteers – held at the Third Age University. Gathering students' motives for volunteering.
6. One-day training, organised in partnership and held at the organisation that accepts volunteers. (1) Presentation of the organisation; (2) Educational and social mission of volunteerism; (3) Voluntary work and ethics
7. Learning sessions, mentored by the mentor. Individual and group learning.
8. Simulation of voluntary work, e.g. guided tour at the exhibition.
9. VOLUNTARY WORK accompanied by continuous supervision and intervision.

Conclusion

To conclude with, I would like to point out what I think is the main reason for engaging elderly volunteers in cultural heritage and museums: it is community service and the need for inclusiveness. By including volunteers into museum activities museums contribute to culturally rich community, and make museum collections wider accessible on intellectual and social levels. Voluntary Cultural Mediators are able to learn about the history of Slovenes and, more importantly, share their knowledge with others, and thus transform from passive observers to active citizens. Voluntary cultural mediating is an element of both, the cultural democracy and the democratization of (high) culture. It promotes active citizenship, lifelong learning and social or, shall I say, cultural inclusion.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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