

# Handbook

## „Distance learning for adults in remote rural areas“

*Methods of involving older people  
from remote rural areas into information exchange and education*

*Project »Capacities over 50' as rural development tool«*



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## The Voice of Civil Society from Rural Areas

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**Key words:** civil society, participative democracy, rural areas, local development, wealth

Now more than ever, the perspectives of civil society in European rural development are dependent on the programmes of leading nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and the ability to implement them. The majority of NGOs have come to the conclusion that they have to act in alliance with similar organisations from other countries. Different international and transnational organisations are emerging as extensions of local, regional and national associations. The path toward a sustainable and integrated rural development is paved with a variety of bottom-up initiatives. These initiatives form an invisible network which grows stronger with each passing year. After decades of strengthening this unavoidable part of modern society, national states have acquired a potent social partner to consult with on the matter of strategic decisions concerning our common future. Since modern society faces an array of significant problems, nongovernmental networks are gaining ground in the political arena. The voice of civil society has become stronger.

The link between the urban and rural way of life changed dramatically. At the beginning of the modern era, the information society seemed like the urban privilege. Citizens of urban areas had access to information, to the satellite video signal and the internet, while people living in rural areas were denied most of those benefits of modern society. This gap between urban and rural areas is melting as the infrastructure intended to convey information progresses into rural areas. At the same time another gap between two poles of society is growing: the gap between the rich and the poor.

In nearly all countries, unemployment rates are growing, which pushes more and more people into the arms of poverty. Social margins are therefore crowded with people from all ages and professions, regardless of whether they live in big urban conglomerates, suburban areas or remote rural areas. The gap between the rich minority and the poor majority of the world grows wider every decade. The hidden cause for that change lies beyond eternal inter-national adversaries, beyond class struggle and beyond all traditional antagonism.

Modern science allows an accelerated exploitation of natural resources, regardless of the environmental damage. The exponential growth of new economic sectors, supported by science and the policies of most developed countries, influenced by multinational companies, has changed the image of the world radically. The development rate of urban areas exceeds the development rate of rural areas. Globalisation has fuelled the expansion of the rich minority, which possesses most of the wealth in the world. All streams leading toward a concentration of wealth have avoided rural areas from afar.

The unequal distribution of wealth has also added to the unequal distribution of risks. Both require social changes all over the world – in rich and in poor countries. Of course, situations in countries of

the developed world differ from those in the poor south, but globalisation is indubitably designing a new political map of the world. This map now also boasts the new dimension of time, not of great importance earlier. The inconsiderate exploitation of limited resources and stepping into the uncertain future taking permanent risk brought forth the issue of solidarity between generations. Relationship between generations became more important for political decisions than class struggle.

Civil society had to react to the abovementioned trends. One of the answers to growing inequality was to raise the voice through new social movements and networks. From the diverse initiatives, rural parliaments emerged as one of the options of political confrontation with said inequality.

At present, numerous social and economic problems persist, but only few can provoke civil society to step into civil disobedience. To ignore the political system or even destroy it is the last option civil society has at its disposal – it resorts to it only when all other methods to influence political decisions have failed. The tolerance of the civil society in the European Union is relatively high. However, the permanent growth of social and economic disparities, the economic decline of rural areas, the existential distress, the moral crisis and social injustice could provoke civil society to step over the limits of tolerance, conquer the streets and demand justice in a radical way. None of the European-wide networks active in the field of rural development have displayed tendencies towards civil disobedience until now, although most of them have the potential to encourage their members to articulate their interests in a more assertive manner. As long as the dialogue between social partners promises results, there is no need for civil disobedience.

There is no modern democracy without a strong civil society, organised and involved in the decision-making processes. The importance of civil society in the political structure of a modern state is increasing. As policy-making shifts from the national to the transnational floor, civil society is following and sometimes even leading, efficiently organised. Articulating the interests of groups on the margins of society has become one of the most urgent needs of an unbalanced society.

# The Importance of Being – Elder Adult and Part of Rural Networking

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## Key words:

population ageing, rural areas, rural network, geography of ageing, Slovenia.

## Introduction: Ageing Society in Slovenia

The future socioeconomic and spatial development of Slovenia will be shaped by the **intensive absolute and relative growth of older populations (aged 65+) and general population ageing**. Already in 2003, Slovenia encountered more elderly than young population. In 2010, there was 16,5% of population aged 65+, ranking Slovenia on the 20<sup>th</sup> place in the world. It is likely that the share of 65+ will increase to 20% in 2020, and reach 30% in 2050 (Slovenia will be ranked as the 9<sup>th</sup> oldest country of the world; Davies and James 2011).

The **extremely unfavourable age structure** is reflected in the two fundamental quantitative indicators.

- On the national level, the **ageing index** indicates disadvantageous ratio between the number of persons aged 65+ and number of persons younger than 15 years, reaching 117,6 in 2008. In 2050 the share of younger will be lower than 14 % (SORS 2011).
- The **old age dependency ratio** is defined as the ratio of the population aged 65+ to the »working age« population (those aged 15–64) and revealed 23,8 elderly population to 100 working age population; till 2050 the value of this ratio will double (SORS 2011).

In Slovenia, we can expect even more evident traits of old demographic regime in the future. Slovenia ranks among those European countries (such as Andorra, Spain, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Poland etc.; Davies and James 2011), which will have to confront with the 20 to 35 % of elderly people in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Van de Kaa (1987) modelled what he termed the **second demographic transition**: it is marked by continued rates of fertility at below replacement levels. This results in structural ageing of the population, with death rates higher than birth rates for an extended period.

The current **spatial distribution of older populations in Slovenia** is an outcome of social, economic and political factors that underpinned fertility, mortality and migration between 1910 and 1950. Numerous empirical surveys of **Slovenian rural areas** (Kovačič et al. 2000, Kladnik and Ravbar 2003, Klemenčič, Lampič, Potočnik Slavič 2008 etc.) frequently referred to population ageing as one of the major demographic problems of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Namely, extensive peripheral, border, hilly and mountainous, economically and infrastructure lagging behind and heavily accessible rural areas have been marked by the processes of deagrarianization, depopulation and modernization. On the other side, the research in **urban settlements** has pointed at strong fertility reduction as a consequence of suburbanization process. Out-migration towards suburban zones and easily accessible rural areas has lead to urban depopulation and accelerated urban population ageing.

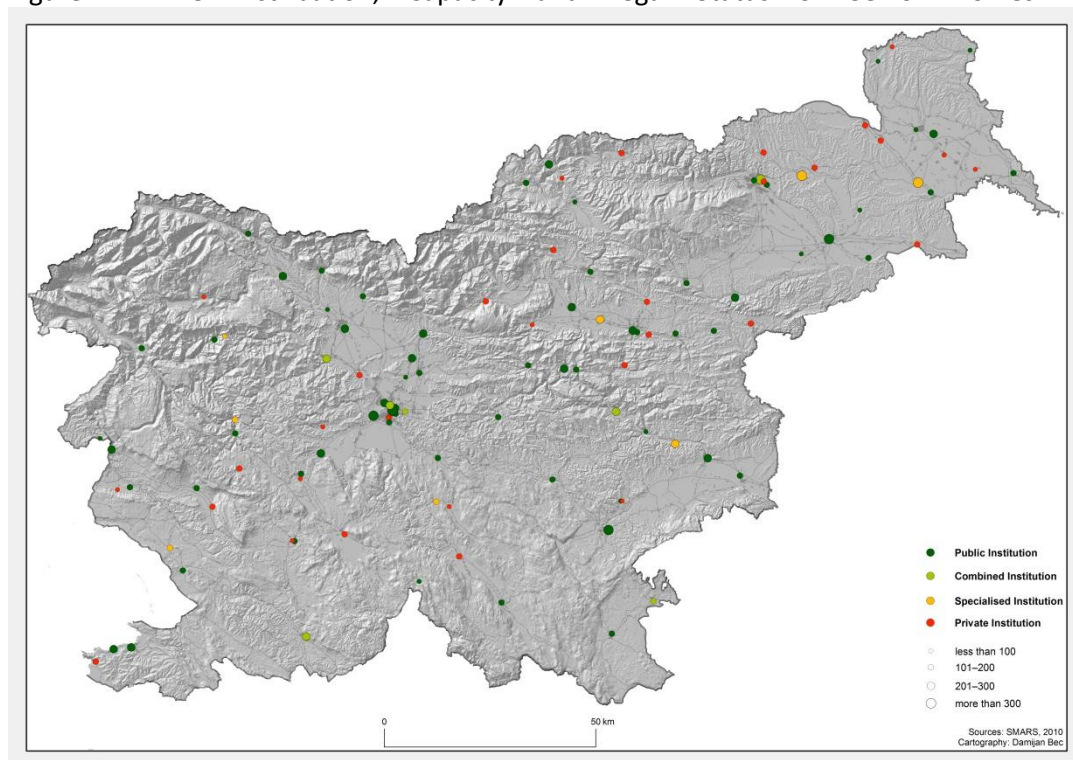
The present demographic dynamics in Slovenia indicates general demographic erosion: suburban zones are slightly more demographically vital in comparison to urban and rural areas. Since 2050, those who are currently aged between 25 and 60, or in other terms the majority of the current working age population, will be aged 65+. The fertility patterns of this population and their residential, employment, provision of services, education, cultural involvement and leisure time patterns will influence the formation of older populations' spatial structures. The term **spatial structures of older population** stands for spatial distributions of their residence, provision of services (health and social services, provision of material goods, leisure time activities, cultural manifestations), of institutionalised forms of care, spatial distribution of support services for elderly, spatial networking and accessibility to various services, forms of help and support for elderly.

It is the aim of this paper to highlight some elements of the above mentioned spatial structure and to emphasize the importance that elder adults have an opportunity to age in (rural) place which offers them proper provision of services and also a functioning rural network.

### The Issues of the Institutionalization and De-Institutionalization

The contemporary elderly people care system in mostly grounded on **institutionalization principles**. The very first senior homes in Slovenia were raised before the WW2; the majority of senior homes were grounded as public institutions in the second half on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The present distribution includes also the senior homes that were built after the year 2000, when the state introduced the system of concessions and consequently several institutions had been opened also in smaller rural municipalities, altogether offering capacities for approx. 19.000 persons (2011; Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Distribution, Capacity and Legal Status of Senior Homes in Slovenia.



Taking into the consideration predicted growth of older populations the preservation on mentioned principles would triple the existing demand on capacities for senior homes, demanding huge investment capital and also relevant long-term public financial means. According to Rudel (2007), the reorganization of public care for elderly on national as well as on the local level is expected, new forms of health and social services need to be developed aiming at more efficiency and financial sustainability. Special emphasis is to be put on ageing in place, where older people remain in their homes as they grow old, rather than move into institutional care (de-institutionalization), which is preferred strategy of many governments for socially, economically and physically supporting a healthy ageing population (James, 2009).

Rural areas in Slovenia (following various definitions they cover the majority of national territory – Kovačič et al. 2000; and nearly half of population lives in rural settlements – Ravbar and Kladnik 2003) are facing the fastest population ageing, and development of these areas, especially peripheral, is becoming essentially dependent on the contributions of elderly people. However, on the average, the provision of basic services in rural areas (comparing to urban settlements) is of much lower quantity and quality. Although the basic road infrastructure has been improved since the implementation of administrative reform (210 municipalities on local level), public transport has been evidently abandoned in the last years, as well as local shops and inns, and usually elderly rural inhabitants miss social contacts (Klemenčič et al. 2008).

Recently, there has been a shift in discourse about population ageing away from problematising ageing towards an interest in creating settings in which older adults can flourish (Woods 2005; Potočnik Slavič 2010a, Jerman 2011 etc.). WHO has therefore coined the term “age-friendly communities” as having policies, services and structures related to the natural, human-built and social environments that enable older people to “live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate fully in society”. The current research employs the “resources” (also amenities and capitals) approach towards understanding the set-up and functioning the age-friendly rural communities. The society has to realize that older people are invaluable source of life experience, knowledge, wisdom and social contacts. But they also need help from young people in overcoming the difficulties referring to physical, financial obstacles and loneliness.

### **Slovenian Rural Communities: A Suitable Place to Grow Old?**

The picture of static elderly rural population has to be upgraded with regionally specific processes and trends. Mostly Western European elderly citizens have intensively followed American model of Silver Dollar migration, i. e. temporary or permanent migration to warmer southern (sometimes also rural) areas with attractive landscapes since mid 1980s. Interesting is the Finnish attempt to attract senior returnees to rural areas, which has some common features with Central European transformation of secondary homes in rural environments into permanent residences for elderly citizens. We can always find some specialties in Mediterranean traditions on this topic, and also analyze profound transformation processes in rural areas of Eastern Europe, compare types of formal and informal care for elderly population in rural localities etc.

Although we are aware of the fact there is no one-size-fits-all solution, we would like to point out some basic elements of **»ideal model of age-friendly rural community«**. The later locality is usually perceived as nice, quiet, green, peaceful, properly accessible (also by public transport), with functioning social and medical infrastructure, adequate provision system, friendly and hospitable local population, where there is a low risk in purchasing real estate, and close to family and friends (Goltz and Born 2005). This model includes tangible and intangible (individual expectations, family ties etc.) elements of spatial structures.

Our research (undertaken in November 2011; Department of Geography, FF, UL 2011) was based on the findings of important body of literature on critical human ecology, (neo)endogenous development approach and rural web. We tried to involve the:

- institutionalized perspective: conducted were in-depth interviews with the managers or other crucial staff members of senior's institutions (54) and also in-depth interviews with responsible persons in the community (i. e. municipality; 35) level;
- de-institutionalised perspective: interviews were performed with firms and associations that are providing services (food and health, cleaning, shopping);
- individualised perspective: semi-structured interview on various locations in Slovenia included 154 elderly people.

It is important to stress that the great majority of senior homes are well embedded in the local environments and also actively integrated in the broader community. Co-operation between municipality and seniors institutions often included:

- **financial support** in several forms: subsidies for less well-off seniors, co-financing of several associations that are dealing with the issues of elderly (seniors associations, cultural and sports associations, intergenerational clubs - newly open »houses for cohesion«, university for the 3<sup>rd</sup> period of life, clubs for invalids, interdisciplinary coordination for the needs of elderly), various programmes for elderly (in the field of health, education, sport, humanitarian activities); home assistance (i. e. family assistant), daily food delivery, self-help programme, special attention to the ones in their 80s and 90s, etc.;
- **institutional and organizatorial support for the networking with the local community:** supporting co-operation between the kindergartens, public schools, volunteers and other public services, organizing meetings for seniors, etc.;
- **organization and financial support** of day-care centres, supporting music, cultural and other socializing events for elderly, building the new senior homes, the newly organized projects (Elderly for Elderly), respecting the expectations of elderly in institution (arranging the chapel), building an out-door fitness for elderly, etc.

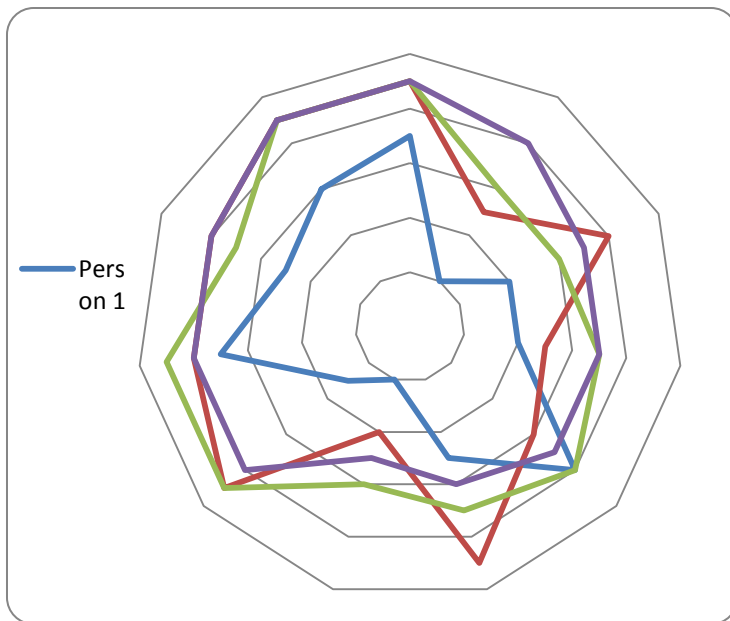
### **The Gap Between the Representations of Oldness and Rural Settings**

For understanding elderly and their wish to grow old in the locality they are familiar with it is very important to get some useful data as usually national and regional statistics fail. Therefore, conducted 154 semi-structured interviews indicated that several elements from the above ideal model of age-friendly rural community are extremely relevant to the elderly (close to family and friends, home and home town were evaluated on the scale from 0 to 9 as 8,21 and 8,13 respectively). Still important (grade around 7,5) were attractive landscape, traffic accessibility, inter-generational cohesion and acceptable costs of living. At least important were stable real-estate price (4,85) and senior homes (3,76). Several important elements of spatial structures for rural planners (activities for elderly, mobile services, functioning network of supply centres) was evaluated at approx. 5,8.

Another important fact is that elderly represent extremely heterogeneous group of population, which is mirrored in the Figure 2. Individual persons from the very same village were asked to evaluate the above mentioned elements: significant differences occurred.

Figure 2: Individual Evaluations of Selected Elements of Age Friendly Rural Community by 65+ in the Same Village.





Source: Survey, Dept. of Geography, FF, UL, 2011.

Note: 1 (attractive landscape), 2 (acceptable costs of living), 3 (network of supply centres), 4 (mobile services), 5 (traffic accessibility), 6 (inter-generational cohesion), 7 (stable real-estate market), 8 (close to relatives, friends), 9 (home, home town), 10 (institutions for seniors), 11 (activities for elderly).

These values could be further on elaborated with some personal narratives (Person 1 and Person 2 from the Figure 2) on how elderly people organize their everyday life.

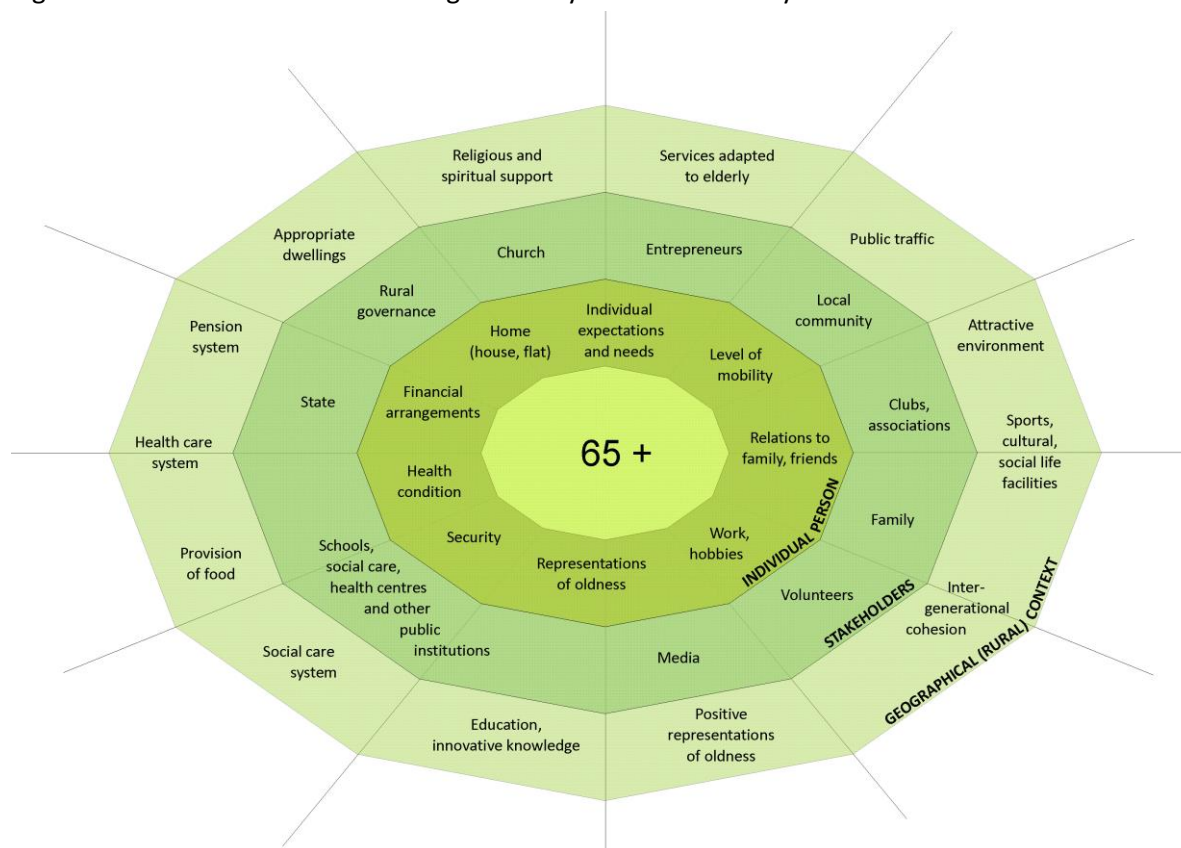
"Firstly, personal hygiene. Then I go and buy a newspaper and listen to daily news. Then I need to prepare some food, if the weather is fine I am occupied with gardening. In the afternoon I am visiting the club and taking care of club's administrative issues. When I am asked (quite often) I am looking after a grandchild, or I am occasionally visiting relatives and attending English course. There is a wish to develop my computer skills. At week-ends: I enjoy in mountaineering, I attend Sunday mass and still participating in fire brigade – mostly in organizational issues." *(Person 1: Male, married, previously employed in public institution, since the birth living in the locality, very pleased with the life in the village, not thinking to move, but if – senior home in rural area)*

"In the morning I prepare coffee and read the newspaper. Afterwards I do the house works, check the computer, do some shopping in the local store, and prepare lunch. In the early afternoon I go to kindergarten to pick-up my grandchild and I look after him for several hours. In between I practice gardening, take care of flowers, trees, attend our choir and do the sports once a week. I listen to the news and TV programme in the evenings. Still I practice hiking during week-ends, Sunday mass, other obligations with choir, visit relatives and help my brother on the farm." *(Person 2: Female, married, previously employed in public institution, since the birth living in the locality, very pleased with the life in the village, not thinking to move, but if – secured dwelling)*

Very important suggestive information that was provided by the elderly is the kind of help they would need (and afford?) and how often. Since they would need more help with shopping, gardening, health care, food supply, cleaning and hygiene, also voluntary services or entrepreneurs who provide this type of services in the rural community could be organized on the basis of these results.

The above quotations and further analysis of our field analysis also point out that the representations on how individual person would like to live the third period of life could be quite different. Hence, there are several factors (on the individual level, secondly associated with the stakeholders in the municipality, and also in the broader geographical context) that shape these representations. Actually, we could employ the idea of rural web (van der Ploeg et al. 2008). This is a complex set of internally and externally generated interrelationships that shape the relative attractiveness of rural regions, economically, socially, culturally and environmentally. Rural webs are multidimensional, consisting of some key conceptual building blocks: of which endogeneity, novelty production, sustainability, social capital, institutional arrangements and the governance of markets are the key dimensions. Rural web is an analytical tool towards understanding (conceptually and empirically) of contemporary contested, complex, globalized, hybrid and fluid rural areas (Woods 2007, Klemenčič 2006, van der Ploeg et al. 2008, Potočnik Slavič 2010b). Various authors (van der Ploeg et al. 2008) argue that rural development processes occur as a continuous unfolding of rural webs in and throughout different rural regions. Consequently, a theoretical model of age-friendly rural community based on the idea of rural web is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Theoretical Model of Age-Friendly Rural Community.



### Distance Learning and 65+

Based on our research we found out that the contemporary generation of 65+ has quite modest needs for ICT and distance learning. Their computer literacy is limited usually to (ir)regular e-mail check, some internet browsing and using the Skype tools to communicate with the long-distance relatives. If their computer skills would have been better perhaps the fields indicated above (gardening, health issues etc.) would be of their interest. Since our research included mostly mobile elderly who do not have time, knowledge and need for virtual contacts, the face-to-face contact still

dominates their societal communication. They have worked hard all their lives to make a certain kind of individual impact in the community; they rely on this credibility which would be used in their later life (bonding social capital).

Completely different picture could be forecasted for the generation born after 1960 which has different attitudes towards ICT, computer skills, means of communication, also their representations of oldness is supposed to be shaped differently. Different settings of rural elderly create a fruitful milieu for accurate research on these issues.

## Conclusions

In the last decades, the **rural population in economically developed countries** has been characterized by reduction in number, re-distribution and irregularities in spatial structures. Observing contemporary world's urban population growth one can consider **rural population as endangered** although there are more than 3 billion rural inhabitants around the world. Rural areas cover approx. 92 % of EU territory (according to the OECD's definition of rural areas) with nearly 200 million of rural inhabitants (World Urbanization Prospects 2004, Eurostat 2011). During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century so called **»problem of young people out-migration, leaving behind mostly elderly in rural areas«** has employed scholars of the highly diversified rural areas in Europe.

**From problem to potential.** Although there is quite rich body of literature on this topic, the results are often based on small scale research. There are some *ad hoc* statements and stereotypes on characteristics and spatial structures of elderly rural population in Europe. Evident is the lack of the awareness of **huge heterogeneity of the age group 65+** living in rural areas (regarding their mobility, level of self-dependence, level of income, provenience, social representation of rural and identity). There are (a) elderly rural population living in the rural localities since their birth, (b) returning migrants aged 65+ with rural origins, (c) urban population aged 65+ without rural experience willing to live in rural areas, (d) international migrants to rural areas aged 65+. More emphasis should be given to modern mobility, present is absence of international comparisons on spatial structures of elderly population in rural areas. A few spatial concentrations of rural elderly population indicate elements of social exclusion and gentrification rather than integration with other social groups in rural localities. Due to positive impacts (local economy, transfer of knowledge and experiences, preserving local identity etc.) **enormous potential of this age group** should be addressed.

It is possible to by-pass the constant deprived character of rural ageing with prudent long-term development of locally/regionally systematic and individually based practices which could be addressed as a **functioning rural web**.

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# Older People's (Distance) Education And Their Participation In Community Matters

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## Introduction

In most western European countries old age posed itself as a political and social issue only after the 50' of the last century. Namely, after the second World War Europe was mostly interested in repairing damages and in the future of younger generations, thus forgetting about older people.

We are looking today at how education/learning, not necessarily distance learning, can stimulate and enable older people to participate in community matters. Now, many could view education and participation of (older) people in community matters as a pleonasm. And one is right in saying so. Whoever participates in community matters has to be offered education to that end. If one wants to take part in decision making processes pertaining to community matters, one unavoidably has to enrich one's frame of reference, preferably by education or training by different types of learning. One has to have a wider frame of reference than those whom one represents. This can be achieved through education /training and different types of learning ( distance learning, learning by doing, co-operative learning, reciprocal learning, etc.) Particularly appropriate here seem to be reciprocal and mutual learning which are best achieved in face- to- face educational formats and events.

### **What older people's representatives need to know about older people's issues**

What seems a question here, that definitely requires an answer, is what an older representative of his or her peers in decision taking processes on community matters should be familiar with. There are at least two areas he or she should be knowledgeable about:

#### **(1) Community matters and policies**

Community matters like employment, education, culture, health, housing, sports, tourism, transport, access to new technologies, local development, active ageing, participation of older people in the community, equal rights and opportunities etc. can not be discussed in isolation, without attempting to understand the changing position of all generations in our changing societies. Seeking solutions within community and for community should by all means involve a perspective involving all generations and their issues.

Comparing the community policies to other policies, it can be said that these policies are much closer to reality, far from all sorts of ideologies, set ideas, national programmes. They are and have to be close to every day life, its joy, sorrow despair or anger. Municipal policies address everybody in the community; different generations, different nationalities, different generational cultures, etc.

*Municipality policy on old age and ageing* currently developps mostly in three directions.

(1) A permanent dialogue with those who have just retired and are aware of their own old age to come and old age as it is today for those who have been retired for some time.

(2) Development of services in close collaboration with families and their neighbourhood. (3) Creation of opportunities for older people to be, on equal basis, a part of the community. Most problems arise within this last field. Why? Because *older people are being approached as dependent and in need of help*. Yes, some are dependent and in need of help! But what about the others?

Older people's represenatives should look at *communities* and should be primarily interested in *healthy communities*, those who are aware that rapid social changes have produced all sorts of inequalities (age, gender, urban, employment etc) and therefore new forms of solidarity are to be invented; communities wanting to be integrative for all social groups and individuals. For that reason it is only natural that different social groups are represented in decision taking processes about community matters. *Senior citizens represent in most cases the largest social group within a community and at the same time all others and all other generations and their views on common community issues*. Beleive me, this is not always easy. Why not? *The cultural model of the organisation of ages* has been changing and this fact seems to be at the origin of »the crisis« called *ageing society* and not fragile public finances as we have been told. The model is being changed and relationships among generations are slowly changing along. Not easily, of course, not without frictions. For the active generations in the middle it is far from being easy to accept that in our changing society younger generations are ready to fully participate in the society at a younger age, and that older generations are also willing and ready to take on their part of responsibility for our living in common. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Europe educational programmes and project ( AESAEC, etc.) have been shaped to educate older people for their participating in community matters.<sup>1</sup>

## **(2) Older people and *their* issues**

In my view, and this seems to be basic, he or she should be above all familiar with *values and concepts* concerning older people, old age, the style of life of older people, pension schemes, active ageing policy, flex security, older people's active citizenship, etc.

To begin with, he or she should know that older people are not all the same, actually they are all different, much more different than members of younger generations and cohorts are. Therefore, older people's representatives should stand for the older people's right to be different: not all older people are patiens , not all older people are poor, not all older people are helpless or functionally illiterate, not all of them are grand mothers and fathers. There are so many stereotypes about older people, about their characteristics and possible social roles. Moreover, municipality policies concerning community matters and older people is often underpinned by them and older people's representatives should take care as not to give in. Education of older people and their representatives is supposed to contribute towards changing these clichés. This is not easy, believe me, since stereotypes about old age are often consolidated by older people themselves. Being knowledgeable about *the position and needs of older people* in the past and in the present and possibly in the future is essential. Above all it is important to understand the role of older people in our changing society as well as the nature of this society.

### **The changing society/ community: major social changes and what they mean for different generations**

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<sup>1</sup> AESAEC: *We all are Europe*, Auxilium Graz 2010

Now, what are the major social changes affecting all generations and changing their position as well as their will and need to participate in shaping public and community matters? Over the last decades our societies have been undergoing many social changes partly brought about by the change in the way of producing (from machines to computers and modern technology). As a result of that, power and wealth have been redistributed. New social groups have got hold of power and wealth bringing with them *their* values and priorities, *their* ways of behaving. As a result of it, changes occur affecting living in community and society. Some of the major changes older representatives of their peers should have in mind, being:

a/ **Paid work.** Unbalanced public finances reflect the disappearance of the society of »paid work and regular monthly income« Today's forms of work, performed by the current middle generations, differ from the Keynesian times of permanent full-time employment; predominant today are fixed-term job, part-time jobs, home-working, teleworking, grey market economy, alternating periods of employment, education and training (flex security). We are facing a transition from »a civilisation of work and stability « to a period of instability, temporariness and, for many, also diminished prosperity and precarity. The new types of employment tend to affect life and work of older people and their participation in the community matters. Younger people and older people are today much more concerned with what is going on in the community since they are much more affected by the changes within it.

*Occasional paid or voluntary work of older people can end up in new jobs for younger people.* Not every work can turn into a full time job. At the beginning an activity is developed step by step. Work can be then performed in the form of occasional activities, occasional paid work. Such work is more easily taken on by older people, since they already have some regular income. On the contrary, for younger people such type of activity would be too risky. Younger people need to have a relatively stable full time job. But initially occasional activities can later be full time jobs for younger people. Older people do not “steal” jobs from younger people, since they take on different types of activities as compared to younger people. *Having a permanent job is hardly a good solution for older people and what is more, they do not want to be fully employed.* The third age has other characteristics than the second age.

The social position of several groups composed of members of younger generations is becoming similar to that of older people. These groups comprise young first-job seekers, unemployed middle-aged persons, the permanently unemployed older workers, people during the interval between one and other fixed-term contract, as well as persons who are unemployable due to their own qualification attainment and skills and pushed to the edge of *society*. *In today's societies, looking for solutions for older people, therefore, means also finding solutions for the above-mentioned groups constituting communities..*

b/ **New technologies** are hardly accessible to all older people; if any members of the community are denied access to modern technology, all generations and the whole community are affected. If they are without access to information they cannot integrate in the community, they cannot keep pace with progress, they can not enter e-economy, e-government, e-education, e-communication, etc. and, *thus, they are more and more dependent on the active working population. Without older people's access to technology communities are less integrative for them.* We wonder whether in our society dependence on employment can be reduced and on a different basis, more in tune with the actual social developments, can be found.

c/ **The urgent need to preserve human and social capital that is being neglected.** Older people are possessors of non tangible, invisible cultural heritage (experiential knowledge, skills, beliefs, customs, etc) that has to be preserved, maintained and passed onto younger generations if the continuity is to be ensured. The overlooked abilities and knowledge of older people form an

important part of the human and social capital. Their activation and employment could improve social position of older people, and, in addition, lessen the burden of younger generations. Presently the society is wasting a considerable part of the human capital it used to possess and foster, which is a disaster for the information society, based on knowledge. *Modern states modern communities can preserve and strengthen their vitality mostly through the available human and social capital. Moreover the ageing society is being looked upon as a threat, a failure but it can be looked upon as a success. A success of our civilisation, which it is.* Namely a fair number of older people with readily available and experientially validated knowledge are now available for the benefit of the community. Moreover, we should not be so much concerned about the decreasing birth rate. On the contrary what we should be concerned about is the »quality« of our children or grandchildren; about how to develop their sensibility, tolerance, resistance to stress, ability to relate and respect the others, their ability to build a community. We should be concerned about their values, knowledge, culture, to sum up about their qualities! Quality seem here to be overriding quantity. We may say so. The quality of our children will help communities survive as well as the quality of older people!

### **Quality of older people's life – how to maintain and increase human and social capital in today's knowledge based society**

*From what I have said so far, can be deduced that an integrative community should take care and advantage of the knowledge and abilities of its members, notwithstanding their age. The lack of infrastructural networks enabling older people to get reintegrated into society, leads to their social exclusion and isolation.* Lack of educational opportunities and structures for them as well. Where can older people create and maintain their social networks? Where can they get support: material, emotional, support, information, knowledge? Where can they start dealing with community matters and where from can they participate in the society? What networks of public institutions and organized structures are available to the elderly in today's Europe? Are there real opportunities for them to socialize, opportunities for goal oriented, engaging free-time activities that bring about real individual and social changes, opportunities for learning and for education, are there specialized job centres for older citizens, specialized medical services, geriatric hospital wards, organizations providing voluntary work and training for older people, cultural organizations for older people? How can older people re-enter society, or rather, how can we prevent older people from being excluded? How can they secure for themselves an equal position with that of other generations in the society to be able to live full lives in their later years (a period of 20-30, and more, years? There are many institutions, you will say, addressing and helping different generations and you are right in saying so. But for socially marginalised groups it is- at the start, necessary to have their own institutions. It is not admissible that in many European countries older people's homes are the only institution for older people and the only one they can identify with- and this one represents them in the society. And it clearly embodies helplessness and dependence not the active ageing. Policy makers are mostly concerned with two issues; older people working longer, not leaving the labour market or getting back there and social and health protection of older people. Policies meeting other older people's psycho-social needs and their need to fully participate in the society are less numerous and elaborated.

We expect older people to participate in community matters. To that purpose we have to think about psycho-social needs of older people about how they can be met; their need for security, belonging, emotions and values, their need to explore and discover new things, their need for beauty and self-fulfillment.? These and other needs have to be recognized not only by their partners, family and friends, but also by the local community, municipality and the state. If at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries medical care, nutrition, hygiene and a pension sufficed for social security, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century this is no longer the case. *The quality of life of each generation, not only the old, depends on the extent to which people's higher psycho-social needs are met.* And participating in the



community, being a part of it, having access to it is a need, is a psycho-social need neglected in the policies and hardly understood.

## Active Old Age – New Ways for Social Integration

*Older people, like anybody else, can become reintegrated in the local community only by being active.* Experience of many retired people has shown, that they may be more successful when joining new social groups, by getting involved in new activities. It is impossible to list all the activities senior citizens can take on together with other people. Given a bit of support and advice and adequate training/education, every individual can find something he or she would enjoy doing, discover what other people need and what they are willing to accept, identify the things that may become a new challenge for him or her. *The choices and attractions of this period are always very personal.* The time has finally come when one is allowed and able to do what one is fond of and interested in. As an illustration, let us just mention a few possibilities: one can learn how to play a musical instrument, take up performing, painting, exhibiting, researching, translating, one can co-operate with museums, work as an assistant custodian or tourist guide, do voluntary work within an organisation, set up a club or society, take up calligraphy, design websites, write for and read stories to nursery school children, co-operate in the design of the curriculum of local community schools, take care of one's garden or perform gardening services for others, give advice, provide learning and psychological help, instruct younger people and people of his own age, make plans, design, get involved in politics, do voluntary work within an organisation, work with public media, establish a company, write and publish books, or participate in community matters representing their peers and all other generations. *All activities should, however, have a clearly defined objective and operative plan. For older people to have their position changed within communities and society it is necessary however, to undertake such activities that are goal oriented and can bring about changes.*

With no encouragement from the social environment, with little policy support, no model they could look up to, however, older people tend to sink into a passive way of life, and end up vegetating on the fringe of the society, to which they wish to attract other old people. In some European countries it is culturally inadmissible that older people work and older people that are perfectly able and want to go on working adapt and leave their work. They get more and more absorbed in themselves, in their own feelings and well-being, and thus they are less and less interesting to other people. Since many human psycho-social needs cannot be met outside relationships based on the give and receive principle, they are bound to become socially excluded and increasingly dissatisfied. Withdrawn from public life, they spend their days watching TV and reading newspapers, meeting with peers in coffee shops, nourishing the illusion that they are part of the society, or they become tourists, travelling around as nicely wrapped-up packages, passing time aimlessly in an unstructured way. They do nothing for the benefit of the community in which they live and become less and less noticeable to other people.

*So, where can older people learn how to plan and structure their lives, to fill them with content meaningful to them and the community? How can they set for themselves new goals and find a new sense of life? How can they learn about representing their peers and different generations in the field of community matters? These questions could be addressed by community policies and educational programmes.*

## Older People and New Technologies

We are all afraid of the unknown, perceiving it as a threat. Because of the rapid technological changes, the amount of the unknown is increasing daily for everyone, but this process is taking place even faster after retirement. Where can older people gain knowledge about new technologies and for what purposes can they use them? How will new technologies become part of their lives? Only if

given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with them, will they be able to outgrow their rejection of technical innovations. As things are, many of them feel ill at ease when hearing people mention the portal, forum, chat-box, e-mail, website, SMS, the intelligent house, or perhaps doing telebanking or public administration services via internet.

Where and how? Are cyber-café's the only solutions? Maybe some other facilities should be made available for older people? Have any programmes been developed for mentors in this field? Can older people create new technologies by the »snowball effect« or »each one teach one« methods, or in some other ways?

New communication technologies and technological literacy are most closely connected with socially organised work. Retirement brings an end to the access to new technologies through one's job. *Participating of older people in community matters should be based on using purposefully new technologies*

Is new technology financially accessible to the older generation, if not, what can be done about it? The costs of a computer, internet fees, digital camera are just some of the expenses connected with modern technology. Can we think of solutions, suitable for older people? What benefits would it bring to the society if all older people could use new technologies? Or shall they simply be denied access to it? Is life without modern technology possible in a society based on it? Is such a situation not potentially dangerous for other generations as well?

Older people should be reasonably well off as to participate in community matters

Older people can not be expected to participate in community matters regarding the whole community if they are not treated equally if they are not encouraged or even allowed to work or stimulated to take up the function of a representative. *Financial stability of a State is safeguarded if individual social groups are made independent to the maximum possible extent and financed at the minimum possible extent. Older people's work benefits local community, be it urban or rural, and society, since, it also contributes to preservation and growth of the badly needed human capital.*

Older people in the world of knowledge, culture and art

Carl Gustav Jung said that older people act as interpreters of culture, making it possible for a culture to survive.<sup>2</sup> What does participation of older people in education, culture, science and art mean for the society as a whole and for older persons in particular? How does it contribute to the quality of older persons' lives and those of other generations?

Research indicates that people's interests begin to change in the early fifties, shifting from the material to the more spiritual domains. In the course of their lives these people have managed to acquire the basic material goods, they have built their homes and brought their children to the point of financial independence. Now they are becoming increasingly interested in knowledge leading to personal growth and social integration. They wish to explore, reset and write, they begin to study and educate themselves, they visit libraries, go to concerts more often than they used to, take up a musical instrument they used to play and join a band. They get organized, search for their roots, explore the history of the locality in which they live. After retirement they finally allow themselves to satisfy the secret ambitions they have been nurturing for a long time.

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<sup>2</sup> Jung, C.G. ; O smislu i besmislu, Zagreb, 1984.

Older people are keen to get to understand interpersonal relations, communication, literature, history of art and local history, all types of artistic expression.

They enjoy the challenge of proving themselves in a new field, leading to self-fulfilment. Fulfilled people, people whose higher needs, including their cognitive needs, are satisfied, tend to open up, surpassing the preoccupation with themselves and their own well-being, establishing connections with other people and passing knowledge on to them. The knowledge accumulated by the older people does not end with them, but flows down to all other generations. Furthermore, by acquiring new knowledge – often widely different from that of their own profession – old people keep up their self-respect and respect for others.

Older people are eager investigators of local environment, which often results in co-operation with museums or establishment of their own research groups. Research projects in scientific institutions employing young researchers tend to be directed internationally, whereas local environments often remain neglected. A great many people, however, are eager to learn about their immediate surroundings. Studies conducted by older people are - once published - usually well received and taken up with enthusiasm by general public. Ordinary people tend to prefer this type of studies to those dealing with the more remote phenomena, since they are easier to understand; as such, they are a useful means in the fight against functional illiteracy, which tends to be rather high among older persons. Local surveys and studies are also a significant means of promotion of cultural tourism and economy, of local educational and cultural institutions.

Theatrical activities tend to spread to rural areas mostly through older people. Animating the spirits and rejoicing the hearts in the monotonous residential settlements, they offer local people the opportunity to meet and get to know each other. One marvels at the scripts and acting skills, knowing that writing and performing never entered the minds of these performers in the course of their working lives.

### **Community versus individualism**

Discussing participation of older people in community matters unavoidably means also discussing the *idea of community, civic engagement and solidarity* among members of the community as opposing individualism.

The idea of community is related to the search of belonging in the insecure conditions of modernity. The revived popularity of community today has been seen as a response to the crisis of solidarity that has been exacerbated and at the same time induced by globalisation and new concepts of working. Communities have been based on ethnicity, religion, class, or politics, territory, cultural heritage, interests, etc. *Communities have been based on what people have in common and not on what their differences are.* Communities may be large or small they may be bound with thick or thin attachments. They may be locally based and globally organised: they can be affirmative or subversive of the established order; they may be traditional, modern or even post modern, reactionary or progressive. The nature of community is a creation of its members. It can not be imposed. Cohen(1985) argues that community is to be understood more as a symbolic structure than a social practice. It has shifted attention from traditional community as form of social interaction based on a locality to a concern with meaning and identity. .

Moreover, local community has its actors; the vision of local development is to be agreed upon and promoted with their help. These are individuals, especially the most active and visible ones, local groups, societies and other non-governmental organisations, public institutions, companies, municipality.etc. What do they have in common? Community matters, which by definition are public matters of general interest. As they concern everybody in the community, access to them should be

made possible. Community matters require civic engagement and democratic citizenship that is understanding and respecting the interdependence of what is going on in a community and consequent acting. Civic engagement could be defined as a way of relating to others.

Throughout history relating to others, belonging to a community has been a way to protect ourselves against hardships and the way to have met our need for recognition, the need to shape our identity, to build ourselves into human beings. But, the greater our autonomy and freedom, the less we feel indebted to anterior generations and the less we are sensible to the fate of future generations, the less we are ready to redistribute what we have to the deprived. Consequently, solidarity and cooperation among generations in different sectors within a community, as a social contract are to be re-evaluated within our modern society: society that has been facing a fair number of interruptions and inequalities and that requires our active civic engagement.

Aristotel in Hannah Arendt's work *The Human Condition*(1989) argues that there are *three ways of living that could be freely chosen from*. The fourth way of living is not really living, it is more surviving. The fourth way of living is/was the one which was not chosen freely, the one typical of slaves who had to work and also the one of traders and craftsmen. But the three freely chosen ways of living were related to beautiful and not really useful things; but they were also consecrated to public matters of the polis. This way of living required qualities of the citizens of the polis and this way of living was called "vita activa". It can be deduced that active citizenship in a community should be related to beauty, to higher psycho-social needs and should be related to public and community matters.

### **Education in later life for voluntary participation in community matters**

*Education for voluntary participation in community matters starts with education for democratic citizenship. This can be carried out through enlightenment or through engagement, or both.*

Education for senior citizens representing their peers (civic engagement, active citizenship, democratic citizenship) can start by enlightenment but it can also start by doing and experience of civic engagement in different fields and by acquiring basic concepts. Thus senior citizens should acquire philosophy of old age. sound theoretical basis for understanding the needs and issues of older people in Europe.

In order to understand community and community matters older students could start by studying theory about local space and its relationship with people, community of people living in it. etc. This could help them taking more sound decisions later on.

Sustainable development means that what already exists is preserved and that simultaneously from it stems what is new. Space in which a human community lives is a whole. Senior citizens representing their peers on community matters should therefore learn not only about institutions and their functions within their community, but also acquire knowledge about the space and theoretical understanding of the space. Branislav Krstić (1982, str.14) argues the space encompasses:

- Natural environment as a source and as a condition for living creatures to survive,
- Natural environment as a source and place for man's dwelling and for his activities.
- Cultural environment as a frame and expression of man's material and intangible culture, of his past, present and future,

- Political and administrative environment as a form of political and territorial social organisation (town, municipality, region, State)
- Legal aspects of the relationships within space (the right to enjoy the space and to use it ,as well as local living conditions).

The way interventions are made in space should take into account the fact that space is unique and specific as well as a whole. The space is managed by the community and its representatives who are guided by the values of the community.

Senior citizens are to be, or can be educated for democratic citizenship having the following objectives: (1) enabling everybody, from school children, young adults, to adults and older adults to personally experience democratic functioning (2) moral education of the citizens, since democracy is a set of values (3) transmitting knowledge and skills and constructing competencies for active participation (4) integrating socially excluded groups in the society and achieving an integrative society (5) engaging citizens in local development and building local capacity (6) empowering citizens (7) building up the local/national community and its identity (8) struggling against low functional literacy (9) supporting lifelong and life wide learning and education.

Democratic competencies can be best acquired through non-formal education ie. forums of citizens, discussion groups in neighbourhoods, public round tables, lectures, seminars, workshops carried out within non-governmental organisations, local communities, third age universities, folk universities and generally in all interested organisations where civic education is experienced as a joint way of learning, doing and living.

Moreover, democracy is a value and it requires skills knowing that knowledge alone could not lead to action. Therefore the value of democracy can be developed owing to the didactics of values based on argumentation, rigorous thinking, dialogue and discussion. Further, democratic competencies can be developed within communities: family, school, church, associations, local communities, through media, through working in political parties, etc.

Active citizens can be formed by means of *civic instruction* offering description and presentation of the city and its institutions, *education of citizens* about democratic values, and *political education* which is about underlying the importance of choice and preparing the citizens to taking decisions. Active citizens should be educated stimulating their readiness to act and developing the values they will need to undertake actions. The general aim is to make citizens aware of their interdependency, and of the interdependency of their issues. For that reason cooperation among generations is needed.

## Conclusion

Cooperation of generations and solidarity among generations is possible only when senior citizens can age actively. Active ageing can be best and in the fastest way introduced through education and learning and voluntary work of older people. This can contribute to the quality of life of all generations and to the development of the civil society. In our complex and changing society older people need knowledge in order to meet professional criteria in voluntary work and enlightened community policies providing for structures and opportunities for older people to learn and be actively involved in a community. Distance learning is one of possible types of learning best suited to large communities. Otherwise more appropriate seem to be cooperative, reciprocal and mutual learning combined with distance or autonomous learning. Namely older people's learning is supposed to meet their psycho-social needs and they seem to be best met in face-to-face contacts and acting.

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## »Each One Teach One« - Older Students Mentoring Their Peers

### *An Example Of The 'Eoto' Movement At Slovenian Third Age University In The Field Computer Mentoring*

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#### **ABOUT THE DISTANCE EDUCATION AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

Distance education or distance learning is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching. It is usually based on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational classroom. It has been described as "a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both." (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_learning))

E-learning includes all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching. The information and communication systems serve as specific media to implement the learning process. The term is still most likely be used to reference out-of-classroom and in-classroom educational experiences via technology, even as advances continue in regard to devices and curriculum. E-learning is the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. E-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital cooperation. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, CD-ROM and other sources. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation, streaming video and audio. Developments in Internet and multimedia technologies are the basic enabler of e-learning, with consulting, content, technologies, services and support being identified as the five key sectors of the e-learning industry. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-learning>)

#### **THE HISTORY BEHIND THE 'EOTO' CONCEPT**

'Each One Teach One' is an African-American Proverb. The phrase originates in the United States during the time of slavery, when Africans and African Americans were denied education, including learning to read. Most slaves were kept in a state of ignorance about anything; everything was under control of owners, the law makers and the authorities. When a slave learned or was taught to read, it became his or her duty to teach someone else to read, hence the phrase "Each one teach one". In the first half of the 20th century, the phrase was applied to the work of a Dr. Laubach, who used the concept to help address poverty and illiteracy in the Philippines. Many sources cite Dr. Laubach as the creator of the saying, but many others believe that he simply used it in order to move forward the ending of illiteracy in the world. In India, this is how several millions of people became literate. (Definition is taken from Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Each\\_One\\_Teach\\_One](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Each_One_Teach_One))

## **WHO, WHY AND HOW in Slovenia**

Slovenian Third Age University<sup>3</sup> was founded in 1984, based on voluntary transfer of knowledge and culture. It continues this tradition ever since, in the recent years also with the EACH ONE TEACH ONE movement in the computer field. As we say it: give someone else as much as you know.

Why do we need the computer skills? And why do we need internet skills? The frequent users will say: FOR EVERYTHING! For everyday life, to nurture contacts with friends and family, to access more knowledge, up-to-date information, to fulfil our cravings for knowledge, to solve our questions from the comfort of our home, to pay our bills, to buy train and plane tickets, to order documents, to send pictures and greetings, etc.

Today's society's needs for knowledge are so immense; there are not enough formal schools and teachers to meet the increasing needs for all kinds of knowledge and skills. That is why we need to decrease the 'Digital divide'. We need to empower the all generations, especially older and all those left behind. We need to acquaint them with the knowledge of all the benefits of the information society; we need to give everyone the chance to be a part of the modern society. That is the only way a society can move on and evolve and not get stuck with constantly helping those who were left behind. This is the main reason why we have started the 'Each one teach one' movement on the Slovenian Third Age University.

We consider ourselves as the third 'excluded' partner in the EOTO movement. We are 'the institution behind' - those who support the individual pairs of mentors and mentees. We have created a database of 'providers' and 'seekers' for the computer-based skills. We actively animate people to join this movement as much as we can: with our individual counselling, with posters, flyers, e-newsletters, events, conferences and learning seminars for mentors. Last year, within the project funded by the Ministry of Public administration and European Social Fund called 'Empowering the network of NGOs educating the Older', we came in contact with the international IT company who loved the idea of our movement so much, they have implemented it their business strategy. Together we have designed a poster to invite more people to join the movement, the company has donated 10 computers to our third age university network to stimulate the voluntary teaching and learning of computer skills and they also organized several seminars for the mentors in the movement, so they can fulfil their knowledge and be more self-confident about giving it to someone else. In the spirit of the EOTO movement, the company's mentors were teaching our movement's mentors on a voluntary basis.

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<sup>3</sup> Objectives of the Slovenian Third Age University are to stimulate the development of the education of the elderly for social roles, personal growth, second career and active citizenship, to conduct education of the elderly, to educate mentors and other professionals, to investigate education of the elderly and to raise public awareness in the field, to offer counselling on the local, national and international level, to conduct public campaigns aiming at changing the position of the elderly in the society, to design new educational programmes for the elderly and other adults.



## **HOW DOES IT ACTUALLY WORK**

One person takes the role of mentor, as he or she will teach someone else, for example, how to create an email account. The other one has trouble with digital photography, and the first one will help him download the pictures from the camera to the computer. Mentor is a volunteer and learning is for free. Learning can take place in someone's home, at any public place or in our computer classroom at the Third Age University.

I will, if I may, quote one of our mentors who once said to me: "At the first meeting with my student (older student, mentee) we have established the basic grounds of things she wanted to learn, for example the basics of digital photography, how to surf the Internet and the basics of typing in Word. We meet every week for one hour, where I first explain the basics and then ask her what specifically she would like to know. Then we slowly answer every question she might have." The volunteer says he had learned about our movement by coincidence, as he was already teaching his neighbour, and he was attending our University and gave him the invitation. "It seemed like a good idea, I have already been doing it with my neighbours and friends and I see no reason, why I couldn't share my knowledge with someone I don't know. That hour per week is really not a big thing to give my knowledge to someone who wants it, who needs it. Otherwise I would probably be at home, watching TV..."

## **THE POSSIBILITIES OF LEARNING FIELDS ARE PRACTICALLY COUNTLESS...**

This kind of mentoring process can be applied to all areas of learning in our lives. It may become the most effective transfer of knowledge in the business world or in intergenerational learning. It has no borders. Knowledge is the gift of a mentor.

The EOTO movement is therefore the preface, a basis for distance or e-learning in today's society. Why? Because the person, the group or the generation, trapped in the digital gap (esp. those left behind due to any reason, i.e. age, poverty, education, geographical distance, etc.) must first lose their fear of the 'new technology', then use it daily, and, as the modern generation, use it for everything they can. That is the main reason one cannot implement the distant learning process before one doesn't set the basic, stable grounds. And since the elderly (who most often remain in the rural areas where they were born and raised) are a group, that learns best with informal learning – with learning with their friends or relatives or even their peers they trust – we, at the Slovenian Third Age University and myself believe, that this kind of informal movement is the best way to teach the older the use of computer, the Internet, the 'new' communication technologies which is a preset of anything related to distance learning. This mentoring process is not difficult to introduce to a certain group of people, but it is crucial to be equipped with a large amount of patience, as the results do not show up overnight. But at the end, the input into the preparation and launch of this kind of mentoring program, esp. between an older mentor and a mentee will certainly be worthwhile like in any other volunteer work. It may not seem a lot to us, to you or even to our mentors at the beginning, but when you see the happiness in someone's eyes when he or she learned something new, when his or hers world drastically expanded with the visit of the On-line world, that is when all the hours, days, months or even years of work to animate individuals becomes worthwhile.

## **CONCLUSION: CAPACITIES OVER 50' AS RURAL DEVELOPMENT TOOL? YES!**

How? How to enable rural development hand-in-hand and with the help of older people? With a fight towards the digital divide. Digital divide respectively to geographical and knowledge reasons. Despite the fact that in 2010 68% of Slovenian households had an access to Internet and majority of them (62%) had the broadband access, over 80% of our population over 65 years (the population accounts for 300.000 people of two million nation) have NEVER used the computer. Moreover, 90% have NEVER used the Internet! This is a clear example of how a new technology does not serve its purpose. Instead of bringing people together and connecting them, it is amplifying the gap between the younger and older generation, between those who know how and why to use it and those who don't. Recent studies show, that majority of those older than 65 who use the computer and Internet live with their children and grandchildren. The reason for this show the 2010 EUROSTAT and SURS (Statistical Office of Slovenia) researches, who show that 55-74-year-olds gain their e-skills with self-learning, practical work and, most importantly, informal help of their friends and relatives. This is where the potential of EOTO movement comes in. The endless possibilities of gaining new knowledge, expanding the social network, expanding the possibilities to connect with and to those who are geographically distant from us, with those who are 30 or 50 years older than us... A retiree from the rural Ireland could very possibly connect to a Slovenian retiree who both love certain plant but one has trouble with parasites, and the other one knows a perfect natural solution to the problem. A young farmer from the rural area is growing a special kind of crops and produces 100% natural products which cannot be bought in the stores. If he has the Internet website people who need those products (might be for the healthier living or due to a strict diet) will find him, visit him and buy his products even though his village is so small it cannot be found on the map. A couple of retirees are making flour by the same recipe for generations, if their work is described online, people might contact them and visit them with younger students who have no idea how people used to produce flour (for example river mills on the Mura river in Slovenia). In this way, younger and older people would keep up the tradition, earn their living and help the development of the rural area with tourism, new job positions, prevention of rural emigration and rise of overall development and building of infrastructure and roads. And so on and so on. The possibilities are really endless.

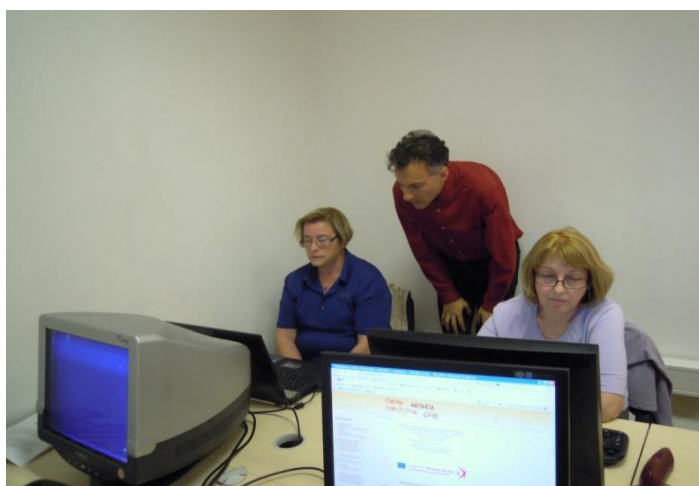
In the spirit of this year's European year of solidarity between generations, let's not forget the intergenerational cooperation. What does older generation have to offer? Knowledge and experience. What does the younger population have to offer? The knowledge of the ICT usage. Combining the two of them and joining the knowledge, experience and new technologies, alongside the willingness and (at least to some extent some) volunteer work we can achieve anything. We can fight the digital divide in any group, in any area.

Let's connect!



Picture: A swirl of possibilities. Made by A. Radojc

On the next 3 pictures: Slovenian Third Age University's EOTO mentoring couples



On the picture: Our EOTO mentors are learning new skills



The EOTO logo:

**EACHONE  
TEACHONE**

# New Opportunities for Geography Students in the Field of Long-term Care

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## ABSTRACT

*Geography students in Slovenia have increasingly more difficulties with finding employment. One of the fields of finding new research and employment opportunities for them is long-term care. University of Maribor participated in the international project Mechanisms for adjusting of professional competencies in long-term care services (ADCOMP). Within the framework of the project, practical workshops in the area of long-term care were developed, which are now carried out voluntarily also by geography students. An analysis of the state of affairs in the field of long-term care was made. Subsequently practical workshops in accordance with the expectations and desires expressed by the elderly were made by the students.*

*Keywords: long-term care, ageing of the population, intergenerational solidarity, geography.*

## Long-term care and geography

Like the majority of other European countries, Slovenia is facing the challenge of the quick ageing of its population and the increasing number of people who need long-term care. According to the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 22 % of the population was in 2010 older than 60 years (SURS, 2011), while the growing proportion of elderly people also causes a number of changes in the fields of social care, housing, employment, social policy and payment system. The purpose of long-term care is not just to enable the mere survival of the person who needs additional help, but to assure the highest possible life quality considering his or her psychophysical capabilities as well as safety in home environment or in a special, organized institutional care (The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia, 2007). Even though the state institutions in Slovenia are aware of the severity of the problems posed by the growing number of elderly people and people in need of care, the changes in the field of long-term care take place slowly and often without paying enough attention to the needs of the long-term care users. At the moment, Slovenia lacks an efficient regulation of aid and care for people who depend on the help of others when carrying out basic life activities, due to illness, degenerative changes, injuries, disability or some other reason. What is missing is especially the connectedness and cooperation between the decision-makers in the field of the country's social policy and the holders of long-term care on all levels (GE-Global Elite). In Slovenia, it is expected and also legally determined that long-term care or nursing of the elderly should include active participation of the closest relatives (children), while we often find other relatives or friends among the most important holders of long-term care. However, such intergenerational solidarity causes serious stress situations, due to the overburdening of closest family members. Some European countries that boast a long-standing tradition in this field have contributed to a series of improvements. Dr Simona Hvalič Touzery (2007) provides several cases of the existing good practice in the field of long-term care in the Netherlands, Sweden, France and Austria, in her article "Cases of innovative and good practice of helping infirm elderly people and their caregivers in the countries of

the European Union." The EU is also opening a tender for a series of international projects through which it wishes to encourage its members to introduce or undertake some constructive solutions in the field of long-term care.

This field provides geographers with new opportunities for additional education or employment, due to the weaker position of geography graduates in the changing social conditions (the situation seems somewhat better for geography teachers, since geography is an obligatory subject in Slovenian primary schools and high schools). Statistical data for Slovenia show that unemployment of Bachelors of geography grew for 142 % from December 2002 to December 2011. In the last two years, it has seen an especially rapid growth (Figure 1).

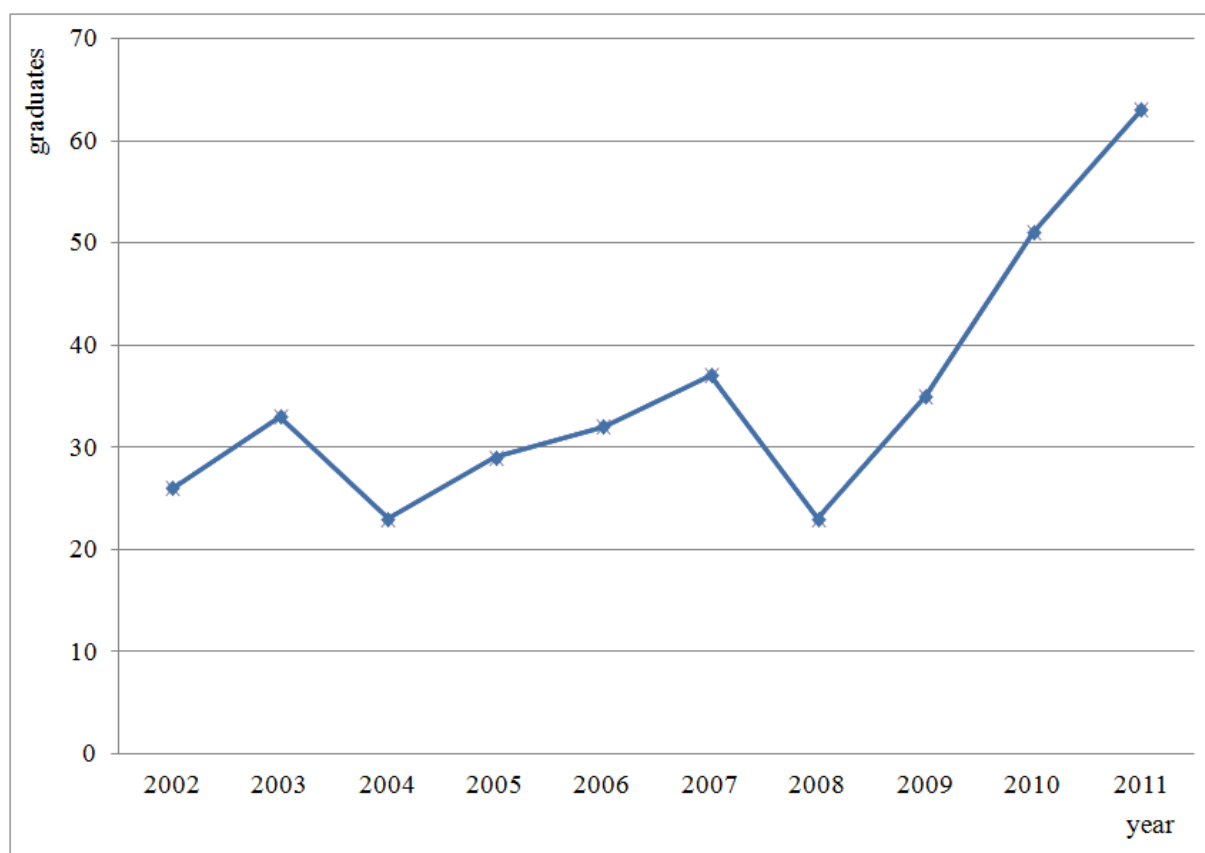


Figure 1: Unemployment among geography university graduates in Slovenia from December 2002 to December 2011. Source: Employment Service of Slovenia, 2012.

The significant role of geography in long-term care of the elderly is an indication of the development of a special discipline that is termed geographic gerontology. Geography is one of the numerous disciplines which are actively included into gerontological work, in which a geographical element is also present. The areas of research are the dynamics, distribution and movement of the elderly population (relationship between the country and the city; differences between regions; the nature, impact and consequences of geographic movements of the elderly population), as well as the relationships between the elderly population and the space where they live and where they receive



care (influences of location on the results in health care; geographic distance between the elderly and their relatives as well as the characteristics of their interactions; place as the product of different possibilities that are open to the elderly) (Andrews, Cutchin, McCracken, Phillips & Wiles, 2007).

The field of geography is wide-ranging and interdisciplinary, and the same applies to the field of long-term care, which makes it easy for geographers to engage in further training and implementation of field work in this area.

### **Problems of long-term care are linked to the country's regional characteristics**

The crucial problem of long-term care is assuring the balance between families with a person who requires care, the needs of the person who is taken care of, social programmes for the elderly and institutions that offer long-term care, as well as the impetuses in the social, political and financial fields. In the framework of the project Mechanisms for adjusting of professional competencies in long-term care services (ADCOMP), we have carried out research on the features of family care in the area of the Podravska region, and we have established that the countryside is plagued by serious difficulties in the field of long-term care, due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure and formal institutions which could take care of the elderly in rural areas. When reaching old age, rural residents are in most cases forced to leave their villages and move into the nearest city, where institutions for this kind of help are usually situated. This situation causes a lot of distress to the elderly, who are not willing to leave their homes, where they have spent the larger part of their lives. Sometimes all they need is some assistance with their housework, but people offering this kind of services are in the countryside very difficult to find. In the framework of the project ADCOMP, we have thus set the goal of developing practical workshops with the help of geography students, whom we have thus introduced to a new field of work.

Research on the problems of long-term care in the region of Podravje has shown regional differences, visible also in Slovenia, specifically the differences between the country and the city. In the case of the Podravska region, the countryside may encounter serious difficulties due to the inappropriate infrastructure and lack of formal institutions that could provide help to the elderly in rural areas. This is the reason why rural residents are forced to leave their hometown when they grow old and move to the city, where they can find the institutions that offer such assistance (ADCOMP, 2011a). If we had a network helping the persons in need of long-term care on the local level, they could remain in their home environments, which is very important to some of them.

Regional differences affect long-term care also on the European level. These differences can be divided into demographic differences and those determined by the policies and customary patterns of long-term care. One of the demographic factors is the proportion of the population that is older than 65 years and the number of people who need long-term care. The proportion of the population older than 65 years is, for example, in Greece (18.7 %), Germany (19.9 %) and Italy (20.1 %) larger than in Spain (16.6%) or Slovenia (16.3%) (Eurostat 2010, Eurostat 2011). Regional differences are indicated also by the ratio of the dependent population, calculated on the basis of the number of dependent residents (aged between 0 and 14 years and above 65 years) and on the basis of the number of residents aged between 15 and 64 years. For example, the ratio of dependency was in 2010 in Italy (31.3 %) and Germany (30.9 %) larger than in Greece (27.8 %), Spain (25.3 %) and



Slovenia (23.5%) (ADCOMP, 2011). Other demographic factors affecting regional differences with regard to the long-term care of the elderly population are an imbalance in settlements of the country, immigration of the population, and the ageing of the population that provides care. Some countries are facing a large number of immigrants, some of whom need appropriate care or who require qualifications and professional training in order to provide nursing and care giving services (Ibid.). The population that provides care services is also ageing. In some countries of the European Union, 40% of nurses are older than 40 years, and this proportion even exceeds 50% in some other countries (Ibid.).

As regards the policies and customary patterns of long-term care, we have noticed that in northern European countries, long-term care is focused especially on professional institutions (which is also characteristic of Germany, Slovenia and Spain), while the long-term care in southern European countries tends to be focused on family (e.g. in Italy and Greece) (Ibid.). Countries differ with respect to these policies also regarding the number of available beds in long-term care institutions. The elderly have, for instance, a good chance of getting institutional care in Germany or Slovenia, while in Italy or Greece they largely depend on the good will of their families (Ibid.). Let us mention that the regional differences in long-term care of the elderly population also reflect the reformed or unreformed system of long-term care. The system has been reorganized and revised in the countries of northern and central Europe. Another significant factor is the earliness of the development of social care services. In northern European countries, this development started already in the 1950s, while it is still in the initial phase in the countries of southern Europe (Ibid.). Due to the mentioned organizational challenges and the challenges with regard to content, the field of long-term care represents an opportunity for unemployed geographers.

### **The international project ADCOMP provided the possibility to participate also to geography students**

In the project ADCOMP, we have developed, beside practical workshops, also some mechanisms for attracting the unemployed into the sector of long-term care. In other countries that have been included into the project ADCOMP, the seasonally unemployed workers will be included into the implementation of long-term care. In the future, these persons will get trained for carrying out practical workshops, and they will help entertain people in retirement homes. Since there are many geographers among the unemployed in Slovenia, we have included third year students of the first level geography studies – those students who were willing to participate in the project as volunteers. Students of geography at the University of Maribor study either at the BA level (first level) or the MA level (second level). Geographical subjects that can be associated with long-term care at the undergraduate level are the following: Population Geography, Cartography and GIS, Statistics in Geography, Economic Geography, Social and Cultural Geography, Geography of Slovenian Regions, Socio-economic Structures of Slovenian Regions, Geography of Settlements, Regional Geography of Europe, Project and Team Work in Geography, Geography of Rural Areas, and Applicability of Geography in Society. At the postgraduate level, these subjects are the following: Field Work in Human Geography, Education in Contemporary Societies, Moral Issues in Education, and Adult Education. It is interesting to note that the field of geography is quite related to long-term care,

which was not expected at first – an analysis of the contents included in geography studies at both levels has confirmed this.

### **Practical workshops for persons under long-term care in accordance with the activities suggested by the elderly**

After the concluded analysis of the state in the field of long-term care in the Podravje region, we have prepared, with geography students, a simple questionnaire for persons included in long-term care. The questionnaires were filled in by students according to their conversations with the residents of the old people's home Dom Jožeta Potrča in the municipality of Poljčane. 77 elderly persons were willing to reply to oral questions (61 women and 16 men). We were interested in their needs (Table 1) and the activities (Table 2) they wish to undertake. An insight into the needs of the elderly has revealed a desire for active spending of leisure time. The analysis of the replies has shown that the elderly wish to use computers (send e-mails), that they still think about developing their capabilities and that they are motivated to join the activities inside and outside the old people's home. They have also shown a desire to be in contact with animals. The majority of the persons under care come from the countryside and they had always had animals at home. Geographic knowledge (from the ICT literacy to the knowledge of the regional and local conditions, cooperation with the public, and team work) is thus part of the contents desired by persons under long-term care.

Seq. no.	NEEDS OF PERSONS UNDER CARE
1.	A need for socializing and for asserting one's talents
2.	Social contact with relatives by e-mail
3.	Conversation (listening to their problems related to their way of living)
4.	Help with getting dressed, hygiene, preparation of food, physical support
5.	Company when they are walking animals, contact with animals, reminiscence, the possibility of doing work according to one's talents
6.	More social games, working in groups
7.	A wish for new knowledge and for using computers
8.	Help with sorting medicines (help with reading the instructions for use, help with measuring out the right dose etc.)
9.	Escort to medical examinations (transport)
10.	A desire for learning, acquisition of new knowledge and skills, use of technology

*Table 1: The needs expressed by the residents of the old people's home Dom Jožeta Potrča in the municipality of Poljčane. An insight reveals a desire for active spending of leisure time.*

Persons under long-term care wish to feel that they are needed in society and that they are relatively independent from the help of others. This is why they want to learn and establish contact with their environment.

Seq. no.	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
1.	Socializing in the framework of workshops, developing one's talents and participating in social life
2.	Contact with animals, taking walks, recreation
3.	Learning the fundamentals of working with computers (using e-mail, android cell phones)
4.	More frequent access to the external environment
5.	Short trips
6.	Walking in nature
7.	Driving to the shop
8.	Delivery of basic utilities from the shop
9.	Providing escort to events
10.	Help with the use of cell phones

*Table 2: The activities suggested by the residents of the old people's home Dom Jožeta Potrča in the municipality of Poljčane.*

The result of getting to know the conditions in the old people's home and problems in the field of long-term care in the Podravje region has been the preparation of practical workshops with the participation of geography students, who helped to create them and carry them out (as volunteers in the old people's home). We have developed three practical workshops:

**Electronic mail:** persons with long-term care have expressed a great interest in communicating through e-mail. Electronic mail opens new possibilities for connecting with our loved ones. The written word can be richer than oral conversation. Since the elderly wish to use electronic mail, we have provided such knowledge in the form of a practical workshop and have taught them to send e-mail through google mail (gmail). For those interested, we have created their personal accounts, and

with the help of the personnel in the old people's home we have acquired the e-mail addresses of their relatives (especially children), and have helped the elderly send e-mails. Students have been surprised to see the joy of people sending their first e-mails (since students are used to this kind of communication).

**Therapy with the help of animals:** while the activities in long-term care with the help of dogs are a long-time practice abroad, in Slovenia there is still no appropriate legislation in this field. In the old people's home Dom Dr Jožeta Potrča in Poljčane, the activities with dogs are already in practice, and the responses of the caregivers are extremely positive. Activities with a dog that take place once a month are conducted by Saša Hren, a volunteer of the Smile Ambassadors society (Ambasadorji nasmeha). She came up with the idea that the additional activities for the elderly should include the therapy with animals, since the people under care are familiar with it and like it very much. Therapy with animals is goal-oriented help, where the animal, which has to fit specific criteria, functions as a crucial part of the healing process. It is designed in a way that enhances the improvement of human physical, social, emotional and cognitive functions, which refer to thinking and intellectual capabilities. When this method was carried out with the inmates of the old people's home, we used rabbits and a puppy. The elderly patted the animals, talked with them and opened up to conversing with us.

**Discovering personal potentials on the basis of analyzing one's handwriting:** performed with the GE-HRM method (Global Employee Human Resource Management), which was demonstrated by the experts from the Global Elite academy. An individual can identify his or her character traits and special competences on the basis of knowing their type of handwriting, which makes it easier for the individual to get actively involved into everyday life. The method was performed by providing paper and pens to the elderly and encouraging them to write down two or three sentences about what they love. With the help of the experts in GE-HRM method we explained to the participants what are their talents and what kind of professions they could work in (this made the elderly tell us their life stories, associated with the lack of money and lack of opportunities for education).

We had prepared written materials for all the three practical workshops (theoretical introduction, the method of implementation, recommendations) and carried them out in the old people's home Dom Dr Toneta Potrča in the town of Poljčane. In the period from June 2011 to December 2011, these practical workshops were carried out voluntarily by students of geography. Students were free to decide on the type of workshop and the time of its implementation. Our goal was to help the old people's home in amusing the persons under long-term care and to encourage geography students' sense of responsibility and their motivation for voluntary work.

After six months of carrying out practical workshops, we analyzed students' work and collected their responses to participating in this process of voluntary work.

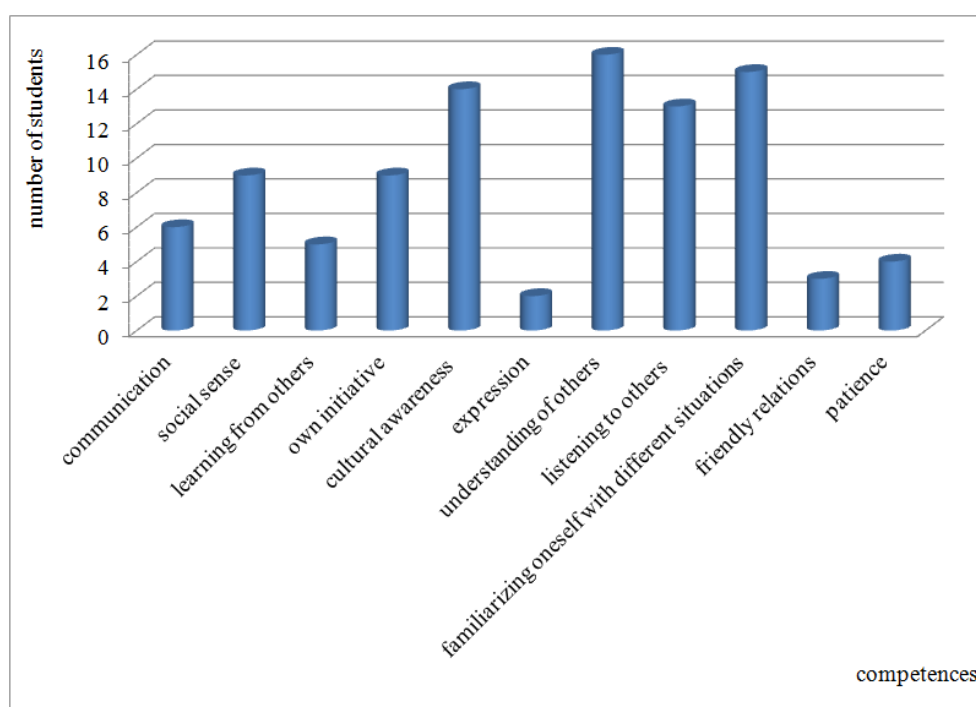
### **Geography students' views on the implementation of practical workshops for people with long-term care**

Practical workshops were carried out from June 2011 to December 2011 by 17 students (12 women and 5 men) who had wanted to participate in the project ADCOMP from the very start. After six months of voluntary work, we asked them (in a guided conversation) to give us their opinions about

conducting practical workshops; what we were most interested in was their attitude to this kind of work.

The results of the analysis of the geography students' views on the implementation of practical workshops for people with long-term care show that students decided to participate in the project ADCOMP most of all because they had no job (9 students) and because they were looking for new experience (5 students). Some also decided to work as volunteers because they are interested in this field of work (3 students).

Among the competences (students were able to choose more than one answer) which students gained in the six month period of the project implementation, the leading ones were the understanding of others (16 replies), familiarizing oneself with different situations (15 replies), cultural awareness (14 replies) and listening to others (13 replies) (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Competences which students have gained in the six month period of participating in the project ADCOMP.*

All 17 students carried out the practical workshop on using e-mail, and 8 did that on a regular basis. 10 students also carried out the therapy involving communication with animals; 5 of them did that regularly. 7 students often carried out the workshop on analyzing handwriting.

All the students found the knowledge of geography useful when carrying out these workshops. Nine students used this knowledge seldom, four occasionally and four often.

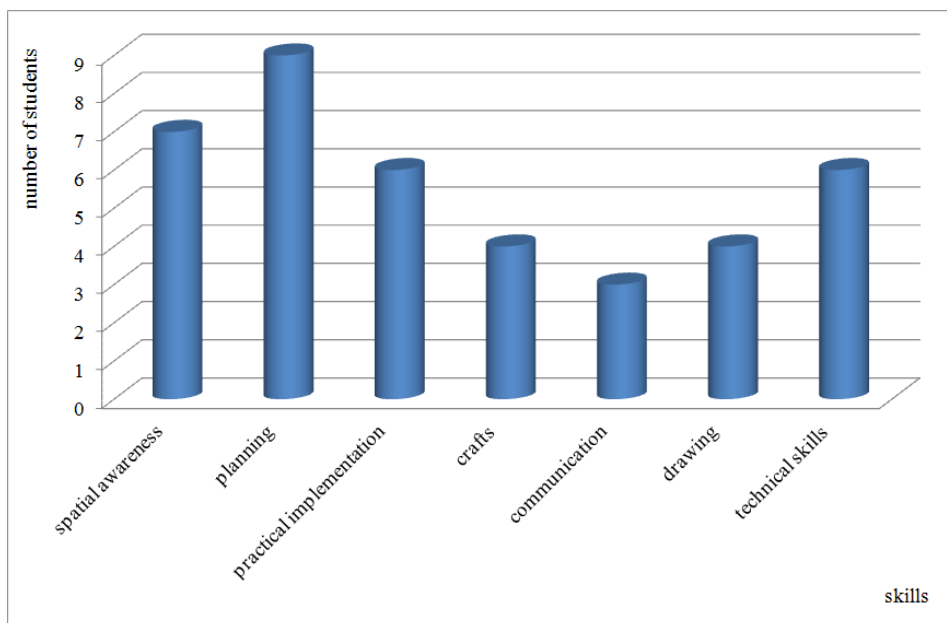
The next question concerned the reason why the people with long-term care wanted to participate in these specific workshops (more than one answer was possible). 13 students thought that the elderly missed such activities because they used to practice them at home. 10 students were of the opinion that the elderly wished to keep in step with the times. 6 students thought that the elderly did not

mind the particular type of workshop. 2 students thought that the elderly were persuaded to join these workshops by other people.

When responding to the question that concerned the specific contribution of geographers to actively solving the problem of long-term care (more than one answer was possible), all the students replied that they can help with the understanding of causes and effects. 9 students also thought that they can make a contribution with their knowledge of local characteristics, 8 students thought that their contribution can stream from their understanding of social processes, 7 students focused on their knowledge of the economic and social circumstances, while 4 students also chose the answer »Other«.

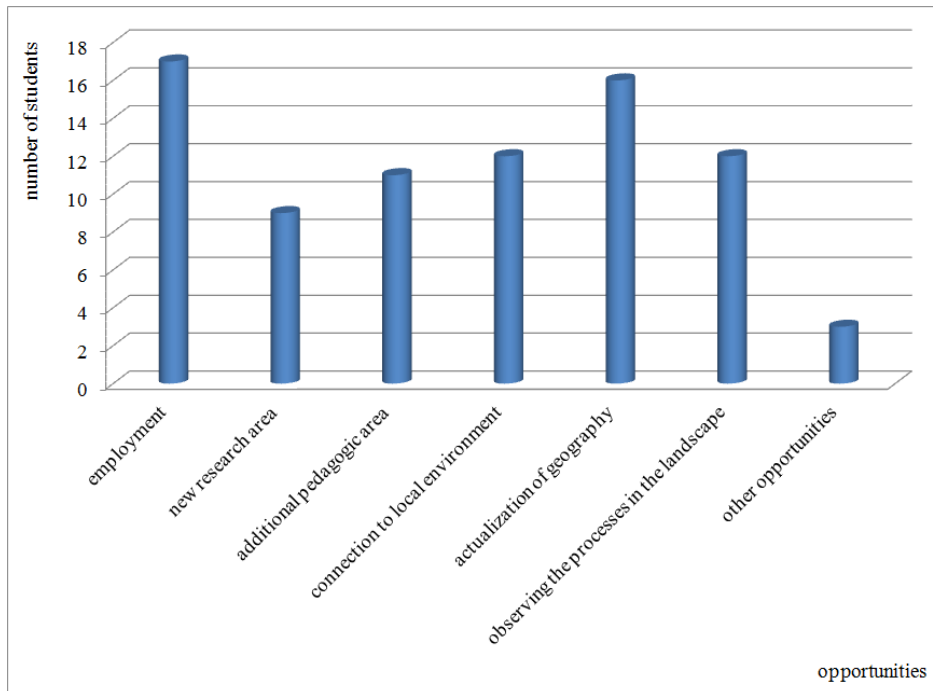
While conducting the workshops, students missed many types of knowledge, namely communication (16 students), rhetoric (15 students), craft and tradition (14 students), art (14 students), psychology (11 students), sociology (4 students) and technology (3 students).

Students think that the skills which are specific to geographers are planning (9 students), spatial awareness (7 students), practical implementation (6 students) and technical skills (6 students). Their skills that are a bit less developed are crafts (4 students), drawing (4 students) and communication (3 students) (Figure 3).



*Figure 3: Highly developed student's skills (according to student's opinion) as a result of geographical education.*

Students see numerous opportunities for geography in the field of long-term care. All students recognize an opportunity for employment in this field, beside recognizing an opportunity for the actualization of geography (16 students), connection to local environment (12 students), observing the processes in the landscape (12 students), additional pedagogic area (11 students), new research area (9 students) and other opportunities (3 students) (Figure 4).



*Figure 4: List of the opportunities for geography that students recognize in the field of long-term care.*

It is interesting to note that the participating geography students had a positive view on the implementation of workshops for people with long-term care, as they see in them many opportunities for geography, beside the employment opportunity. By carrying out practical workshops they gained numerous competences which are not offered by geography studies. They found out that the geographic knowledge helps them in areas which are not primarily geographical and that studying geography provided them with specific types of knowledge which enable their active contribution to solving the problem of long-term care. However, there are also types of knowledge that students missed while carrying out practical workshops and which it would be reasonable to gain subsequently.

The field of long-term care is an employment area of interest and one which requires well-educated and professional staff, as well as innovative, committed, fair and broad-minded people who know how to help others. In addition, there are many areas which face great problems due to the non-holistic approach to long-term care and which call for new measures for addressing this issue. In the light of this aspect, employment in the field of long-term care can be an opportunity also for students of geography:

- they can get involved in developing educational programmes for old people's homes and participate in their implementation,
- they can participate in the carrying out of numerous activities among the participants of training for the professional profile of a caregiver in the countryside: socializing in the context of workshops, organizing different clubs, teaching the fundamentals of using computers, therapy with animals,
- they can get involved in conducting practical workshops in old people's homes and the preparation of materials for workshops,
- they can get involved in doing research on the characteristics of family care in particular regions and developing appropriate programmes of education and organization of support network of caregivers and formal institutions in the field of long-term care in the framework of local communities.

The advantage of geographers in these activities is the possibility of connecting the subjects of geography studies with the education for long-term care, knowledge of local specificities, accustomedness to field work and working with people.

### **Systemic inclusion of the discipline of geography into the field of long-term care**

Current demographic indicators in economically developed countries show a pronounced increase of the proportion of the elderly population. Unfortunately, Slovenia belongs to the countries which have not paid much attention to this issue and the field of long-term care is not appropriately regulated by law, as it is governed by several laws that do not allow unified organization of care, the transparency of practices and their funding.

The increasing need for long-term care in Slovenia reminds us that in the future we will have to pay special attention to solving the question of caring for the elderly. The institutional forms of care will not suffice to solve the problem, considering the intensity of the ageing of the population, as this would implicate the enlargement of the capacities of old people's homes or other social institutions for three times. This would require exceptionally large investment funds which Slovenia cannot afford, considering its limited economic power. A more feasible alternative will be developing home care, which will have to include the unemployed much more than in the past. Unfortunately, more and more geographers tend to be unemployed, but due to their interdisciplinary knowledge they may seek new vocational opportunities. Six months of voluntary work by students of geography in the field of long-term care have shown that young geographers wish to work with people who need long-term care, so that they can employ many competences which they had acquired during their geography studies, and that they know how to get involved in the implementation of non-geographical contents above all due to the broad knowledge provided by geography (Figure 5). We increasingly offer research topics from this field in the framework of undergraduate and postgraduate studies, with the aim of encouraging geographers in Slovenia to become more active in solving current issues such as long-term care in relation to the ageing of the population. We find it interesting that the young wish to examine the processes and consequences of the ageing of the population and seek innovative solutions in the field of long-term care. We can claim that geographers have already gotten involved in the systemic tackling of this problem. Through the project ADCOMP, we have passed some suggestions for solving the issue of long-term care to the



government, including geographers in this process and proving that they can substantially help with organizing the activities for effective spending of leisure time of the elderly and other people in need of long-term care.



Figure 5: Geographers' competences can be effectively applied to helping the elderly and persons with long-term care.

## Conclusion

In Europe, the number of people who will be older than 65 years till the year 2050 will increase to 77% (Glendinning, C., Tjadens, F., Arksey, H., Moree, M., Moran, N. & Nies, H., 2009). The key problem of the ageing of the population is a shortage of suitably qualified professional personnel and a lack of interest of the unemployed for this kind of workplaces. It is increasingly evident that we need to ensure, in the field of long-term care, professional expertise and encourage the cooperation between the labour market and demand for long-term care. In Slovenia, this market does not function yet, due to a too low interest of expert institutions and educational systems in making such changes. An increasing demand for long-term care in Slovenia is a reminder that in the future we will have to give special attention to solving the problem of care for the elderly. Institutional forms of tackling this problem will not prove satisfactory, considering the intense ageing of the population, as this would mean increasing old people's homes and other social institutions for three times. This would require exceptionally large investment funds which Slovenia cannot afford. In the future, we will thus have to develop home care, which will require the cooperation of relatives, friends and volunteers. With this objective in mind, we have started to develop – in the framework of the international project ADCOMP – mechanisms for adjusting professional competences of care and nursing services in the field of long-term care, whereby

we promoted an interest in caregivers in old people's homes and prepared three practical workshops for active spending of leisure time, intended especially for helping the elderly.

Inclusion and participation in long-term care is a new opportunity for geography. Its role is shown in:

- active participation of students and graduates of geography in the field of recognizing areas that have problems with long-term care, as well as in conceiving measures for the reduction of these problems,
- the inclusion of geography students into education for implementing educational programmes for old people's homes,
- research into the dynamics, dispersion and movement of the elderly population, as well as the relationships among the elderly and the space they inhabit,
- research into regional differences (within the country or between countries; the country-the city) regarding long-term care,
- research into demographic characteristics, which influence regional differences in long-term care of the elderly population
- and investigation of regional differences in light of the policies and established patterns of long-term care.

The voluntary work of geography students has shown that we can reduce the unemployment of geographers by including especially the young into the system of long-term care, where our goal is active participation in planning systemic measures for this population. These should include the environmentally friendly design of old people's homes (simple objects, efficient in terms of energy), sustainable management of the environment in which these people live (permaculture garden design, the use of plants that positively affect people's well-being) and the use of ecoremediation in environment management (for cleaning water and soil). Such initiatives are already well under way. The old people's home in the town of Murska sobota (the Pomurje region) has made a request for an arrangement of its environment with ecoremediation, which will require the knowledge and experience of geographers. This is why we have reasons to view this new opportunity for geography with optimism.

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## **The system with study circles in Sweden**

**SIVERT GUSTAFSSON**

All Sweden Shall Live!

### **How the study circles began in Sweden**

In Sweden the first study circle started 1902. It was a temperance movement called IOGT - Independent Order of Good Templars, which acted for a sober life among the people. The widespread use of alcohol caused damage to the society as a whole and caused many tragedies in families.

Very soon there were followers to IOGT. Almost every organisation on the national level started study organisations to introduce the system of study circles. It could be political parties, religious associations, associations like IOGT and trade unions.

### **Great gaps in the Swedish society**

During half a century with start around 1870 the workers organised themselves in trade unions. In Sweden it was a gap between the working class people and the upper class.

The class struggle was going on for several years. 1909 was a big conflict on the labour market with more than 300 000 workers on strike. The employers responded with lockout.

The right to vote, for instance, was taken by the parliament in 1918, but only for men. The women had to wait three more years, why I do not know.

### **Higher studies only for the wealthy part of the society**

In Sweden there was in 1842 taken a law that granted every child the right to go to the primary school. However it took almost a century until it had resulted in any greater impact in real life for the working class people.

The wealthy families had long before sent their children to different kinds of schools and which in many cases ended with an exam at the university. Some families hired a governess to give lectures in the family home.

children among the workers were as smart as the upper class children, or sometimes even smarter, there was no chance at all for them to reach higher studies. As soon as they had finished school after six years they had to get a job and tribute to the support of the family. Some of them left home and got work in other places.

However, even if just a few, there are some success stories. It happened that the schoolteacher, or sometimes the priest in the village, had observed that a boy seemed to have good premises to go to higher studies and they succeeded to raise enough money to secure the schooling for the pupil, mainly a boy.

### **The basic idea with a study circle**

The basic idea with a study circle is that everyone can choose a subject and start a circle, or be a member of a study circle. You just have to find some more people who are interested in the same subject. In the beginning the members of the study circles often met in their homes. The study material very often was, and still is, a book. Some study circles had the only purpose to discuss a specific topic.

The idea of a study circle is also that the members can learn from each other.

### **The leader of the study circle**

The basic idea with a study circle is the same nowadays as it was in the beginning. It must be easy, not too expensive and stimulating to take part of it. For some of the study circles, depending on the topic, it is not required any special knowledge. The leader of the study circle has to take care of practical things before, during and after the meetings and keep an eye on the talks so they are on track for the subject. It is also important that every member is given the opportunity to speak.

Other topics require more capability of the leader of the study circle. A good example is when you are studying a foreign language. To ensure that the members of the study circle can achieve a good pronunciation you cannot start from scratch.

There is the same requirement if the topic is painting porcelain, knitting, etc.

### **Elementary school – big change in 1962 of the schooling system in Sweden**

1962 was a milestone for the Swedish schooling system. An obligatory nine years elementary school was set. One of the purposes was to support equality as well gender equality.

The next level is secondary school or high school. That school is not obligatory.

Probably because of this new school the number of study circles decreased seriously. Many of the study associations faced great economic problems. Some closed down and other searched for partnerships. Some even merged.

SFS 1962:319 Law of nine years obligatory school

### **How the opinions of the members of the study circles have changed over time**

During all these years from the beginning of the system with study circles adults have been the target group. In the Swedish society something happened around 1960. People earned more money, the TV was more and more common in the families, people had holiday houses. Other interests competed with the leisure. The engagement in study circles went down.

There are some study circles which have been present during all the years. They are regarding foreign languages. Some study circles have gone on for years with the same members. Some have continued new learning, other have conversation meetings, just to keep the language alive.

Almost all members of the study circles are people over 50 years. There are exceptions but it is very clear the study associations have a great challenge to attract new generations. One way to do so is the use of various kinds of IT-media. The marketing over Facebook, Twitter and so on can maybe result in that the young people can find the way to study circles.

There is one good example of a topic which is popular, mainly among 50+. One is reading about a place or a country and later the members as a group are doing a journey to that destination.

Earlier a study circle could last several months with meetings once or twice a week. Nowadays people are not willing to sign on for such long periods. To respond on that the study associations are offering courses with meeting just three or four times or concentrated to a weekend with almost two full days.

### **Financial support from the government**

The financial support from the government is allocated to the cultural department. The study associations are competing with all other actors in the cultural sector.

One presumption is that the study associations can show the extent of their activities. Because of that every study circle must have an attendance register which shall be enclosed to a new application of state subsidies.

### **Examples from my own local village group**

My own local village group was established in 1986. Since then we have had a lot of various study circles. Some examples:

- decoupage
- dancing courses
- English language
- stamp collecting
- gymnastics
- straw handicraft

- orienteering
- finding your family roots

... and many more.

## **Summary**

Originally the study circles meant a lot to the working class people in their efforts to enrich their lives by studies. At that time higher studies were achievable mostly for the wealthy families.

Almost every association on national level started study circles around 1900. The system with study circles then went on for more than half a century.

But around 1960 big changes took place in the Swedish society. People earned more money, new areas of interests competed of the leisure time. 1962 a new law regarding the schooling system was set with a nine years obligatory school. The need of study circles as a tool for complementary education decreased.

The system with study circles is still working and the members are mainly older persons. Apart from the topics in the circles the networking is very important.

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