



# DANET's Statements Concerning the Role and Function of Lifelong Learning in Active Ageing and Older People's Social Participation in the Danube Region

Formulated during the DANET final project meeting, 6-10. November 2011

We, the Danube Networkers, older citizens and representatives of educational and training institutions engaged in lifelong learning and education of older people have formulated the following final statements concerning the role and function of lifelong learning in active ageing and older people's social participation in the Danube Region. The statements result from the Danube-Networkers at Work (DANET) project conducted in the framework of the programme Europe for Citizens.

## 1. Introductory Statements

Having not only economic but also psychological, social, cultural, political and other implications, *active ageing* is a broad concept going far beyond the existing policy of active ageing. It is also a condition sine qua non for solidarity and above all for better and constructive older people's co-operation with their peers, as well as younger and older generations (intergenerational learning).

In our ageing society personally and socially active older people will have a considerable impact on the activity, productivity, personal growth and social development of all generations as well as on the development of localities and local communities in European regions.

Moreover, older people are a numerous social group, often more numerous than the group of young people from 0-14 years of age. For these and other reasons, older people's issues and their active contribution to society have to be considered and dealt with for both, their own sake and for the sake of the society as a whole.

Nevertheless, the importance of older people, their issues and contribution is too often overseen.

Older people have professional and experiential knowledge as well as culture needed in today's knowledge based and competitive society.

Older people possess valuable cultural and human capital which has to be maintained by means of quality employment and educational and learning opportunities if older people should remain active/ integrated back into the social mainstream for *both* their own benefit and the benefit of the community.

The lack of employment opportunities for older people is not an excuse for not enabling and encouraging older people's participation in social and economic development of the region.

Older people should be fully integrated in society not only through work, but also through voluntary participation in society as well as education. In today's society active ageing is a cohesive social force, but also a force that has to be supported by relevant multi-sectorial policies, educational structures and their networking.

## **2. Socio-economic Situation in the Danube Region Statements**

We, the DANET members, agree that our countries share a number of demographic, economic, social, cultural and environmental issues that would need a common, and not separated approach.

In our capacities, we would like to contribute to solving urgent social problems and would like to improve our mutual understanding in the region. Saying this, we are aware that we cannot solve all the problems and remove all the obstacles but we can, at least, make key actors in the region aware of them.

We should help overcoming inequalities of ageing by trying to ensure equal access to education for *a//*the disadvantaged and under-privileged older citizens like: older people from rural areas, older people with low income, and older people with disabilities, etc. Thus, wanting for instance to develop older people's ICT skills our endeavours should be accompanied by providing open and equal access to the needed resources. The same goes for public funding (i.e. in the fields of education, culture and tourism). Public bids' criteria are to be changed in order to include disadvantaged older people as part of the beneficiary target groups.

In the Danube Region there are diverse, but also common, contexts and settings for older people's education. Therefore, the needed infrastructures are to be developed first or in parallel i.e.: new institutions and new partnerships (between NGOs, governmental, public and private institutions).

With regard to what has been said above, developing new research institutions in the field of geragogy is urgent, while using local, national and European experience in developing a holistic regional approach.

Controversial however, remains the issue, how older people could participate in the society; working on the labour market or rather in the field of voluntary and civic engagement.

Older people should decide themselves when they should get retired.

Older workers need to be supported in getting back to the labour market.

Increasing retirement age needs accompanying measures so that older people would not be squeezed out of work and would not become a burden to the society.

New models and solutions for employment in older age are required.

Older people are to be identified both as a benefit to society and as a resource of the society and the respectful and fruitful relationships between generations are to be supported by means of policies, education accessible to everybody, guidance and public campaigning.

## **3. Education and Research Statements**

Older people's issues and ageing should be a part of all educational and training programmes on all levels and in all environments.

Older people should have access to all types of education/learning: formal, non-formal and informal. Older people are to be regarded as a resource for education in later life and intergenerational learning and education.

In some areas and Danube countries there are no institutions for education of older people. Structures for learning in later life are to be developed and given sustainable financial support. Existing educational structures should receive financial resources so that they can provide good quality work.

National and international education networks of older people should be strengthened by project grants thus fostering the sustainability of their projects.

LLL programs should be a part of an “age-friendly” community (development of voluntary community-networks, local meeting points, development of self-directed learning groups).

In many institutions working with/for older people the new technologies are not applied as an instrument of continuing education and communication. Courses for trainers should be offered, so that these would be in a position to initiate/modernise virtual courses and to develop or to coordinate Internet-supported social communities.

Easy and affordable Internet access should be available to all citizens, especially in structures for older people and other public structures.

Academic continuing education should be made accessible also to older people in rural areas through the use of the new media.

Research results and statistical data concerning the role and function of lifelong learning for active ageing and older people’s social participation have been gathered over Europe. They should be collected, structured, compared and presented on a special website to be easily accessible to foster ongoing exchange and discussion amongst stakeholders.

The collected, structured, compared and presented research findings and statistical data as well as information about examples of good practice from the Danube Region should be accessible so that they can be used in devising and delivering educational and training programmes by those involved in the education of older people.

Research organisations dealing with older people’s issues (active ageing, andragogy of the third age, geragogy, education, etc.) should be established and/or supported.

## **5. Identity and Cultural Heritage Statements**

We, the Danube-Workers have discussed the subject of “Identity” with the focus on the joint European values and their historical roots. In spite of our cultural differences we want to see each other as a “large family” in the Danube Region.

There are many intergenerational learning paths which could improve mutual understanding.

Mobility, international meetings and multilateral projects of / for older people as well as intergenerational dialogue between members of the European civil society build an important prerequisite for the unification of Europe.

Older people are mediators between the past, present and future and ensure our cultural continuity. They are a bridge helping the youngsters (and also other groups of people i.e. immigrants) transmitting values and preserving and presenting tangible and non-tangible heritage to their peers and other generations, thus helping them to build identities. Moreover, they are a guarantee for the sustainability of cultural heritage, national and European identity.

Important here is the development of a system of mobility for older people in the Danube Region and creating transnational projects for older people and mixed-age groups from this region.

NGOs should support and promote the concept of interculturality as an important tool in harmonizing the community.

## **6. Migration Statements**

Migration is viewed as a chance and opportunity, but also a danger and threat to the majority.

Emigration of young and well educated people from their country with consequent increase of the share of older population and a shortage of skilled manpower are to be dealt with.

Migration is a chance for the regions concerned.

NGOs should influence the decision making processes in the area of migration policies to initiate cooperation among religious communities in the country.

Citizens should overcome the stereotypes and prejudices and accept the differences as a form of enrichment.

Cultural education of both sides and knowledge of respective languages are very important here.

In order to decrease the emigration rates, especially emigration of experts and young people, conditions that would reduce the citizens' need to go to other countries should be looked for by the state policies, measures should include boosting economic development and an increase of the employment rates, creating conditions for self-realisation of the youth, balancing regional development, i.e. de-centralising ('de-metropolizing') economic and social activities, etc.

## **7. Environment and Sustainable Development Statements**

Sustainable development has many aspects; ecological, economic, social aspects being only some of them. Education in relation to all the mentioned areas seems to be urgent.

Ecological education and awareness as well as international exchange are necessary within all Danube Region.

Every young generation needs to be sensibilised for nature and sustainability: inter-generational communication, know-how transfer between the generations can be decisive here.

Getting active on local level, older people bring in their experience in their environment by getting engaged in ecological projects. E.g. citizens' participation in Local Agenda 21 helps to raise the motivation

with elderly people to take responsibility for their personal environment and influence political decisions; analysis of the needs in the local environment, strengthening the social community, etc.

Implementing sustainable development to public life: the elder generation expects clear perspective and responsibilities for a natural and safe future for their children and grand-children: e.g. consequent securing of water resources in public hands, raising awareness for the limited availability of resources, traffic issues, etc.

Fostering natural and regional food production such as the importance of regional, organic food as a main pillar of a healthy natural life style, fair trade, decentralised production, non-acceptance of genetic modified organisms are further important issues.

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