



## Introduction – Seniors' Empowerment and Participation

We've started this project because we felt challenged to react against some very common prejudices that have somehow the power of a self-fulfilling prophecy. One of them is that people in later age don't learn anymore. Another one is that while people get older, their knowledge, skills and competences become obsolete due to the changes in the society's processes. Last but not least, to fight back the idea that elder persons lose their cultural and social relevance. Our goal is to promote a different attitude towards seniors, towards their capacities to learn and further transmit their expertise, and towards their relations with the community in general and with cultural organizations in particular.

There is no doubt any longer about the demographic change Europe is going through and about the impact it will bear on all the aspects of society. And the answer to any change is always learning. Adult learning is a major factor of active aging. Participation in cultural life is one way of keeping alive the relations with the community. Making cultural organisations more open to seniors and empowering seniors to contribute more to culture and education are the aims of Active Seniors Learn, Educate, Communicate and Transmit project. Achieving them, we are guided by and we are trying to make the best use of the existing practices developed in the recent years by fellow professionals from the fields of education and culture from the European Union. The results of our efforts are made available for cultural professionals, adult educators, seniors and seniors' representatives from all over the Europe.

Project partners developed together a set of criteria for identifying those educational practices involving seniors which are relevant to our project goal. The main ones are represented by the concepts of **empowerment** and **participation** of seniors to the educational and cultural process. We orient our project work toward those practices which place active learning at their core, where seniors are involved in decision-making and take responsibilities in relation to the process, results and meaning of the action, where their knowledge and expertise is recognized and used as a valuable resource of the learning. With these lenses, we went over a series of cooperation projects from the field of education, we analyzed those in which seniors were participants and we finally chose to present those which can better illustrate the proposed criteria.

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Selected projects show a quite diverse range of approaches on how to support seniors to develop new, practical ways to review their past experience and personal skills, as well as to explore new and potential opportunities for learning and community engagement. Their value lies not only in being a source of inspiration for cultural professionals, adult educators and seniors themselves, but also in the fact that they are offering concrete educational tools and information to those interested to multiply the practice and to transfer it into their own organisation. This is our way of inviting cultural professionals and adult educators to engage themselves in a new learning process, as a first phase in the development of the learning dimension of cultural organisations and in the integration of seniors as active participants to community cultural life.

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