

Active Seniors Learn, Educate, Communicate and Transmit

Purpose and Methodological Approach

In times of globalisation and demographic change, it is necessary to direct the focus on the special abilities of seniors. On the basis of already accumulated knowledge in other European projects, ASLECT aims at creating conditions, which should allow active seniors a comprehensive integration into the cultural and social life as well as into the educational system. Cultural and educational organizations in particular (libraries, museums, cultural centres, adult education centres) must be trained in dealing with committed seniors.

ASLECT is a *KA4 – Dissemination and exploitation of results* multilateral project with a duration of two years (December 2010-November 2012) funded by the European Commission. A total of six partner organisations are working together on assembling a manual for a good treatment of dedicated seniors. The coordination of the partnership is based in the Centre of Professional Training in Culture, Romania. Other partners are Integra Association (Bulgaria), Amicitie Srl (Italy), Eğitim ve Gençlik Çalışmaları Enstitüsü Derneği (Turkey), ISIS – Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur GbR (Germany) and INMAD – Internationales Institut für Managing Diversity (Austria).

By focusing on the 15 examples of good practice in Europe, ASLECT aims at making visible the existing skills and interests of seniors at the formal and informal level, and at placing these at the centre of activities in cultural organisations and educational institutions. This purpose is to be achieved in a variety of ways: first, by presenting and promoting to cultural professionals and adult educators learning tools designed and tested with seniors; then by organising and carrying out local workshops with cultural professionals and seniors. A significant stake for ASLECT project is to promote the understanding of senior citizens not only as users of social services, but also as active co-creators of culture and education in the local community.

The precise objectives of ASLECT are:

- to provide resources for strengthening the capacity of cultural and educational organisations to offer an adult learning and communication environment that is particularly favourable for senior citizens;
- to create opportunities for retired professionals to use their experience/competences and become adult educators for their peers and other interested groups;
- to establish cooperation and incorporation between educational and cultural organisations in order to ensure the project's sustainability even after its end.

Overall, our project aims at supporting seniors to volunteer and to find new fields of activity in coaching, and to support cultural and educational organisations in dealing with the needs of older volunteers.

The project target groups are:

- seniors older than 50 regardless of their employment status;
- cultural and educational professionals;
- decision-makers from the fields of culture, education and social services.

As a project focusing on the valorisation and exploitation of previous results of European cooperation, ASLECT relies on the results and achievements of other organisations and projects. The partnership consortium carried an identification of results from previous European cooperation projects, as well as from national, regional or local projects. In order to make a qualified identification, the partner consortium first developed a 43-question-catalogue of Good Practice Criteria with four main areas:

- Empowerment
- Participation
- Impact
- Sustainability

During the Identification Phase, the questions regarding **empowerment** and **participation** were weighted higher than the others. Empowerment was a particularly mandatory criterion. A project that had just a few positive responses within this theme, even if it had excellent results within the other themes, was not considered relevant. The reasons for the importance of this criterion are the sustainable results of the projects. The best sustainability is accomplished when active seniors are empowered in the project and, therefore, able to continue the work beyond the project.

Each project partner reviewed different projects compendia between 2007 and 2010, as well as the respective project websites in order to collect examples of good practice, where the successful integration of active seniors had already taken place. During the scanning process, the partners were searching for approaches that involve seniors as trainees in the traditional way, that valorise seniors' experience, skills and competences in an active way, by giving them the role of the trainer or of the expert. They also searched for approaches that empower seniors by letting them have control over the way in which the educational process is designed and conducted (fully autonomous). Furthermore, they were looking for educational materials such as curricula, methods definition, case studies, glossaries, training manuals and guides, etc. as well as educational experiences. In the next stage of project work, these materials will be used for the training of cultural and educational professionals and seniors older than 50 years, and/or see them as a base for formulating recommendations to decision-makers from the fields of culture, education and social services.

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Eventually, a total of 84 projects were localised and evaluated according to the Good Practice Criteria; in case of each evaluated project, a positive answer to the questions based on the criteria counted as one point, while a negative answer counted as zero points.

According to the empowerment, important criteria were: the manner in which the projects dealt with the capacity of the seniors, the manner in which seniors were involved in development, planning and implementation, the manner in which decisions about the learning process were made, the manner in which seniors could use their experiences in the process and whether they developed new competences. The criteria for participation were consultation, the concrete action, self-involvement and decision-making. Furthermore, the qualitative and quantitative impact, as well as the project objectives were tested. Finally, the sustainability of the projects was tested in relation to their local and regional dimensions, national and international dimensions and transferability.

Each project awarded more than 30 points qualified for the following phase. As a result, 24 projects entered the Second Phase. In the Second Phase, the projects were randomly distributed among five partners. Each partner had to write a summary for the assigned projects. Apart from the basic information about the project (project name and acronym, implementation period, financing programme, coordinating organisation, etc.) each summary contained a description of the example, as well as information about the project rationale, impact, strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of the summaries was to outline the most significant project information, using the project websites and all the available material, which was then applied in the next phase.

In order to guarantee an objective evaluation of each project, in the Third Phase, the written project summaries were sent to two other partners. Their task was to review the summary and add their opinion to the final results and findings. The review questionnaire consisted of two questions concerning the usability of the summary, multiple choice questions regarding empowerment, participation, impact and sustainability as well as two open questions regarding the usefulness of the gained knowledge and available materials for ASLECT. The purpose of the reviews was to present information, which should facilitate the work during the next phase.

Based on the evaluation of the projects during the Identification and Review Phases, a ranking was created in order to determine the best 15 projects. The best 15 European projects on senior's involvement in education and culture are presented in detail hereinbelow.

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