A Better and Larger Presence of Seniors in European Cooperation Actions – AESAEC Project

1. Project Relevance

AESAEC project aims at **activating** senior citizens to benefit more from EU funds, and at involving them in the preparation of project proposals for their own benefit. The project also promoted a better access for seniors to participate in European cooperation actions, and it was directed to change seniors' perception on Active European Citizenship (AEC).

The AESAEC project is also a good practice case because it has a strong **participation** aspect. During the first

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Coordinating organisation: Auxilium pro Regionibus Europae in Rebus Culturalibus
Countries involved: Austria (2) , Denmark, Spain, Italy, Romania, Slovenia
Types of organisations involved: Non-profit association, association, educational centre, non-profit educational
Implementation level: European, local
Website: www.aesaec.eu

project year, seniors were involved in evaluation/feed-back and dissemination activities. In the second project year, senior citizens **got involved** into the project through designing and development of EU project proposals. First, senior citizens are provided with trainings on EU funds, active citizenship and project proposal development; then, they prepared proposals for their own benefit. The "learning by doing" approach was used. Additionally, seniors were asked to express which kind of know-how, competences and skills they would need to participate more actively in AEC, and how these should be transferred into a training program.

The project impact can also be considered **sustainable** since the knowledge and skills gained during the trainings can be used by seniors on the long term. Participants can continue to develop and implement new projects.

The materials developed in this project can be used by those interested in training seniors on European project management in order to encourage such seniors to participate in EU programs, benefit from EU funds, promote a better access to participation for seniors and change seniors' perception on how Active European Citizenship (AEC) can empower seniors.

2. Background and Aims

The project was implemented by a consortium formed of 7 official and 5 supporting (silent) partners. The first partner, **Auxilium pro Regionibus Europae in Rebus Culturalibus (Auxilium)**, is a non-profit association aiming at the development, exchange and implementation of educational trainings and concepts, as well as at the implementation and promotion of EU projects. **Volkshochschule (VHS) Steiermark** is experienced in adult education measures; as a subsidiary association of the Austrian Chamber of Labour, it is directly linked to the educational and social positions of the Austrian concept of social partnership. **Fritid & Samfund (F&S)** from Denmark have great expertise in the development and encouragement of an active citizenship on the local, national and European levels. The fourth partner, **Aragonese Association of Local Authorities**

(ASAEL), is an association representing more than 300 local authorities in Aragón, Spain; it is an expert in regional development, the establishment and promotion of Active European Citizenship, as well as in the training development and implementation. **FormAzione CO&SO Network (CO&SO)** is an Italian organisation specialised in planning, managing and implementation of education and training actions and initiatives, with a special focus on learners with special needs. The sixth partner, **Soros Educational Centres (SEC)**, from Romania is an educational centre, offering special trainings for adults disadvantaged due to social, economic, and cultural reasons. **The Slovenian Third Age University** is a non-profit educational organisation. It was founded by senior citizens for senior citizens, and all its courses are especially dedicated to and designed for learners aged 50+.

The Context of Project Implementation and the Needs that the Project Tried to Address
Even though Active European Citizenship (AEC) is intensively promoted by the EU Commission, its results are often frustrating: the general attitude towards the concept of the EU ranges from "reserved" to "negative" in many countries, as well as within many social groups; in all the EU countries, participation in democratic elections, volunteer work and social engagement is decreasing, and some social groups seem to be extremely resistant to being convinced that the EU and AEC exist for their own benefit. One of these EU sceptic groups are senior citizens, as they were exposed to other political and social concepts - with their own identity different from that of the EU (lack of identification) - for a longer period of time; they often feel ignored and not included in political and social decision-making processes, particularly at the transnational level (lack of engagement). They are addressed by means of information and promotion campaigns introducing the EU and AEC (lack of information). In fewer instances, they feel that they benefit less than other social groups from the advantages provided by the EU, *e.g.* economic development; easier mobility. They feel that they have more disadvantages (lack of benefits). The project tried to address these needs and to propose solutions for overcoming this situation, to convince more senior citizens in Europe that the EU and AEC exist also for their own benefit. Even more, the project tried to motivate these senior citizens to contribute pro-actively to AEC. In this context, the AESAEC project aimed at introducing the concept of European Citizenship to Europe's senior citizens and to make clear to them how they could personally benefit from their active participation to this concept.

3. Description of the Target Groups
The main target group of the AESAEC project were senior citizens, around 60 years of age and older, from the partner countries. The basic sample size of 69 persons from all partner countries participated in the first key factor collection phase. Especially in the second half of the project, 125 senior citizens attended the pilot trainings in all partner countries. The partnership of the AESAEC project implemented altogether 6 pilot courses with the materials and approaches developed during the development stage of the project. Pilot courses were implemented in the following countries: AT, DK, ES, IT, SI and RO.
The number of people participating in the pilot courses in the different partner countries was quite different. Most participants came from Slovenia and Romania; on the contrary, much less participants could be motivated in Denmark and Austria. Reflecting on this situation, it might appear that countries from the new member states of the European Union (RO and SI) obviously find a much more positive attitude towards European cooperation also within the senior population than countries from the older member states.

4. Outputs and Multiplying Outcomes
The main product of AESAEC project is a **training course** based on a training handbook which has two major parts:
• Part A contains three short chapters about pedagogic concepts and guidelines which might be helpful when organising and implementing training courses for senior learners.

• Part B has seven modules dealing with the European Union, the concept of Active European Citizenship, the Senior Volunteering Programme, the Europe for Citizens Programme, as well as with how to design, structure, write, budget, submit and implement EU projects under these programmes.

The project also developed a **website** (www.aesaec.eu; EN; summaries in DE, DK, ES, IT, HU, RO, SI) used for the documentation and dissemination of the AECSEC project and its results as well as for linking the project with other projects which address relevant topics and have stakeholders or experts/organisations interested in our project.

AESAEC – Key Factor Catalogue (EN; downloadable from www.aesec.eu). As a first project step, the partnership realized a survey in all the 6 partner countries, in which representatives from the main target groups and stakeholders were able to give feedback on what they are interested in with regard to the EU, Active European Citizenship and EU funding opportunities. Additionally, they were asked to express which kind of know-how, competences and skills they would need to participate more actively in AEC and how these should be transferred into a training program.

AESAEC – Pedagogic Concept (EN; downloadable from www.aesaec.eu). Based on the results of the key factor collection, as well as on the outcomes of the Grundtvig project "IANUS – Guidelines and Quality Standards for Later Learning in Europe" (www.ianusllp.com) the partnership developed the pedagogic frameworks for the training course. Therefore, meeting the special learning needs and demands of senior learners and setting up an innovative training structure, including "authentic location learning", "multi-sensorial learning" and "learning by doing", were most important.

A **green paper** including analyses and recommendations was dedicated to political decision-makers and bodies responsible for the design and structure of EU funds dealing with AEC, concentrating on how to make them more easily accessible for senior citizens.

Additionally, flyers and posters were produced to promote the project.

5. Impact and Sustainability

The expected forms of impact were:

-to raise awareness and create positive attitudes towards the EU and its values, as well as towards the concept of AEC within the hard-to-reach target group of senior citizens;

-to make learning about the EU more accessible and understandable for senior citizens;

-to empower senior citizens to participate pro-actively in AEC (especially, on a transnational level);

-to open AEC processes and programmes for the special needs, demands and interests of senior citizens, so it is easier for them to support the EU developments with their contributions, engagement, experience and knowledge;

-to set up a transnational network which takes care of the topic of AEC for senior citizens beyond the end of this project.

In terms of expected impact, the approach used in the project seems to be effective, at least to a certain extent: project proposals were elaborated by seniors participating in the pilot training from the 6 countries. There is evidence concerning the evaluation of the learning outcomes of the seniors participating in the project at the level of one partner, not of the entire partnership; however, the methodology for evaluation was common. The learners' feedback about training sessions was positive. Trainers were also asked to provide feedback on the training process and on its results. The learners' engagement was one of the elements which were most appreciated by trainers, while teaching senior citizens how to write European projects independently was appreciated as being less successful.

The element of the training methodology named "authentic location learning" was positively evaluated by learners.

The AESAEC project results can be considered sustainable to some extent since the skills gained through trainings by seniors will be useful on the long term. The handbook and green paper are useful outputs which can prove their further usefulness.

6. Educational Process
A bottom-up approach was used by the project. The representatives of the main target group (senior citizens 60+) were involved in all important project steps. They were in the centre of the pilot training activities which were held in all partner countries; during these pilot activities, they learned about how to apply for an EU grant and they designed and elaborated their own project proposals, dealing with their needs and demands as true senior citizens of Europe. The target group had "learning-by-doing" experience concerning EU project management, transnational co-operation and mobility, as well as Active European Citizenship.
"Applied approaches" formed also the general basis for the **AESAEC pedagogic concept**; in this concept, the partnership linked "traditional learning methods" to "authentic location learning", "multi-sensorial learning" and "learning-by-doing activities".

Recommended Tool:
AESAEC Pedagogical Concept (available online): The pedagogical approaches presented in this e-book which are used in AESAEC project can be useful for Aslect project. The summary of the pedagogical approaches can be found hereinbelow:
Authentic Location Learning is a learning approach that uses locations outside lecture rooms such as museums, galleries and libraries. This kind of learning brings older people back and closer to the community and can improve the mutual understanding of generations and their mutual recognition.
Multi-Sensory Learning is an approach in which methods and instruments are applied in correspondence to the learners' overall sensory and attentiveness potential to actively use their learning potential. The more successful learning is the one in which more brain functions are activated, because the resulting connection of brain cells is greater, the storage of information and skills is more intense, while information and skills can be more easily retrieved or activated later on.
Learning-by-Doing: learning in formal educational settings means first learning, then doing, while learning-by-doing is about performing the two activities at the same time.