



LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN LATER LIFE

English Translation of Extracts

LERNEN UND BILDUNG IM SPÄTEREN LEBENSALTER

Leitlinien und Prioritäten 2020

Erstellt von der Projektgruppe Lernen im späteren Lebensalter

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

The publication „Lernen und Bildung im späteren Lebensalter. Leitlinien und Prioritäten 2020“ was published in 2011 in German. These extracts offer English-speaking readers a translation of the Preamble, the Guidelines for an education in later life, the Requirements and “Chapter 01: Lifelong learning in later life: Principles and definitions” of the original publication. It also includes the short professional profiles of the members of the Learning in Later Life project group and of the consultants as well as a list of other participating experts. In presenting these extracts to a wider community, we hope to contribute to the further development of the discourse on Learning in Later Life in practice, research and policy development.

Andrea Waxenegger, on behalf of the Learning in Later Life project group, Graz 2012

INTRODUCTION

This publication is the result of a 2-year long project with the objective of creating a catalogue of guidelines and priorities entitled “Education in Later Life”. The project was carried out in consultation with the Department V/6 of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, and with the Department of Adult Education and Public Libraries of the Regional Government of Styria. The contents of this publication build on the results of the “Further Education in Later Life” project group, which published a relevant position paper in 2007. We believe that the present catalogue of guidelines and priorities can serve as a guide for anyone in a position of responsibility in this field over the coming years.

Experts from different educational practice establishments and educational research institutions participated in the project group. An intensive exchange of knowledge with an international expert took place within the framework of a workshop. In the Austrian Federal Institute for Adult Education in St. Wolfgang, a group of experts held in-depth discussions on a draft of the publication.

The Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz constituted the platform of the work of the project group. Since 2005, we have systematically built up the focus on general scientific education, incorporating it into the overall university strategy of “the University of Graz as a Partner for Learning”. Through the “Monday Academy” and the newly developed “Vita activa” programme we offer an extensive education portfolio at said university, thereby facilitating active confrontation with scientific developments and enabling the acquisition of university knowledge for an active lifestyle, notably for people in the second life phase. Our reference point in this context is the “European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning” that explicitly requires universities to become active in the field of education for people in later life.

Our thanks go to the Department V/6 of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection for supporting this project.

As project leader, I would like to thank everyone who participated in the creation of this publication.

Andrea Waxenegger Graz 2011

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PREAMBLE, GUIDELINES, BASIC DEFINITIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

PREAMBLE

This publication – “Learning and Education in Later Life: Guidelines and priorities 2020” – addresses central fields of activity and developments in the area of lifelong learning and education in later life.

It forges a bridge between important definitions and topics such as quality development, counselling, didactics and methodology in the field of learning and education. It also takes into account gender-specific and generational aspects, focuses on the professionalisation of educational work, and examines the fields of social inclusion, equal opportunities and participation. The attached annotated directory of basic materials on education in later life and lifelong learning provides an overview of international developments in this domain.

The guidelines for lifelong learning and education in later life are the result of intense discussions and the elaboration of the fundamental principles and thematic areas. The requirements were formulated in order to set priorities for further work in this field.

This publication will offer the chance to deal with upcoming questions, fields of activity, and development perspectives.

We are addressing political decision-makers, people in positions of responsibility at an administrative level, and experts on senior citizens and education in the Austrian Federal States, towns and municipalities, as well as people who run organisations for older people.

In educational practice we are addressing people responsible in the field of adult education and university continuing education, in addition to those in charge at NGOs and in cultural work who implement an educational mandate. In the field of research we are addressing senior staff in research institutions and scientists alike.

Necessity of lifelong learning and education in later life

The number of people potentially involved in lifelong learning and education in later life is evident from demographic data. Today in Austria 1.9 million people are older than 60 – which equates to about 23% of the total population. Approximately 667,000 people are older than 75, and almost 12,000 people are 95 years old and over. In the medium term (2020) some 26% of the Austrian population will be aged 60 and above.

In our time the third age life phase has changed too. This phase as one of good health has become longer. In total the post-retirement phase now has a time span of more than 20 years – an average of 27 years for women compared to about 22 years for men – i.e. a time span that is as long as childhood, youth and adolescence combined.

These figures clearly highlight one of the greatest achievements of our era. For the first time ever in human history, people have the chance to reach a higher age in a state of good health and with the benefit of social security. This also means that we have both the opportunity and the duty to shape a whole life phase ourselves.

It is all about participation, co-determination and shaping the future – our own and that of our society. The activities in the fields of lifelong learning and education in later life constitute an essential contribution to securing participation and equal opportunities.

Learning should be viewed as a chance for personal development enabling individuals to gain or extend skills e.g. to undertake voluntary work, to be in a position to rise to new challenges that notably occur in this life phase, or to be able to cope with everyday life despite various innovations such as those in the field of technology.

National and international context

Activities in the field of lifelong learning and education in later life are embedded in a broad international context that ranges from the regional implementation strategy of the International Action Plan on Ageing in the UNECE region, the WHO programme “Active Ageing: A Policy Framework”, the UNESCO “Belém Framework for Action”, “the European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning”, to communications from the European Commission.

Whilst elaborating the Austrian national strategy on lifelong learning 2020, an action plan on the enrichment of the quality of life through education in the post-professional life phase

was introduced comprising objectives and measures for the field of lifelong learning and education in later life.

The objectives of policies for older people adopted by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in the field of lifelong learning and education for older people are to be considered with this in mind.

These objectives are: To provide older people with equal and unhindered access to high-quality and diverse learning opportunities and to a variety of learning experiences; to initiate the development of innovative offers through basic research; to support the creation of wide-ranging educational portfolios that especially provide low-entry qualifications; and to promote the quality management of those programmes.

Educational practices in Austria are characterised by various initiatives in the field of lifelong learning and education in later life. However, we feel that this theme needs to be even more strongly anchored within the long-term strategic planning process of educational institutions.

We invite all people working in various fields and at various levels of education to participate in the shaping of educational practices and in the concrete implementation of the adopted measures.

GUIDELINES FOR AN EDUCATION IN LATER LIFE

Education in later life means both “ageing as a learner” and “learning how to age”, whereby it is necessary to consider on-going technological and social changes. Properly getting to grips with the process of ageing means understanding and shaping changes in the social environment and those occurring at an individual level.

Orientation and information are particularly necessary in a democratic society dependent on the participation and the responsible co-decision-making of the individual. On the background of a life course perspective learning and further education up to an old age are needed in order to gain new skills and abilities whilst cultivating and expanding one’s own interests. Organised learning with adults is very often influenced by existing experiences, because they have “proved to be successful” in coping with the problems of everyday life. Experiences are valuable, since the individual has learned something from them.

Older People with functional constraints must be supported so as to enable them to maintain their independence and self-efficacy. In doing so, their need for autonomy when organising their daily life must be taken seriously. The prospect of lifelong learning broadens the scope of individual development options, such as self-determination and fulfilment.

Education in later life therefore does not primarily aim at the conveyance of knowledge and abilities that can contribute to better and more effective performances, but rather gives ageing individuals a chance to express their own concerns and competences. Open-result and self-regulated learning processes play an important role in this context. As such, education has the duty of detecting individual resources and potential, of supporting older people

to recognise these and to apply them for themselves and their individual life situations in a positive way.

The importance of social contacts and social integration in learning processes must be taken into account, including the creation of intergenerational and intra-generational relationships.

Over the course of their life, older people have mainly learned in everyday life situations. They are often distant from organised learning possibilities and belong rather more to the population group of “people unaccustomed to education”. That is why the aspect of social integration should be taken into particular consideration. This also means supporting people in building up relationships, despite reduced contact with the outside world, and powerful social networks that prevent isolation.

In addition to the realisation of personal interests, qualifications for post-professional fields of activity and societal participation as a whole are to be considered. Important areas are voluntary work and active citizenship.

In an employment-oriented society the post-professional life phase remains both an individual and a societal challenge. This may result in voluntary activities or engagement in less formalised contexts. In order to prevent pure activism, it is necessary to independently find forms of involvement that are suited in view of each individual’s biography. In this respect, it is the decision processes that need to be considered in the conception of educational work. This means that education in later life qualifies for self-determined civic engagement and indeed is also a part of it.

Learning in later life should promote a new, differentiated view on ageing and intergenerational relationships.

Concepts such as dependence, limitation and loss are linked to advanced age. These experiences are negatively valued in our society. Firstly, those ideas need to be put into perspective, because they show a distorted picture of reality; secondly, it should be made clear that dependence and loss are part of the human existence. Education contributes to the development of different cultures of ageing. Continuing education should play a major role in the context of a culture of age(ing) within the terms of individualisation and standardisation. Education is necessary for ensuring self-assertiveness on a labour market hostile to ageing and for preparing a self-determined life-style under conditions of frailty.

Education must consider the diversity of ageing and old age. As well as the informative and participatory function of education, it also has a social dimension.

Educational measures should contribute to the inclusion of people who are – due to their social or geographical background – excluded or screened from further educational opportunities and participation. Furthermore, critical education tries to address the gender inequality and the asynchrony or diversity of the generations. The idea of diversity refers to the consideration of the differences according to age, gender and ethnicity.

The further and future development of organised education (non-formal learning) in later life is linked to the issue of quality management.

Quality development in learning in later life is an open-ended issue. The learning environment for people of an advanced age should be organised in a way that overcomes the idea that learning is connected to lecturing. Defining key qualifications including skills for overcoming the digital divide and identity competence is part of a high-quality education in later life. In any case, the qualifications of people working in the continuing education sector need to be improved. The third age as a phase of good health and mostly good income require specific know-how of professionals working with older people that has to be made available in different geragogic study programmes.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Lifelong learning can be defined as learning based on experiences and learning for personal and social reasons. It comprises all target-oriented learning activities that serve the continuous improvement of knowledge, skills and competences. It can take place within or outside organised learning settings. Basic skills, digital competences and broader activity knowledge for shaping everyday life are acquired. The objective is self-determination.

Education in later life can be defined as the deliberate, targeted acquisition of new knowledge or new skills. Education can also be defined as the result of this process. The pursuit of educational goals can go on over different periods of time and can incorporate a variety of activities like, for example, studies, book-reading, discussions, and the acquisition of skills. The pursuing of education is target-oriented, rational acting that deals with social, historical and cultural circumstances of life. The definition of education is broader than that of learning and includes reflexivity and theory competence.

Geragogics is the pedagogy of ageing and older people. It is a branch of gerontology and educational science that deals with all problems, learning contents and processes that are connected to ageing. Geragogics is the discipline of science that focuses on learning and age and the application of the results of geriatrics and social gerontology on life practices of people in later life.

Education for people in later life refers to learning opportunities that are adapted to the special learning requirements and motivations of people in the later, post-professional life phase. It means target-group-specific adult education, because the addressees can be characterised by a canon of collective experiences, comparable problem situations and opportunities for activities.

Education on age(ing) can be defined as educational work on topics concerning ageing that occur throughout the entire course of one's life. Education on age(ing) does not only address people in later life; it also incorporates education for people in the pre- and post-retirement phase and intergenerational learning. Learning in groups of the same age and learning in groups of mixed ages is part of education on age(ing) too.

REQUIREMENTS

- Implementation of the lifelong learning strategy at federal and regional level in Austria with regard to education for older people in the post-professional life phase
- Development of action planning in the educational policy for promoting educational measures in the post-professional life phase vis-à-vis resource provision and the securing of funding
- Creation of prerequisites for equal opportunities in accessing education and learning
- Consideration of (further) education measures and possibilities for older people when creating and securing a regional basic offer in the educational sector in coordination with regional development and urban planning
- Consideration of the diversity of old age, ageing and intergenerational learning in programme development
- Development and implementation of quality standards for educational opportunities in the post-professional life phase
- Training for people working in the areas of adult education and third age education through the creation of a diverse range of further education possibilities
- Introduction and expansion of educational guidance and improvement of information available to people in the post-professional life phase, as well as relevant certificates for counsellors
- Enhanced learning possibilities that are close to home, easy to access and barrier-free, as well as cross-generation projects that are aimed at the local community

- Creation of further education opportunities in the sector of the new information and communication technologies in order to secure opportunities for the participation of people in later life
- Expansion and broadening of educational programmes in universities and the adult education sector for people in the post-professional life phase; development of new intergenerational forms of further scientific education
- Research on education in the third age and promotion of the development and implementation of innovative model projects in education for people of the third or fourth age; development/expansion of a respective methodology and/or didactics
- Implementation of accompanying basic research and data acquisition

CHAPTER 01

LIFELONG LEARNING IN LATER LIFE. PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS

LIFELONG LEARNING IN LATER LIFE. PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS

Franz Kolland, Heinrich Klingenberg

A few decades ago, concepts like “education for the elderly”, “further education for people in the second half of their life” or “lifelong learning in later life” were wholly unfamiliar in the theory and practice of adult education. People did not see the need for the further education of older people, and people in later life were regarded mostly as not being capable of acquiring education. Today we have a completely different understanding of this area. A global awareness has developed highlighting the fact that the living conditions of people in later life were not previously given enough attention in the educational sector. This is true of the employment policy for older employees, as well as for the sector of “general education for adults” or education on age(ing).

A significant step towards an education throughout one’s entire life was taken when the concept of “lifelong learning” was introduced. In documents developed both at European level and internationally, lifelong learning is defined as learning based on personal, social and professional reasons. Promoting lifelong learning means investing more in people and their knowledge. It is about acquiring basic skills as well as a broader skill base. These skills should not only be acquired in a classroom but also through other forms of learning. People of all ages should have equal and unhindered access to a variety of learning experiences throughout Europe. The “Action Plan on Adult Learning of the European Commission” (27.9.2007) states that “Adult learning can both improve people’s skills and help them towards active citizenship and personal autonomy”. Education is by all accounts a central resource of the knowledge society.

The year 2012 was declared as the “European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity”. The goal of the European Commission is to show how older people contribute to society. Measures for a better mobilisation of the older generations’ potential will be promoted, and people in later life will be encouraged to convey their knowledge and experiences to the next generations and to learn from them in return.

Another document that particularly points out the importance of lifelong learning in later life is the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) which was concluded in 2002 by the United Nations Economic Council for Europe (UNECE). Article 6 of the Plan of Action on Ageing deals with the promotion of lifelong learning and the adaptation of education systems in order to meet the demands of changing economic, social and demographic conditions. The MIPAA recognised the need for specific strategies and practical measures for meeting the educational demands of people in later life. In this vein the key idea is having a learning practice that leads to everyday life being coped with more easily, a secured participation in society, and social inclusion.

The principles of lifelong learning, massively promoted by the European Commission and the UNECE, are, of course, valid for Austria too. With regard to the predicted demographic development, respective measures are absolutely essential for achieving the goals of the “coherent strategy on lifelong learning” which Austria also ratified. At the same time, a conscious change of existing structures, organisational measures and focuses is necessary. Whilst occasional measures and opportunities already exist for people close to/in the post-professional life phase, a medium-term and a long-term strategy is not yet available at national level. By contrast, extensive efforts and a large number of strategies, programmes and measures for young people can be identified in nearly all areas of life. There is a considerable and growing awareness amongst politicians and decision-makers concerning problems of youth, but for the sector of the older population this awareness has yet to be created. In this context it is possible to speak of an existing imbalance.

Age structure and the perception of old age have an effect on further education

Demographic data shows two trends that are changing our society in the long term:

- The increasing life expectancy in parallel with a low birth rate is creating a new age structure within our population.
- The continuing migration processes are resulting in a growing percentage of people with different cultural backgrounds, traditions and languages.

By 2030, approximately one third of the Austrian population will be over 60 years of age. The fact that this will have a massive impact on our healthcare and pension system, as well as on the relationship between the generations, has been the subject of debate for quite some time. Stark changes have also been experienced over the past few decades in the educational sector and in the forms in which different generations live together, and this must be addressed and tackled. These developments affect all areas of life and their impact is not merely limited to the traditional sectors (care, support, prevention, etc.). Whilst the task of monitoring and managing these changes constitutes a big challenge, it presents an enormous opportunity at the same time.

The life period that people spend in their post-professional life phase is getting longer. On the one hand this is due to the increasing life expectancy thanks to medical and social progress, whilst on the other hand this results from a “rejuvenation” of old age by dropping out of professional life before reaching actual retirement age.

Nowadays, this long life phase is so varied that it does not justify labelling old age in general as negative in the sense of having little contact with others, being isolated, lonely, inactive, ill and helpless. Older people are often regarded in the context of “care/health” or “support”. This is rooted in a way of thinking based on the antiquated “deficit model” of older people. Older people are still associated with the image of “being a burden in terms of care and support” or are regarded as a cost factor. Even if frailty is a sign of old age that should not be overlooked by educational policy, the image of old age that primarily brings negative aspects to the fore does not correspond to actual modern reality.

There are people in later life who completely reshape their lives; they attend cultural events, travel, study for the first time or again, or share their knowledge and experiences with younger people. In general, they present themselves as mobile and agile and do not think of limiting themselves to the traditional role of retirement. There are, however, people in later life who are limited in their possibilities for participation in social events or in the active planning of their ways of life.

Lifelong learning is an essential condition for an active way of life in later years. Nowadays, the concept of lifelong learning is not restricted to the educational and professional phase. It is no longer only the employed generations that have to adapt to new economic demands through flexible learning who are taken into consideration; today we think of the post-professional life phase as well.

For this post-professional life phase, which constitutes a separate phase of life, a changed conception of education is needed which must, in turn, be reflected in the media and in public opinion.

The understanding must be established that education during and for later life is worthwhile for the individual and society as a whole. People who have an active way of life and are learning are more energetic physically, mentally, and socially.

The following conclusions can be drawn pertaining to Austria:

1. The term “senior citizen” has lost its traditional meaning. Nowadays we speak of the third and fourth age.
2. The “co-existence of generations” is more important than ever, and widely overlapping sectors exist.
3. As a result, it is urgently necessary to look at the “older people” question from a more general perspective rather than reducing it to deficits.
4. This in turn requires that people in later life are not only assigned to “social departments”. Instead, an interconnected way of thinking and acting that combines and re-structures scattered tasks and competences is needed.
5. Special attention should be paid to the different socio-geographic distribution of educational opportunities. At the moment they are limited to urban areas. A “thinning” of educational opportunities available in rural regions limits the possibilities of social participation and must not be allowed to occur.
6. Structural, organisational and financial questions will need to be solved by regional corporate entities in cooperation with key protagonists.
7. From a scientific point of view an interdisciplinary approach is necessary, because a classical cross-sectional issue is at stake which must not be perceived from the viewpoint of any single discipline (e.g. nursing sciences, medical training, sociology, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.).

Definitions

What is understood by lifelong learning or education in later life? What relevance does the experience learning have and what correlation is there between learning and competence?

Education

Educational concepts that go beyond the scope of skills are needed. We learn and think of many things that are not related to our professional activity requirements. We do not only think in a skills-oriented way, but we are also intrinsically motivated to learn. Furthermore, we learn since we are interested in things and because learning improves our activities within society. When considered as such, education is possible in each life phase.

If we learn in an environment that is not geared towards skills, it does not mean that we are not learning in a target-oriented or task-oriented way. It follows that education can be understood as the claim that social cohesion cannot be reduced to market relations.

Education means a broad economic, socio-cultural and political context that requires attention to social participation and active ageing.

The critical dimension of education gives access to enlightenment, promotes maturity, and strengthens the individual and the social decision-making. Education is about strengthening the self-image and the self-perception of people in later life. To enable that to happen, the self-awareness has to be encouraged and made clear.

The main objective of education is not adaptation, integration and retrospection, but rather the idea of balancing the present and the future.

Empirical knowledge

An educational theory that focuses on the special learning conditions of people in later life must measure the complexity of the connection between experiences and systemic knowledge in words. In this context, everyday knowledge or experiences verbalised in interpretations are not to be understood as pre-forms of precise knowledge that need to be overcome. Empirical knowledge that is articulated in interpretations has its specific purpose in life-practice relations. The plausibility and persuasiveness of an experience results from its situation-specific context. It has “proved” itself when overcoming practical problems in life. From this standpoint, the experience is valuable since the person learned something from it. The older the learner, the more significant the presence of experiences in learning processes.

Learning

In a curriculum-oriented observation of learning processes, these can be described and analysed in their procedures as linear or consecutive, transformative or expansive.

Learning processes are **linear**, if it is assumed that learning leads to increased competences which are consecutively acquired.

Learning processes are **transformative**, if they provoke a personal and social change. Transformative learning is about extensive change processes in contrast to learning processes that mean situational adaptations to changed life situations. For that, reflexive, i.e. critical and self-confident, learning is a decisive prerequisite.

Expansive learning refers to a form of self-determined learning in which the individual broadens his/her ability to act through learning. Learning is only expansive, if the individual has certain reasons for it. A practical interest is always necessary for creating the motivation to learn. In this context it is also possible to speak of life-integrated learning, which means that learning does not happen in a life-accompanying way, but instead is integrated into the lifestyle itself.

The term “**Lifelong Education**” was used for the first time by Basil Alfred Yeaxlee in 1929 when describing education as an aspect of daily life. As present culture and society are exposed to changes coming into effect much quicker than ever before, the compulsion for permanent education is intensified.

New experiences that challenge people to participate in educational programmes come from a working environment that uses a great deal of technology, the structural change of urban and rural regions, the change in relationships between genders and generations, and the changes in leisure activities. Therefore, we are now dealing with a changing definition of learning in which the incompleteness and the developmental character particularly stand out.

Formal, non-formal and informal learning

Since the 1970s, there has been a differentiation between “formal learning”, “non-formal learning” and “informal learning”.

On the whole, systematically organised and socially approved learning within the framework of a public education system is known as **formal learning**. Formal learning is intended to lead to formal qualifications (certificates or diplomas). The results of formal learning are characterised and classified according to the ISCED standard (International Standard Classification of Education). There are six levels of formal learning or scholastic education ranging from pre-school to university education.

Non-formal learning is a collective term for all forms of systematic and organised learning outside the formalised educational system. A key characteristic of non-formal learning in countries of the European Union is that it is not usually intended to lead to a certificate or a diploma.

Informal learning is the lifelong processing of experiences and acquisition of skills in everyday life, professional life and leisure time. Informal learning in its target-oriented form serves as a better solution to situational demands. It has a specific value in later life. Informal learning is more geared towards activity. It has a clear practical aspect and therefore has a strong connection to quality of life in later years. Informal learning depends not only on the quality of the basic activity, reflection and creativity of the learners, but also on the potential stimulus and support of the surroundings. Whilst formal learning refers to guidance from teachers and tutors, informal learning refers to an environment that stimulates and supports learning itself.

Competence

In order to present non-formal or informal learning in a standardised way, acquired skills are documented in so-called competence portfolios. For example, the Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke (Association of Educational Unions in Austria) offers a competence portfolio for voluntary workers (www.kompetenz-portfolio.at). The OECD is endeavouring to develop a programme to assess the competences of adults (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences – PIAAC).

Competence can be defined as a pre-condition for learning and, as a result, of learning processes. Competence means the ability to act independently in the respective reference framework – in the private, professional or political field. For questions on learning in later life it is important to differentiate between competences and skills. With regard to old age, the term “competence” is classified as helpful, because it contains a more subject-bound orientation, while the term “skill” refers to objective demand criteria. Competence is bound to people and includes their processed pre-experiences. The term “competence” describes complex, changeable patterns of behaviour. The acquisition of competence or competences refers not only to certain contexts of life, but also opens up to actual biography courses, into which the informal learning is integrated.

Potential participants of lifelong learning in later life

New and diverse learning challenges and settings are necessary to meet the requirements of the differentiation of later life. To facilitate a new learning culture, opportunities are needed that allow active participation by the learners. Educational opportunities that deal with the daily challenges faced by older people (such as technology in everyday life) are necessary in order to reach out to educationally disadvantaged younger people too. Furthermore, opportunities of a meaningful character are needed.

Self-fulfilment and self-determination as objectives of learning in later life do not result from a reproduction of material and knowledge which already exist or from defensive learning. They result from a learning practice based on a broadening of opportunities for individuals to be involved. An awareness of self-perception and the worldview develop from productive learning, which is also the starting point of a subjective quality of life. Self-fulfilment is especially notable in cultural education in later life. The promotion of creatively shaping and dealing with cultural traditions and modern phenomena facilitates the development of personal identity and a social age culture.

Must special target groups be identified for the development of adequate educational opportunities in later life? The target group approach endeavours to consider the special situation of the respective target group in the creation of a learning offer which needs to be tailored to the people concerned in view of their experiences and opportunities for activity right from the very start. This is true of courses dealing with new technologies that consider the specific expectations of people of the third and fourth age. At the end of a learning process, the knowledge gained should have an impact on the everyday activities of the target group. The needs or the effects of discrimination against specific groups constitute the basis for work with target groups. The target group approach becomes visible in education offers that particularly address older people (e.g. English for senior citizens).

The efficiency of target-group-oriented approaches is controversial. Some doubts exist that specific programmes lead to stronger social interaction. Activation programmes can cause or intensify dependence and marginalisation, i.e. the very things that were actually meant to be removed as a result of those programmes. Opponents of the target group approach say that such work would only reach active and interested members of the group leaving other individuals who do not belong to the target group being excluded. However, existing educational practice shows that without any targeted measures, which means that without an age-sensitive educational orientation or "Mainstreaming Ageing", older people are significantly underrepresented in educational processes. A programme that pays particular attention to

the various life environments of older women and men and which has activity-oriented content is needed rather than a programme explicitly oriented towards senior citizens.

An EU project that regards the living situation as a starting point for learning processes can be taken as an example for the consideration of the living environments of educationally disadvantaged older people (please see: www.seelernetz.eu). In this context, learning formats are created that develop and strengthen abilities which facilitate social participation in the residential environment. The project shows very clearly that older people want to shape their living environments but often lack the necessary know-how.

Notably, the reference to the life environment in the education of older people should be developed and extended. Older migrants, people of the third and fourth age, people in need of care, or educationally disadvantaged people participate little or not at all in organised learning opportunities and also learn less often in an informal way. Special incentives are needed – both in the creation of opportunities and the access to them – that increase learning motivation; whether these are learning festivals, a culture sensitive education on ageing or educational counselling, what is important is a stimulation that creates the motivation to learn in the first place.

Paying attention to the cultural diversity in our society is an essential task of education on ageing. Migration has always taken place; it is a necessary part of human development and creates the possibility for exchange processes. Since a significant part of older migrants (will) spend their later life in Austria, appropriate educational opportunities are needed that respond to this development.

Considering the residential and life environment is also very important in the context of the demands of older women living alone. More than 50% of women of the fourth age live alone, making it necessary to connect education with social participation. Positive approaches for that are offered by geragogy and by educational concepts that are aimed at social engagement and networking.

Effects of education in later life

Even as early as the 1970s, it was illustrated that the ability to learn does not generally decrease over the course of one's life, but rather is only reduced with regard to particular factors and content.

Research on old age and ageing shows a range of positive effects thanks to participation in educational opportunities. Education conveys the prerequisites for a healthy lifestyle. Health is not automatically a side effect of wealth, but essentially has to do with educational processes that are again linked to activities. Changes do not happen by themselves. Medical findings highlight the positive effect that continuous mental stimulation has on the preservation of a good state of health. A lower educational level is often linked to serious physical diseases and defects and also to much more pronounced problems resulting from chronic illnesses. These include cardiovascular diseases, strokes, arthritis, dementia and Parkinson's disease. Higher education contributes to lowering the risk of mortality. The longer people attend school, the greater the proportion of women and men without physical disorders.

Neurological studies show that mental training has a positive influence on intellectual abilities. For example, memory loss can be reduced or even reversed. In any case learning leads to changes in the brain structure. Physical activity has an important effect on cognitive ability. Physical activity stimulates the metabolism and the circulation and therefore prevents neuronal tissue damage. Increased physical activity can lead to spontaneous improvement in cognitive performance of up to 35%.

Mental training makes it not only possible to preserve but also to gain new competences. Even abilities and knowledge that were already believed to be lost can be re-gained by older people. Even if those who keep themselves mentally healthy do not attain the cognitive performances they achieved when they were young, they can nevertheless in later life reach a performance level expected of significantly younger people.

This shows that education and a healthy lifestyle keep us fit. To what degree men and women in Europe live a healthy life strongly depends on their income and educational level. Older people with lower educational achievements rarely exercise and suffer more often from weight problems than people of the same age with a higher level school-leaving diploma. That is why education is also part of a preventive health policy. Furthermore, participating in further education programmes leads to social integration, strengthens a positive image of ageing in society, increases physical and mental wellbeing, improves the anticipation and the processing of critical life events, and has a positive impact on civic engagement or voluntary work as appropriate.

Education leads to a development of habits, skills, resources and abilities which contribute to providing (older) people with the opportunity to reach goals important to them as individuals and to effectively shape their lives.

Favourable and hindering factors in current educational participation

In spite of the proven positive effects of learning processes throughout the entire lifecycle, the actual rate of participation in educational programmes in the post-professional life phase is low. This low rate is a result of various factors, whereby the most important variable is the educational level, which means that a lower level school-leaving certificate leads to a lower level of participation in further education programmes. Hindering factors are furthermore a low level of participation in professional training measures, an adverse state of health, a negative image of ageing, a peripheral residential area, or an unfavourable learning biography.

Educational level and participation in education in later life are strongly determined by social background. Individuals who only received a compulsory school-leaving diploma are less likely to participate in further education programmes in the middle and later life phases. It is partly structural factors that lead to an early termination of the school career (income, gender-specific stereotypes), coupled with “demoralisation processes” that may have caused an early “cooling-down” of learning motivation.

The low level of participation of older people in organised learning forms becomes a social and socio-political problem if it results in negative consequences for older people with regard to their chances for social participation.

In dealing with learning involvement in later life, it is important to take a look at it from the educational biography perspective. Empirical studies show a connection between one’s own learning history and the existent or non-existent readiness to learn in later life. In this context it is not only important that positive learning experiences during childhood and adolescence are a favourable prerequisite for later learning processes, but learning in later life very specifically must take into account earlier learning experiences.

Apart from citing the level of school education and one’s own early learning history, newer findings refer to the effects of employment which influence educational participation. People who had a monotonous working life show a lower mental flexibility, whereas people who continuously dealt with new tasks and challenges and gained further skills also seek new tasks after their retirement and preserve their problem-solving ability at an older age too.

Lifelong learning, however, is not only influenced by personality dispositions, social background and environment variables, but also by the images of ageing in society. These are social constructions that emerge and develop in interaction between the individual and society. On the one hand older people contribute with their actions (e.g. through their lifestyle) to the emergence and change of the images of ageing. On the other hand the images of ageing influence the perception and judgement of older people at an individual and a societal level, the shaping of social interactions with them, the expectations for one's own ageing process and the personal life situation in later life. The beginning of the later life phase is generally marked by the date of retirement. This emphasises the central meaning of the welfare state construction of this transition into a new life phase.

It is important to consider with what images of ageing people in later life can identify. The answer to this question determines to what extent older people use their resources for an independent life, to what extent they try to preserve these resources as long as possible through their own activities, and to what extent they see the engagement of other people – i.e. the provision of resources – as a task of personal importance.

Images of ageing that emphasise the positive aspects of age(ing) (e.g. in the sense of increasing professional competence, life competence and social productivity) can broaden the scope of activity for older people. They can contribute to the creation of personally satisfying engagements in self-chosen social roles that are accepted by others. Furthermore, images of old age which focus on the opportunities that it represents increase the probability that objectively existing scopes of action will be recognised by individuals and will be used for the realisation of personally important wishes and demands. Therefore, they also have an encouraging function.

On the contrary, images of old age which emphasise the negative aspects of age(ing) (losing and loss), can contribute to objectively existing ranges of activity not being recognised, opportunities for the realisation of personally important wishes and demands not being seized, and, in the most adverse cases, being permanently lost.

At this point the potentially unfavourable impact of negative images of ageing in the sense of “labelling” should be explicitly discussed. If an old person accepts the messages of a “negative” stereotype on age(ing) (e.g. old = weak, incompetent, isolated), there is the danger that public-labelling or self-labelling as an “old person” could lead to those very characteristics being adopted.

What significance do gender aspects have with regard to leisure time activities and educational participation in later life? Research shows significant gender-specific differences. Women rather give up leisure time activities and hobbies if they clash with other duties such as care duties and other social activities. There are also differences in attitude. Women rather experience the feeling of not having the right to leisure time; they feel guilty and put their leisure needs behind the needs of their family members. For both women and men retirement means a “release from employment”. Men, however, see this as the freedom to choose their leisure time activities, whereas women see their freedom of choice in the fact that they do not have to carry out housework on a specific day or at specific times.

People of the fourth age show an orientation towards their own household when it comes to leisure time and learning activities. This orientation is partly caused by a change of individual needs and partly by a lack of opportunities for activities outside their home. Social withdrawal at an older age becomes significantly visible in corresponding activity profiles. However, not only changed personal needs, but also cohort-related influences such as a lower level of school education or the lack of opportunities or offers for activity are the reasons for that. What has to be considered in offers for more elderly people is the fact that people over 80 rarely have their own car, are generally less mobile, and pay more attention to offers that are connected to direct communication and do not require internet access.

A favourable factor for learning in later life is “dialogic learning”. What does that mean? It is about learning that has to be understood as an interactional event, as an exchange between learners and teachers. Therefore it is necessary to create opportunities and framework conditions that promote social interaction and exchange. In this context it is accepted that learning is not only about clearly defined knowledge; fragmented contents which are not yet verbalised are part of this interactive event as well.

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PROJECT GROUP, CONSULTANTS AND OTHER
PARTICIPATING EXPERTS**

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