

CONCORDIA PROJECT RESULTS: SUM-UP RECOMMENDATIONS ZAK | CENTRE FOR CULTURAL AND GENERAL STUDIES

CONCORDIA - Cooperation, Need for Communication and Resumption of Dialogue in Relation to Age-groups is a project realised within the EU-Grundtvig framework. In cooperation with the Slovak University of Technology, SK, Bratislava, Czestochowa University of Technology, PL, and Karadeniz Technical University, Trabzon, TR, KIT-Partner ZAK worked jointly on improving intergenerational dialogue and learning. The project ran from August 2012 until July 2014. Five international conferences addressed the repercussions and chances of demographic change in the context of education (with a special focus on seniors' and further education), alumni management, economic development, global mega trends and European politics.

Sum-up

While demographic change affects all of European society, the situation and response in each nation state vary and, moreover, are marked by regional disparities. The partner countries engaged in the CONCORDIA project represent the margins of current demographic proportions on the European continent: Slovakia, not unlike Poland and Germany currently have ageing populations in contrast to Turkey, where the share of younger people is larger. However, projections show that the Turkish society will be ageing soon, too. Immigration is the most important factor in changing current demographic situations. For instance, today, Germany is an attractive destination for migrants and refugees. At the same time, many young Slovaks are leaving their country and immigration is far from being relevant in Slovakia. Slovakia and Poland were pioneering countries in developing academic education for seniors; Germany and Turkey are catching up slowly. In all countries, access to and use of ICT skills in the course of the "4th industrial revolution" (Sabina Jeschke) differ. The heterogeneous composition of the project provided a fruitful ground for discussion. Hence, intercultural and intergenerational learning played a constituent role in the course of the project itself. In formulating recommendations for a joint European strategy, it was challenging to exchange knowledge across and within culturally different academic systems: Terms have distinct connotations in respective contexts, the style of academic discussion varies and so do language skills. This self-reflective dimension of presenting and discussing research on and practical experiences of life-long learning was perhaps the most essential outcome of the project. It should be further strengthened by accompanying research.

Based on the joint results of CONCORDIA ZAK proposes the following recommendations to multipliers and decision-makers.

1. POPULATION AGEING AND IMMIGRATION GO TOGETHER.

- **Europe has to sustain its attractiveness.** Ageing societies have to be especially open and welcoming to migrant populations and refugees. To generate an overall welcoming culture, ageing societies must provide skilled training and education to those migrants who lack the required skills. Awareness-raising to counter racist discrimination and social exclusion is essential to render economically less stable countries an attractive destination for migrants and refugees. This includes providing better access to education and social and political participation to ethnic and religious minorities already in place, e.g. Roma communities.
- **Intercultural and intergenerational competencies have to be built – and can be built jointly.** The relation of age-related and ethnic-related forms of discrimination and exclusion must be addressed in research and awareness-raising programmes. In the long term, using the multiple oppression approach currently discriminated and excluded groups can support each other in obtaining equal rights. Intercultural teams and intergenerational teams should become common place in enterprises and require supportive training infrastructures.
 - **Measures:**
 - More comparative research on the interrelations between intercultural and intergenerational competencies, ageism and racism/sexism.
 - Develop and disseminate a clear-cut profile of intergenerational competencies.
 - Develop intercultural-intergenerational training programmes for trainers, teachers, multipliers, HR managers.
 - Include international alumni clubs in on-going concepts of intercultural and intergenerational counselling.
 - Encourage the opening of international exchange programmes for senior students.

2. LIFE-LONG LEARNING MEANS LEARNING FROM ANOTHER GENERATION.

- **Intergenerational learning and life-long learning complement each other.** Life-long learning should be understood as a process that will involve learning in inter-generational settings. To perceive older and younger people as experts in different life contexts will not only counter ageism but also provide an understanding of learning that follows the humanistic ideals instead of being merely oriented towards success. At universities, extra-curricular courses are often attended by senior students and hence provide both an access to life-long learning and to the intergenerational aspect of learning.
- **Life-long learning is interdisciplinary learning.** Interdisciplinary courses providing key competencies and access to knowledge outside the students' specialist discipline give students the opportunity to learn in a heterogeneous environment. To counter the growing specialisation and adapt students at a young age to the quickly-changing requirements of the labour market extra-curricular courses are essential. However, the pressure on students in the fast-track studies of post-Bologna universities is rising still. To enable students to appreciate interdisciplinary learning they have to be encouraged to choose outside their subjects and provide their own knowledge as experts while at the same time learning from others, with others and about others.
- **Learning as a public science commitment.** Public science events and formats are an established way to provide access to cutting-edge research. Moreover, in the sense of responsible research and innovation, they involve citizens in discussing the impact of research on societies. Because the audience often consists of students and seniors, they are an arena for intergenerational dialogue. This untapped potential should be used for research on how to improve intergenerational learning situations.
 - **Measures**
 - Research is needed on what seniors and young students expect of an intergenerational learning situation.
 - Older people should be invited as experts to kindergartens, pre-schools, schools and universities.
 - Vice versa, children and younger people should be invited as experts/teachers to seniors learning institutions.
 - Students should be encouraged to take interdisciplinary extra-curricular classes – open to senior students, too.
 - Public Science events should be looked into as arena for intergenerational learning and dialogue.
 - Social media and smart technologies will become even more important for intergenerational learning and are viable subjects for intergenerational learning.

3. IT'S THE ECONOMY...

- ***Make working longer more attractive.*** Age discrimination of employees and jobless older than 40 or 50 has to be addressed by considering the options of anonymous application procedures and quota. Moreover, the business sector has to become aware of the potential older employees have because of their occupational experience and as bearers of the corporate tradition. For instance, senior employees can be consulted as experts for corporate development and innovation. To keep and use the potential that older employees provide enterprises must facilitate the transition period between late work life and retirement. Knowledge transfer has to be a part of transition strategies.
- ***Protect older people from poverty and social isolation.*** Access to life-long learning has to be open to seniors with little or no pensions. Non-formal settings drawing on intergenerational learning approaches should be developed and strengthened. These could involve exchanging services between generations, for example child-care in exchange for ICT help and support.
- ***Coping with uncertainty.*** Research and public dialogue should raise the question of how younger and intermediate generations handle the uncertain future that is awaiting them. Public discussions should collect the most central problems and needs younger generations are facing and provide opportunities for older members of societies to recommend strategies and share experiences. Especially in societies where a large majority of the population has experienced the change in the political system after the end of the Soviet Union, a lot of untapped tacit knowledge about how to cope with political and social uncertainty within older generations is deemed to be available.
- ***Involve alumni in education – for younger and senior students.*** Intergenerational career counselling services for younger students involve alumni teaching single classes. Furthermore, alumni could become consultants for curricular developments both in Universities of the Third Age and regular universities.
 - **Measures**
 - Comparative research on how (older) people would like to spend time in retirement, with regard to intercultural and intergenerational differences.
 - Raise social standard and develop community-based measures in countries and regions with low pension rates and for people without pensions.
 - Use the cultural and social capital alumni provide.
 - Universities have to provide better assistance for students entering the labour market – alumni can be helpful here, too.