

*EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS WITH AN  
INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION FOR SENIORS IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE PROMOTION  
OF CULTURAL HERITAGE*

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**Abstract**

Places that were and are scenario of our lives, are an intrinsic part of our identity, individual and collective. Both Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage are constitutive elements of our way of life. The Senior University, the university program for older adults of the University of A Coruña, develops educational initiatives with an international dimension that promote knowledge of their own identity, but from a European and international perspective, through unique projects and initiatives that have the active participation of the students. This article will describe several experiences that, under the Erasmus + Program of the European Union, promote knowledge of Cultural Heritage among older adults in an international context.

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## Keywords

Educational Programmes. International Dimension. Third Age University.

## 1 Introduction

We understand Cultural Heritage as expression of the lifestyles developed by a community, which pass from generation to generation, and which include both tangible and intangible heritage: traditions, customs, practices, objects, artistic expressions and values. Furthermore, within the Cultural Heritage, UNESCO includes the built environment (buildings, urban landscapes, archaeological remains), objects (books and documents, artifacts, artistic productions), or the natural environment (rural landscapes, coastlines, agricultural heritage).

From this conception of Cultural Heritage, the Senior University, the University Program for people over 50 of the University of Coruna (Spain), has developed this subject in recent years in various training initiatives and educational projects with an international dimension that are conveyed through a so-called European Workshop.

The University of A Coruna (UDC) launched the Senior University in 2001, with its own curriculum for people over 50 which aims to promote personal development, the empowerment of older people and an active citizenship. Currently there are about 1,000 students at the UDC Senior University in two cities (A Coruna and Ferrol), 40 university professors and 6 management and administrative staff.

From 2003, the so-called European Workshop promotes the values of European identity and citizenship among older adults. The workshop is co-funded by projects from the European Commission, under the Socrates Program (2003-2006), the Lifelong Learning Program (2007-2013) and currently the Erasmus + Program.

The Erasmus + Program of the European Union supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe. With a budget of 14.7 billion euros, it offers to more than 4 million Europeans the opportunity to study, train and gain experience abroad. The Erasmus program offers opportunities to a wide variety of people and organizations, and covers the entire spectrum of Lifelong Learning, from school to adult education, through higher education and vocational training. Three Key Actions develop the international dimension of the Erasmus + Program (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2020): Mobility of individuals

(key action 1); cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices (key action 2); and support for policy reform (key action 3). Multilingualism is one of the cornerstones of the European project, therefore, the learning of foreign languages plays a prominent role among the skills that are promoted.

### 1.1 Participation of the Senior University in the Erasmus + Program of the European Union

Since 2003 the Senior University has been actively involved in the development of different European projects. Some of the projects of the last 5 years that have developed themes related to Cultural Heritage will be briefly described below.

*ProHospiz* Strategic Partnership (2014-1 – DE02 – KA204-001583) was a consortium of five countries that aimed to study the different ways of facing the last stages of life in different cultural contexts. Mediterranean Europe and Eastern Europe were compared both from the individual and family point of view and from the point of view of institutions, with the economic and values background as the basis to explain the cultural differences found in the way of facing death (GARCÍA, 2016).

*IDEMASAP 50+ – Increase and development of manual skills and physical vitality of citizens of the European Union over 50 years* (2018-1-SK01-KA204-046291) project is also a Strategic Partnership in the adult education sector, which is currently under development. The objective of this project is the exchange of good practices between adult education institutions in Spain, Portugal, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland for the analysis and promotion of manual skills and physical vitality in older adults.

The previous projects were complemented with a national consortium of University Programs for Older Adults that aimed to improve the training of trainers in innovative learning techniques. It was co-funded through Key Action 1: *ICT Tac +55 – Combined Learning Techniques of ICT for seniors 55 years old* (2017-1-ES01-KA104-037163). With this project, a set of improvements were obtained both in the professional competences of the participating personnel (in their knowledge and application of educational methodologies, social and linguistic competences, etc.), and in that of their students, by applying more innovative techniques tending to stimulate the learning of ICT in older adults. To ensure the dissemination of the skills acquired, workshops were held for stakeholders and a manual was prepared as the final compendium of the project (DELGADO, 2020).

## 1.2 International bilateral agreements with adult education institutions

Following participation in European educational projects, the Universidade Sénior has developed a network of contacts that has led to the establishment of bilateral relations with some of the institutions that have participated as partners in such projects:

1. *HET Perspectief*, Ghent (Belgium), from 2008 to 2018, different projects have been developed to promote European culture, mainly around literature themes.

2. *Università del Tempo Libero*, Scandiano (Emilia Romagna – Italy). Some joint training activities are: *After the hits of Quixote – Sulle orme di Don Chisciotte*, (2014-2015); *ECHO – O Nome da Rosa* (2016-2017); and between 2018 and 2020, the initiatives related to Sustainability and Cultural Heritage, called CONATURE and L.A.N.D.

3. Senior Universities of Portugal: the *Universidade da Grande Idade de Rio Tinto – UGIRT*, the *Universidade Sénior e Autodidacta* from Felgueiras, the *University Program for Seniors* of the University of Porto, and since 2019, the *ILP 60+ Program* of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria. Collaboration with these Portuguese partners ranges from conducting academic and cultural exchanges, to the active involvement of students and teachers in joint projects such as the On-Line Poetry Club *En-RED-Versad@s*, dedicated since its 2<sup>nd</sup> edition to Lusophony poetry and that we will describe later.

## 2 Objectives

The general and common objectives of all the international initiatives developed in the UDC University Senior Program are:

1. To promote active European citizenship among senior students.
2. To acquire new knowledge and skills with an active and participatory methodology.
3. To improve the skills and competences already acquired by the students.
4. To strengthen attitudes and abilities: learn to learn, and learn to share.
5. To adjust to the needs and potential of each individual learner.

### 3 Method<sup>(1)</sup>

A workshop called *European Workshop* conveys the international dimension of the Universidade Sénior. The aim is to promote intercultural values, collaborative work, and empowerment of active European citizens, through foreign languages and ICT training, both with an instrumental nature<sup>3</sup>.

#### 3.1 Participants

In the 2019-2020 academic year, the distribution by sex of the students at the Senior University (N= 987), shows a higher percentage of women (74%). The distribution by age is as follows: 28% are under 65; 65% are between 65 and 75 years; and 7% over 75 years.

Since 2003, 724 students have been involved in the European Workshop (67% women), and 335 students and staff have participated at least in one international mobility (70% women). Every year, two trainers lead the Workshop but there are also some invited faculty to perform lectures.

In the last academic year 2018-2019, the Workshop was composed of 43 students (81% women). The age group distribution was: 4.6% from 50 to 59; 48.8% from 60 to 69; and 46, 5% from 70 to 79. Their educational level was: 6% received only primary education, 36% secondary education and 58% had university studies.

#### 3.2 Description of the European Workshop

For the development of the academic activities of the Workshop, an active and participative methodology based on the idea of “Learning to Learn, and Learning to Share” is used, as well as a blended learning methodology, combining face-to-face learning with an individual approach in which students have to search, process and share information using ICT. Heinze and Procter (2004) define blended learning as learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of communication, teaching models, and learning styles. The learning methodology in the European Workshop includes group work and individual work, master classes, practical sessions and field trips, as well as individual tutorials. The group come together at least for two hours sessions every fortnight.

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3 This research has been done according to the UDC Ethical Code of Research (UDC, 2019).

In addition to the contents of each edition of the European Workshop, which are derived from the themes of each of the projects or international initiatives in which the Senior University is involved, there are common areas every year: training in research techniques, communication skills and skills for working in teams, foreign languages learning and ICT training. In addition, emphasis is placed on specific training in *Peer Learning*, understanding that the principles of peer learning are based on similar collaborative and active learning techniques in an interactive social context. The peer learning methodology empowers students for performing cooperative learning activities, promoting creativity, critical thinking and the active participation of all students.

The main ICT tools currently used are blogs and social networks (especially Facebook). Blogs represent an important tool to promote the use of ICT and to facilitate communication between staff and students. As for social networks, they are an increasingly common communication channel also among our students.

Regarding the specific contents, in the last two editions of the European Workshop two simultaneous lines of work have been developed:

1. *Cultural Heritage, Landscape, Memory and Sustainability*. Within the framework of bilateral collaboration agreements with the *Università del Tempo Libero* in Scandiano (Italy), the *Senior Sustainability* initiative was launched, bringing together work on four closely related axes: Cultural Heritage, Landscape, Memory and Sustainability.

The year 2018 was declared as the European Year of Cultural Heritage, understood as an expression of the lifestyles that have been developed by a community and transmitted from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural Heritage includes both the material and the immaterial (ICOMOS, 2002). Landscapes are part of both the natural heritage and the spaces of our memory, which through the subjective construction of natural reality, affect the memory and interpretation of those landscapes.

Based on the previous premises, we proposed an activity in the European Workshop to work our memory through the significant landscapes of our life. To do so, the students chose photos from their family albums and took new photos located in the same landscapes of their memory, trying to maintain the same focus and perspective as in the original old photo. Thus, the changes in the landscape and in the cultural heritage, as well as the causes of those changes were identified, through a personal research work of the students. Discussion groups reflected on the right to a sustainable landscape and our

cultural heritage, and our obligation to preserve them. This reflection was framed in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and specifically, in the following goals:

1. Goal 11, make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
2. Goal 12, ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
3. Goal 13, take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
4. Goal 14, conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
5. Goal 15, protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

For the right development of these tasks, students received training in various ICT tools: digital image capture and processing techniques, and geo-location. In addition, they had talks by experts in sustainability and SDGs, and the work in the classroom was complemented with field trips. This line of work was also connected to the *IDEMASAP 50+* project, since it addresses the increase of manual skills in senior European citizens. To do this, the students participated in 4 two-hour sessions in which the old photographs were transferred to other surfaces such as wood and canvas. For the development of these manual skills sessions, a peer-learning methodology was used as described in Garcia and Ascón (2009).

Results: The relationship between the landscape, the cultural heritage and our own and common cultural identity (Galician and European) was reflected in an exhibition of photographs at local (A Coruna) and international level in international meetings in Almansa (Spain) and Brno (Czech Republic), accompanied by a public presentation by the students.

In addition, the work of the students was published in a blog designed for the European Workshop 2018-2019, and which will continue to be updated in the current academic year 2019-2020 (<https://seniorsustainability.wordpress.com/>). Both the files made by the students, as well as an online map that geo-locates each of the landscapes or samples of cultural heritage, were published on the blog, along with a short video with the photographs recovered and shared during the academic year.

As result of the project, training support materials will be created: a guide to good practices and a series of short video-tutorials so that they can be replicated in any training institution for older adults.

2. *Online Poetry Club "En-RED-Versad@s"*. The second initiative that we are going to describe focuses on intangible heritage, and is derived from the participation of the Senior University between 2013 and 2015, as an associate

partner of the Project *ACTing – Social Agents Promoting Active Aging through ICT*, under the action Leonardo da Vinci of the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Commission. The objective of the project was to spread the best practices in teaching methodology in the field of aging and digital inclusion. The Universidade Senior promoted two unique technological initiatives: 1) *Speak Speare – Falemos con William* (Talk to William) for the improvement of English language skills through ICT (ACTING, 2015), and 2) Online Poetry Club *En-RED-Versad@s*, a unique technological initiative to promote basic skills in the field of ICT by reading poetry from an intercultural perspective and with an international dimension. The *En-RED-Versad@s* initiative continues to be part of the contents of the European Workshop.

With the online poetry club, we aim to increase motivation regarding ICT learning through three cultural elements: 1) Poetry as a manifestation of diversity, dialogue, and the free circulation of ideas through the word, of creativity and innovation as has been declared by UNESCO; 2) the international dimension of the initiative through the participation of other adult education institutions in Belgium and Portugal; 3) the approach to Lusophony, taking into account the *Valentín Paz-Andrade Law* (LEI 1/2014, of March 24, for Promoting Portuguese Language) aimed at progressively incorporating the learning of the Portuguese language in Galicia and encouraging relations with Portuguese-speaking countries.

Results: The ICT skills acquired in *En-RED-Versad@s* included creating user accounts on a blogging platform, searching for information (text, images, videos...) on the Internet, and writing and publishing posts with text, images, videos and links (<https://enredversados.wordpress.com/>).

Throughout the approximately five years of existence of the *En-RED-Versad@* online Poetry Club, the participating students have shared more than 700 entries and received more than 128,000 visits from more than 87,000 unique visitors.

#### 4 Conclusions

Older people are the voice of memory, and their experiences can complement history and teach us how customs and ways of life evolve and how many aspects of our identity are conditioned and enriched by the past. The places where we grow and age, shape our identity and are inherent components of our culture, one inferring the other (TAYLOR, 2008).



Studying Cultural Heritage can also be a motivating element to introduce digital skills in the generation that experiences a greater digital gap. The integration of digital tools in the classroom must always be done in a meaningful way, considering the objectives and the context, as well as the needs of the students. Including an international dimension in educational programs for older adults encourages learning activities and also the construction of an inclusive society.

The Erasmus + program with its possibilities of financing in lifelong learning programs is an optimal tool to break the digital gap and at the same time to make it easier for European citizens to learn about and benefit from the knowledge that older adults possess of our Cultural Heritage.

*PROJETOS EDUCACIONAIS COM DIMENSÃO  
INTERNACIONAL PARA IDOSOS NO ENSINO  
SUPERIOR NA PROMOÇÃO DO PATRIMÔNIO  
CULTURAL*

Resumo

Os lugares que foram e são o cenário de nossas vidas constituem uma parte intrínseca de nossa identidade, individual e coletiva. Tanto o patrimônio cultural quanto o patrimônio natural são elementos constitutivos de nosso modo de viver. A Universidade Sênior, programa universitário para idosos da Universidade da Corunha, desenvolve iniciativas educacionais de dimensão internacional que promovem o conhecimento da identidade de uma perspectiva europeia e internacional, por meio de projetos e iniciativas exclusivas que têm a participação ativa dos alunos. Este artigo expõe várias experiências que, no âmbito do programa Erasmus + da União Europeia, promovem o conhecimento do patrimônio cultural entre idosos em um contexto internacional.

Palavras-chave

Programas Educacionais. Dimensão Internacional. Universidade da Terceira Idade.

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