EDITORIAL BY ANNE RABILLER

To become the reference point within the European Union for developments in lifelong learning and enablement for ageing people with sensory disabilities in order to maintain their independence and to improve their quality of life: that is the slogan for SensAge.

The number of ageing people is increasing quickly in Europe and, as more people get older, more people have the risk of living with sensory impairments.

Through our international cooperation, we know that some initiatives already exist in EU countries. The overall objective of SensAge is to gather best practices, materials, innovative tools and services concerning developments for ageing people with sensory disabilities, and to become the reference point in terms of knowledge and expertise in this field.

The question of ageing is now an issue of public health in all EU countries. Accordingly, SensAge has to demonstrate that the best practices in Europe should respond to the problem of dependency, inevitable with many elderly people, which is also a big issue for policy makers and professionals in the field of ageing.

SensAge will become a resource to enable ageing people to maintain their independence and quality of life, and for policy makers and professionals to develop their responses to increasing financial issues.

SensAge network held its kick-off meeting in Angers (France) in October 2011 with 14 partners from Europe and Canada.

During its 3 year lifespan, the partners will work together to gather all the information concerning this field, and the network will ensure the dissemination of this information via a web database, developed by our own partners. The network will also seek to ensure its sustainability after the end of EC funding.

The strong partnership within SensAge is the strong basis of the network, to fulfill our aim to become the reference point in Europe concerning developments for ageing people with sensory disabilities.

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It is already a well-known fact that people in Europe are aging rapidly. According to the latest researches of the World Health Organization (WHO) the median age of the Europeans is the highest in the world and the proportion of people aged 65 and older is forecast to increase from 14% in 2010 to 25% in 2050. Thanks to the positive developments in health treatment and social achievements, today people in Europe are living longer but their chances of spending these later years in good health and well-being vary between countries and in accordance with their health status.

These developments in longevity can be considered as an extraordinary achievement but they also will be a great challenge for the future: ensuring the quality of life of an unprecedentedly large elderly population. In particular, for social and health service providers, as well as families and policy makers at both national and European levels this phenomenon represents various problems that needs to be solved but also many opportunities. Most citizens feel that people aged 55 years and older play a major role in key aspects of society-family, politics, in the community and the economy. Opinions are divided as to whether in the future they should play more of a role or the same role as now in each of the areas, but those aged 55 years and over tend to feel they should have more of a role.

In order to address these demographic changes the European Union declared 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. The year is intended to raise awareness of the contribution that older people make to society. It seeks to encourage policymakers and relevant stakeholders at all levels to take action with the aim of creating better opportunities for active ageing and strengthening solidarity between generations.

One of the very serious aspects of those demographic changes in Europe that needs to be addressed is the quality of life of people with disabilities. In the framework of the research done for the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, launched in December 2010, the European Commission has identified persons with disabilities and elderly people as being at high risk of falling into poverty and social exclusion. This means that elderly people with disabilities are facing double disadvantages and risks in society. Elderly persons with disabilities are also more likely to live in residential institutions and often do not have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and with whom they would like to live. The adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006, which promotes quality of life, choice and inclusion in society of people with disabilities, has already marked a huge step forward to launch the discussions and create awareness at political level. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in order to meet the needs of older persons with disabilities and to ensure their inclusion in society.

During the last years EASPD brought the discussion on the special needs of elderly persons with disabilities on the political agenda by organizing and participating in various events and projects dedicated to the topic.
In 2010 we also launched a Special Interest group on Independent living which aims at promoting community based services for persons with disabilities, including ageing people. Most recently, in January 2012, EASPD contributed to the cause of promoting independent living for ageing people with disabilities by summarizing in the “Linz declaration” the most important recommendations required to correctly implement the UNCRPD and the policies needed when developing more inclusive society and high quality support systems. The declaration is based on the outcomes of the EASPD’s conference “Old? So what? Independent living for seniors with disabilities” which took place in July 2011 in Linz, Austria. To read the declaration click here.

Within SensAge project EASPD will draft two reports and three policy papers which will help feed the policy debates at National and EU level on the challenges represented by an ageing population with sensory impairments, and on the way to make sure that elderly people with sensory impairments can fully enjoy their rights as citizens thanks to lifelong learning processes.

If you would like to learn more about Active Ageing and the European initiatives addressing the topic you may visit the following links:

- Linz declaration
- European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations
- World Health Organization Europe- Active Ageing
- Age Platform Europe


A cross border comparative study of the vision related quality of life of urban and rural dwelling people aged 60 years and older who are registrable as vision impaired in Ireland.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
School of Medicine, Health & Life Sciences
Queen’s University Belfast
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December 2008
This research seeks to evaluate the effects of visual impairment on people aged 60 and over on the island of Ireland, so that service providers can prepare appropriate and effective health care strategies in light of changing demographics. Participants for this study were selected from the registers of vision impaired persons in the Republic and North of Ireland. A total of 343 people who met the inclusion criteria were recruited to the study.

Interviews, averaging 1.75 hour's duration, were conducted with 222 consenting participants. In addition, 121 vision impaired individuals agreed to participate in 14 focus groups. This allowed the researcher to explore further issues raised during individual interviews. A focus group was held with frontline professionals. QOL scores are better in the Republic of Ireland than in Northern Ireland. Those living in Republic of Ireland (Dublin/urban) scored highest while those living in Northern Ireland (Belfast/urban) scored worst in every domain for QOL. Over 50% were living alone and 73% reported difficulty in getting around. Fear of falling was experienced by 73%, 64% had fallen and over 60% had received injuries as a result of their fall. Only 12.6% had received full formal mobility training. Dependency on family support was high, particularly for transport.

The implications of these findings highlight the challenges ahead for service providers and policy makers in meeting the needs of this growing population.
Definition of «Life Long Learning» was proposed by Lengrand, Paul in 1965 at the UNESCO forum states;

"Life Long Learning (LLL) describes Education without age limits. Education and learning should expand to contain the whole life of a person, all skills and all knowledge areas, to use all possible mediums to give all people the opportunity to develop their personalities".

Paul Lengrand describes the concept of lifelong education in his book "An introduction to lifelong education". The author, a theorist and practitioner in adult education, he suggests how lifelong education can be promoted and highlights some of the problems it involves. The idea of LLL has stimulated to find new special techniques, forms, and training and retraining of all ages. And this idea was the basis for development of the project "Lifelong Learning Needs for Ageing People with Sensory Disabilities" (SensAge). The aim of the project is to become the reference point within the European Union for developments in lifelong learning and enablement for ageing people with sensory disabilities in order to maintain their independence and to improve their quality of life. The program LLL implies that the learning can be organized at home, at work and in leisure time, using all forms of media and modern technologies of distance education.

What is lifelong learning in the modern sense? We interviewed the employee of the Institute of Open Education - Andrei Markov, PhD. Today, it's not a secret that modernization should cover all aspects of life. Of course, this process must begin with education.

L. Plastunova. Andrei tell please, how far you've gone through in education?
A. Markov. I graduated school for children with visual impairment. I have Usher syndrome – I’m blind and partially hearing. A feature of this syndrome is that people have difficulties in orientation, communication, and access to information. However, these people can be kept without any changes to the verbal speech. I’m enjoy hearing aids. In 70-s I went to the University, Faculty of Philosophy. It was a laborious process that was associated with changes in the rate of hearing perception. Ultimately, the intermediate goal was achieved: I received “red” diploma, in which all estimates were "excellent." After the University, I entered in post graduated coerces. The theme of dissertation was "The historical fact as a problem of methodology of scientific knowledge."

L. Plastunova. Andrei, you have learned so much, while experiencing some difficulties. You have not lost the desire to improve your education?
A. Markov. It is clear that after graduation the process of education does not stop – because the reading of books is continuing. Reading allows you to obtain information from various areas of knowledge. Reading is an active prerequisite for the education. Education - is raising the cultural level at the same time, such as theaters, concert halls. Finally, education - it’s a journey. During the travel we do not entertain only, but also learn something new about the history of the country, its culture, try to imagine ourselves in a new cultural and historical space.

L. Plastunova. Andrei, can you use a computer? If "yes", then what features you gain through the computer for yourself?
A. Markov. Yes, computer skills with Braille displays is important in my life. Computer for me - it is a source of information: I write text, edit, send e-mails, as well as get new information, including through the global network "Internet". However, currently there is a process of constant renewal both of the computers and software. That requires the user updating the knowledge in this area. Blindness and hearing impaired can not be the justification to use older programs - this is a cruel law of globalization. But the user's own efforts are not enough. We need a teaching support.

L. Plastunova. That is, you would like to continue education in computer courses?
A. Markov. Yes, I feel it necessary.

L. Plastunova. Of course, computer skills, not only will enhance lifelong learning for people with sensory disabilities, but in many respects improve their quality of life.

ICEVI-Europe supports the program of lifelong learning and is actively involved in the project SensAge.

One of the forms presenting the results of the project will be the Annual Conferences.

The first conference will be held next year. 2012 is the EU Year of Active Ageing.

Please follow of the announcement on the ICEVI-E website: www.icevi-e.org

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