Enhancing the Social and Digital Participation of Older People

O1: Fact Sheet

National report for Lithuania

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1. Introduction

The demographic development calls for measures to enable older people to live autonomously and shape living environments in a way that their independence and the social participation is supported. Simultaneously, the transformative power of digitalisation is visible in almost every field of our society. The speed of digital development is going that fast that even younger seniors cannot keep up the pace. New knowledge and skills are needed to be able to fully participate in society. It is highly important that we reduce the digital gap that divides certain groups (e.g. older people) from those with full access to the digital world. The *Bridge the Gap!* project aims to create age-friendly neighbourhoods and reduce the digital divide between generations by developing trainings that empower and train older people to explore, analyse and (re)shape their neighbourhoods with the help of digital tools.

The Intellectual Output of the research phase is the Bridge the Gap! Fact Sheet. It is a basis for the partnership as regards content as well as for the promotion, dissemination and implementation of the project. The Bridge the Gap! Fact Sheet aims to inform about the subject older people in the digital era as well as interesting best-practice examples of participation in older age – with a focus on age-friendly environments and ICT. This national report for Lithuania describes the research activities and summarises the main findings to be included in the Bridge the Gap! Fact Sheet, as well as fruitful training settings and content for the development of the training.

2. Methodology and proceedings

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aims, the following methods were applied:

- Desk research in each country concerning approaches to age-friendly environments, perspectives on the topic “digitalisation and demography”, best-practice examples as well as training settings and contents.
- Interviews in each partner country with stakeholders, experts and representatives of the target group for the training.

The desk research focused on the following issues:

- Political and practical approaches to age-friendly environments (at national, regional and local level)
- Policies and strategies regarding digitalisation and demography (at national, regional and local level)
- Facts and figures related to digitalisation and demography
- Best-practice examples in co-producing age-friendly environments with the facilitation of digital means

Lead questions for interviews with experts and stakeholders as well as for potential training participants ("learners") were agreed upon in the kick-off meeting (see Annex 1 and Annex 2). Regarding the experts, the interview questions have been adapted to the functions, expertise and personal background of the interviewees.

The potential experts were selected after doing the desk research and finding the research articles or media publications on the topics of "Bridge the gap" project. The selected experts were approached by e-mail with a request for permission to be contacted by phone. The introductory e-mail contained the project info sheet and a list of questions for the experts. Seven experts gave a positive response. The experts represented the following institutions: Vilnius University Faculty of Communication Department of Digital Cultures and Communication (head of department, female), Vilnius Gediminas Technical University Faculty of Creative Industries (lecturer, male), Five Continents Group (CEO and chairman, male), Kaunas Public Library Šilainiai Branch (Librarian, female), Kaunas European Capital of Culture 2022 (Coordinator of community programme "All like one", female), European Innovations Centre (project manager, female), Employment Information Centre for Women (researcher and trainer, female). Three experts were interviewed by phone and four experts sent written answers to the questions after a short explanatory conversation by phone.

Five active seniors were interviewed: two by phone and three sent their answers in writing. All active seniors interviewed were women of the age group 60–75 with the education level ranging from 4 to 6. One of them is a leader of the local community club, and one is a member of the Local Action Group of Kaunas region.

3. Research results

3.1 Political and practical approaches to age-friendly environments

The increase in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy, as well as high socio-economic activity of the elderly population, are indicators of the state's progress and effective adaptation to the trends of demographic ageing. The National Progress Program 2014-2020, summarising the analysis of Lithuania's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, identifies ageing as one of the threats that reduces the need for education and increases the need for health care services.

The Government's program (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2020) declares that older people are valued as a great asset, thus recognising, at the national level, the need to respond to population ageing. The provisions of the Lithuanian legal framework regarding older people are aimed at compensating for the reduced purchasing power of this age group, reducing their vulnerability in the labour market and social exclusion. Older population related legal framework mainly provides for additional rights and benefits in the field of employment, social security and public transport.

In the field of social security, older age is considered to be one of the factors of increased risk of economic and social exclusion. Lithuanian legislation provides for various support measures in response to reduced earnings, deteriorating health in older age: 80 % compensation for the basic cost of medicines and medical aids, sanatorium-spa treatment for pensioners is provided by the Health Insurance Act; the Law on Transportation provides for a 50 % discount to passengers aged 70+ and 80 % discount to passengers aged 80+. Provisions of the employment legal framework aim to help older people to remain longer in the labour market. The Law on Civil Service provides an opportunity for civil servants, who have reached the age of 65 and are dismissed from public service, to transfer their experience under a two-year mentoring contract. The Employment Act provides for the training support or supported employment measures for the unemployed persons 50+ to facilitate their integration into the labour market.

According to the Government Strategic Analysis Centre's report "Ageing Lithuanian Society 2020" (Strata, 2020), there is a lack of integrated horizontal approach of the state to the challenges of population aging in Lithuania at the strategic level. Issues related to the ageing society are addressed in a fragmented way, the goals and objectives are often duplicated, resources are often dispersed in strategic documents at various levels and duration in the fields of health, social protection, employment and education, and older people are seen as one of the most vulnerable groups in the society. It appears probable that greater awareness of the aging society issues and revealing the potential opportunities would help to focus more public attention and improve the quality of life of older people and economic growth prospects and, subsequently, the values of respective indicators in the EU context.

After the parliamentary elections were held in Lithuania on 25 October 2020, a coalition of two centre-right and one centre parties was formed. On 11 December 2020 the programme of the 18th government was approved by the Seimas. There is no term "age-friendly environments" in the new Government Programme (Seimas, 2020). Older age-population is mentioned in the chapters on the Compatibility of Interests (interests of all groups must be met), Health (development of technologies helping to meet the demographic challenges in healthcare) and Physical Activity (creating favourable conditions for older citizens to engage regularly in physical activities), Social Care (indexation of pensions), and Employment (the priority will be given to increasing the employment of long-term unemployed, the youth, women, older persons, residents of certain regions, people with disabilities and from certain social groups). The Government's programme contains two important initiatives in the context of age-friendly environments: seniors' education vouchers and silver start-up packages. The action plans and measures for implementing these initiatives have not been announced yet.

On 4 March 2020 the Minister for Social Security and Labour initiated an online public discussion with older persons (socialinių reikalų ir darbo ministerija, 2021). The discussion covered the most relevant topics at present: the challenges of the pandemic, pensions, access to services, more active participation of older people in cultural and community life, activities of non-governmental

organizations, the need for and access to emotional and psychological support. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour financially supports various projects that promote active and healthy lifestyle of older people, support to lonely seniors, intergenerational solidarity, voluntary activities, lifelong learning to increase the employment of older people, mutual assistance. Older people have opportunities to learn and gain new skills in the Universities of Third Age (U3A), multifunctional centres, libraries where ICT literacy courses are organized. There are more than 60 U3A all over the country. Most of public libraries in the country provide special digital literacy training for older people, give consultations on the use of public electronic services (e.g. e-health, e-government gateways, etc.). To date, the participation rates of older people in Lithuania are relatively low. Only about 11 % of older people are actively engaged in public activities, whereas the average participation rate in the EU is as high as 27%. The rector of Medardas Čobotas U3A Zita Žebrauskienė proposed to establish a Seniors Council at the Ministry of Social Security and Labour that would advise and consult in the preparation of action plans in the field of ageing. Meanwhile the priorities are given on responding to COVID 19 challenges.

3.2 Findings on digitalisation and demography

3.2.1 Status quo of demography and digitalisation

At the start of 2021 the population of Lithuania was 2.8 million, of these 1.9 million living in the cities and 9.1 thousand in rural municipalities. Almost 20% of Lithuanian population (5.6 thousand) are older than 65 years. In December 2020 the average social insurance pension was EUR 376.23. One out of 10 pensioners continues working after the retirement age (Lietuvos Statistika, 2020).

In January 2021, 104 238, or almost 17% persons in the age group 50-65 were unemployed. According to the information of the Employment Office, almost 56.4 % of registered jobseekers lack digital competences (Tarcijonaitė, 2020).

Loreta Križinauskienė, director of the alliance Langas į ateitį (Window to the Future), which plays a leading role in the development of the information society in Lithuania (Zdramys, 2020), states that the problem of poor digital literacy skills is relevant not only among job seekers, but also among all middle-aged and older Lithuanians. She explains that the older generation did not have the opportunity to master smart technologies in a formal way or organically, as the young generation does nowadays, so their digital literacy level is not sufficient. Therefore, many older people cannot access e-government services, make online appointments or use online banking. She says there are many positive examples of people finding a job after digital skills training courses because poor digital skills were a barrier in job seeking. Besides, digital skills must be developed not only for participation in the labour market, but also to ensure the quality of life.

Lithuania ranks 14th among 28 EU Member States in the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020, which measures Member States' digital progress across five dimensions: connectivity (rank

19), human capital (rank 18), use of internet services (rank 13), integration of digital technology (rank 10), and digital public services (rank 6) (European Commission, 2020).

According to the DESI 2020 country report, the digital agenda strategy in Lithuania aims to reduce the digital divide by encouraging people to develop new skills in ICT. The latest update of the strategy places even more emphasis on this goal, and emphasises reaching out to rural, older, disabled and lower-income residents.

3.2.2 Areas of application of ICT by older citizens

Compared to the EU average, Lithuanians' online activities rank higher for news, banking, video calls, social networking as well as for music, videos and games. Lithuanians are below the EU average in using the internet for video-on-demand, selling online and shopping. The proportion of people who have never used the internet is decreasing but remains higher than the EU average (15% versus 9% in the EU) (European Commission, 2020).

According to the Statistics Lithuania, 83% of Lithuanians used internet in 2020. Older people (age groups 55-64 and 65–74) used ICT for the following purposes (Lietuvos Statistika, 2020a): communication (e-mails, calls) (62.2%; 37,5%), search for information about goods and services (58.4%; 33.5%), read news (63.6%; 41.2%), search for health related information (50.1%; 31.1%), online banking (50.5%; 23.8%), use online learning material (8.8; 2.4), online communication with teachers and learners for learning purposes (5.5%; 1.0%), social networking (39.5%; 18.9%), upload their own digital content (19.9%; 7.5%), make a medical appointment online (22.2%; 11.1%), sell goods or services (e.g., on eBay) (3.9%; 0.9%), store photos, music, videos in internet based repositories (16.0%; 5.7%), communicate in writing online in real time (skype, whatsapp, etc.) (44.5%; 21.6 %), listen to radio or music (22.8 %; 11.1 %), watch TV online or from mediateka (23.5 %; 11.5 %), watch paid video materials (e.g. Netflix) (4.4 %; 3.1 %), watch video on youtube (41.8 %; 21.6 %), express opinion on political or civic issues online (sign a petition) (6.2 % in 2019, 0 % in 2020; 2.7 %in 2019, 0 % in 2020), develop a website or write a blog (0 %; 0 %), use travelling and accommodation services (0%; 0%).

3.2.3 Policies regarding digitalisation and demography

The targeted implementation of digitalisation policy in Lithuania started in 2001 with the approval of the National information society development strategy. This document established the state's approach to information policy. The horizontal policy was implemented through various strategic documents, such as e-Government concept, Library renovation and modernisation programme, Public administration development strategy, Universal computer literacy programme, Information society development strategies.

Lithuania's Digital Agenda, the Information Society Development Programme for 2014-2020, was adopted in 2014 and amended in 2017. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Innovation has the

responsibility for implementing this strategy in cooperation with other relevant governmental bodies. The strategy covers all areas of the digital economy and society: digital skills; digital content in the Lithuanian language; investments in high-speed broadband; e-government; use of open public data and innovative e-service creation; security; reliability; and interoperability. This strategy aims to reduce the digital divide, improve the quality of life for Lithuanians, and make companies more efficient.

Access to digital technology and wide spreading use of online services has acquired the status of a human right. Therefore, it is very important that people from all walks of life, all social groups, and all ages have the opportunity to acquire ICT skills.

Information Society Development Committee at the Ministry of Economy in cooperation with the alliance Window to the Future, the National Public Library, Communications Regulatory Authority and the Ministry of Interior are implementing a three-year project (April 2018–September 2021) funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Government of Lithuania. The aim of the project is to help Lithuanian people to use digital technologies and internet effectively, safely and responsibly and benefit from using ICT. The project aims to reach that 87% of the Lithuanian population use internet.

With the budget of EUR 5,988,156.64 the project targets to involve 500 000 people who do not use ICT yet or have no or very low digital skills. Older people are a specific target audience of the project. While 82 % of people aged 16-74 in Lithuania use the internet, only 70 % of 55-64 year-olds and 40 % of 65-74 year-olds access online information, communications and services, according to Statistics Lithuania. At the same time, 76 % of Lithuanian residents are ashamed to ask for help with digital devices, Connected Lithuania found.

The training of ICT skills is organised in public open access internet points in public libraries and online. The hardware and software of the public libraries was updated and four-month training courses were held for the librarians to use the updated resources efficiently and to provide qualified assistance to community leaders and library visitors. Women over 50 have been the most active participants, and as a whole women enrolled on the courses outnumber men by four to one. An attractive promotional campaign and special events were dedicated to older people.

3.2.4 Benefits and challenges of the digitalisation for older citizens

According to the experts and active seniors interviewed, ICT bring a lot of benefits. Recently a lot of public and private services have become digital and require advanced ICT skills in order to use them. Digitisations brings many opportunities. There are various activity trackers (Fit bits) that bring both fun and benefit. You feel calmer when you can check your pulse and heart rate. The same can be checked by carers, family members and general practitioners. There are various applications for smart phones that make life much easier. ICT, robotic equipment make life more comfortable, but require investment in learning. Due to reduced mobility, with the help of digital tools older people could do dozens of things just by pressing the button: make an appointment with the doctor, follow the waiting lists, order food delivery, pay bills, communicate with family

and friends, plan and book both local and international trips. They could be self-reliant and independent. The interviewees noted that ICT not only brings more possibilities to communicate but also helps to deal with daily issues. With digital tools older people have more personal development and learning possibilities, sometimes they even can start a business. According to the experts and active seniors interviewed, the increased social activity using digital tools, information accessibility makes people feel less lonely.

In a media publication director of the alliance Langas į ateitį noted that COVID lockdown has accelerated the practical process of acquiring and improving ICT skills (Žinios, 2020). Older people started using video conversations with children and grandchildren, were “forced” to learn online shopping and online banking. It is important to inform them where to look for learning tools on the internet and provide learning support from family and friends. The website of the project Connected Lithuania provides a lot of practical lessons on different topics and services on the Internet for beginners and advanced users.

A demonstration e-bank created by the specialists of the Lithuanian Banking Association and the alliance Window to the Future was a finalist in All Digital Awards 2020 in the category Digital Resource. The demo e-bank is intended for 24% (European Commission, 2020) of the Lithuanian population who have never used e-banking, especially seniors. It is constantly used in both individual and group digital literacy training. The demo e-bank has been viewed more than 16 400 times, mostly used by the learners in “Connected Lithuania” project, All Digital Week, Seniors Digital Week and other events. The demo e-bank provides an opportunity to test e-banking in practice without registering, without disclosing one's personal data and, most importantly, without risking real money. It's the only practical learning tool in Lithuania that allows to perform basic banking operations in real time and see changes in your bank accounts. Repetitions and tests are unlimited. The demo e-bank is not constrained by registrations and does not require specific software. It is possible to practice in a comfortable environment at any time. The aim is to gain self-confidence and help get used to the digital environment.

The main challenge of digitisation is poor ICT skills and low motivation to learn how to use digital tools. According to literature sources, answers from the experts and active seniors, and SIC experience, there are hardware, software and psychological barriers. The hardware is either not affordable for older people or very outdated. The software and e-services are not older user-friendly (not all web solutions meet accessibility requirements, user interfaces are not intuitive, e-government website has 568 services for residents while an older person may need up to 10 services). There is an INFOBALT association that represents the interests of businesses developing IT systems and products, but there are no associations of end-users of IT products who could communicate their needs to the developers.

Older users are still afraid that they can “break the internet” and refrain from using digital tools out of fear that arises due to poor ICT skills. Older people who live alone do not have immediate assistance when a problem occurs and further steps are not clear. Many older people have attended training courses and acquired the basic skills. When they encounter a problem while

working independently and do not receive assistance in solving the problem, they lose interest in ICT and stop using digital tools.

Older people do not have facilitators who could spend time patiently supporting the development of their ICT skills continuously. There are also no motivators who would inspire and motivate them to learn to use information and communication technology and digital tools.

According to SIC experience, older people prefer to use smart phones to PCs because their laptops or desk computers are outdated, take some time to start and older people do not see them as handy tools. With smartphones older people become consumers of information: they read the messages or e-mails, but do not respond to them as writing text on a smart phone is not convenient.

Unfortunately, some older people still think that information technologies is the "evil" of modern times. Every news about the hacking, internet fraud or personal data breach is used to support the negative attitudes towards information technologies.

3.2.5 The digital divide - status quo, consequences and potentials to reduce the gap

With the rapid development of information technology and the Internet, emerging differences between various groups of individuals who use and do not use technology were quickly noticed. Initially, the focus was placed on the physical access to the latest information technology and the Internet (the first level of digital divide). Today the digital divide is measured by effective use of technology, often driven by skills, perceived benefits and appropriate motivation (the second and third levels). Researchers have noted that older people suffer from the digital divide at all three levels (Šuminas, 2018). They are less likely to use computers or the Internet, and if they do, they use ICT rather superficially, focusing on simpler forms such as browsing, reading the news, sending e-mails. The use of more sophisticated online services is much less common among older people, especially in professional activities such as programming. The digital divide at all three levels is also more pronounced among the rural population, pensioners and the unemployed.

According to interviewed experts and active seniors, people who do not use digital tools suffer, "die" as social individuals because they lock themselves in a cage. Loneliness, feeling out of place have a negative effect on health (mental health too). They become a burden to their family and to the society because they lose independence without using digital tools. They have less choice because they depend on what others do for them, what products the social worker buys. The training providers also can't exist if there are no users of their training service. Digital literacy and involvement in community/public life is very important for psychological stability and self-realisation of older people. Participation helps to overcome loneliness, sadness and boredom. For community leaders and workers it is difficult to involve older people in community activities because information about the events and reaction/comments after the events has moved to digital media. During the lockdown it's almost impossible to reach older people. All community meetings now take place online and older people do not participate in these events as they do

not have adequate digital skills. Therefore, it is very important to teach them ICT skills for the sake of socialisation and participation.

With further advance of ICT the older people, rural population and unemployed people with no or low digital skills will remain increasingly isolated from innovations that penetrate more areas of public life. The most important challenge is to address the digital divide at the third level. Providing access to the Internet and teaching people how to use it is a realistic schedule, whereas encouraging people to use ICT and convincing that it is beneficial to use digital tools is a much more challenging task.

In some cases it is difficult to delineate the second and third levels of digital divide. In some cases people do not use the latest ICT and internet because they do not have sufficient skills and knowledge, but in other cases they don't use ICT because they do not see the benefits or have no motivation. In the radio programme "Pulse of Business" director of INFOBALT association Paulius Vertelka noted that older people should be taught how to use the benefits of ICT. The issue of digital divide arising from the differences in motivation, skills and opportunities to benefit from using ICT is also highlighted by researchers (Manžuch, 2018). They note the differences in priorities and areas of actions of the Government and NGOs. Researchers conclude that governmental strategies lack a vision how the solution of digital divide issues could involve the citizens in social and economic activities. Strategic documents do not specify, or describe in a very abstract manner, what social and economic needs could be met by the citizens using ICT. This makes it difficult to define the indicators of action plans and to reach them.

Researchers also find that the cooperation between the Government, state institutions and NGOs is an effective way to reduce the digital divide. The initiative of the alliance Window to the Future to set up public internet access points soon became a project of collaboration with the Government and later grew into EU structural support programmes. A long-term collaboration of the Ministry of Culture, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Lithuanian National Library made it possible to make advantage of the network of public libraries and professional competencies of librarians in creating a sustainable basis for internet access and ICT skills training. It is likely that NGOs could continue acting as a catalyst for new ideas.

A recent population survey conducted by the Department of Statistics (Lietuvos Statistika, 2020a) shows that the so-called digital divide among older people is closing, albeit perhaps not as fast as expected. For example, among people aged 65-74, internet use has risen to 6% per year and reached 46%. The survey shows that 33 % of older persons use the internet every day. In addition, more and more older people are surfing more than once a day.

A. Merkys, one of the experts of the project Connected Lithuania, believes that this growth has been influenced by the ongoing project, which encourages older people to explore the possibilities of modern technologies, and the pandemic in the spring. With the introduction of strict quarantine last March and instructions to stay at home, people were forced to

communicate, study or even shop from home. Older people, who previously claimed that they did not need internet, also had to turn to modern technologies. In fact, experts believe it was just an excuse. Many people did not use computers or smartphones just because they lacked the necessary skills and did not dare to admit it or simply did not want to waste time on learning. A. Merkys also noted that older people (aged 55–74) started using internet not only for information, but also for learning or even entertainment. The survey shows that seniors started using such applications as Skype, Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber or Snapchat.

Is it possible that newly and perhaps forcibly acquired digital skills among seniors will persist for a longer period of time, or will they be forgotten after the end of the pandemic and quarantine? According to the expert, it is likely that older-age residents in the cities are already changing their habits and the currently observed changes may be noticeable for longer. Some of them will develop a habit of using the Internet after the quarantine. Just as people are used to having electricity and no one wants to go back to kerosene lamps, so they may not want to give up smart technology either.

3.3 Best practice examples of co-producing age-friendly environments with the facilitation of digital tools

3.3.1 "Come together, dear seniors", Vilnius and Kaunas

Objectives

The aim of the project "Come together, dear seniors" is to encourage older people to try and engage in new activities, such as painting, making items from clay and leather, line dancing, callanetics, etc., socialise and set an example of active and healthy ageing to others. Creative activities are employed to improve the physical and psychological well-being of seniors, to encourage their self-expression, build the feeling of community and a culture of communication.

The target group is older people 65+.

Key facts

The project was initiated by a public and political figure, member of Vilnius City Council and head of a public enterprise "Idea of Success" Edgaras Stanišauskas. The project idea was to propose creative and health enhancing activities for older people to try things they've never done before, e.g. painting, line dancing, callanetics, crafts. Older people can try themselves in four different activities and find what is best to them and after the workshops continue developing the activity as a hobby.

The pilot project started in Vilnius in 2017 and involved over 300 older-age citizens in 3-months creative workshops. In 2018 the project geography expanded to Kaunas and reached 800 older

persons who attended creative workshops of 440 hours. The target is to have 10 Lithuanian cities involved by 2023. In 2019 the number of seniors involved in project activities reached 1000.

All activities are free of charge and the costs are borne by the sponsors, such as eye clinic Lirema, the supermarket chain IKI, the pharmacy chain Eurovaistine, dental clinic, other socially responsible business. The public national broadcaster, one of the biggest news website 15 min and some other media companies are information partners. The project promotes the idea of healthy and active ageing and creates a positive image of older people in Lithuania. In 2020 the project was challenged by the lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge was met by moving some of the activities online using Facebook and YouTube platform.

Implementation

Creative and health enhancing workshops take place in autumn and last for three months. The workshops are given by well-known professionals: actor and dancer Dalia Michelevičiūte, a ceramic artist and host of a TV programme Nomeda Marčėnaite, a painter and exhibition curator Linas Liandzbergis, a master of handcrafts Kristina Račkauskaite, trainer Toma Peštene, master of leatherwork, glasswork, jewellery, and spatial expression Jone Kalinaite-Stankevičiene. Older people try new activities, find a hobby that can be further practised independently. They also make new friends. Local councils support the project by giving the premises for activities.

As face-to-face workshops were no longer possible due to COVID 19 lockdown, some activities moved online and take place on Facebook and YouTube. In 2020 the property management company Mano būstas joined forces with the project and introduced the training of digital skills. The property management company administers multi-storey apartment buildings, where a lot of apartment owners are older persons. The company created an eHOME app for paying bills, registering faults, monitoring repair work in progress, following the news, communicating with property manager, voting, and participating in decision making.

Results

Project activities were organised by well-known public figures and drew attention to the need for more programmes for older people. The project was well promoted in different media channels demonstrating the possibilities for older people to learn new things, try new hobbies, and find new friends. Most of the participants of creative workshops tried the activity like painting or wool felting, or jewellery for the first time. They all claimed that new creative activities opened their mind, improved their self-esteem. Older people are concerned about their living environment and they want to participate in improving it. The application eHOME and online training to gain ICT skills have increased the involvement of older people in local community matters doing it in a safe way online.

More information

All workshops are free of charge. Project promoters look for and find sponsors for the activities in the world of business thus drawing attention to the potential areas of demonstrating corporate social responsibility.

Project website https://susitikim.wixsite.com/mysitesusitikim/apie-mus
Report about the project on the national TV https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwGqPDgVRpw

3.3.2 Genius Loci: Urbanisation and Civil Society, Kaunas, Šančiai community

Objectives

The three-year (2020-2023) project funded by EEA grants aims to solve the problem of uncoordinated and non-democratic urbanization in Kaunas Šančiai district and to involve local people in the planning of new developments in this historical territory. One of the project objectives is to create a virtual community space for civic processes and to increase the number of users of digital tools to promote public participation in civic activities.

Key facts

The target group of the project consists of the residents of Šančiai district and other interested groups of Kaunas and other cities.

Implementation

During the project lifetime it is planned to implement over 50 civic activities and partnerships with Šančiai residents and other stakeholders. These are education, creativity, map building and capacity building activities. No specific ICT training activities are envisaged, therefore the possibility to arrange workshops for older-age residents of the district to teach them how to upload information onto the memory map was discussed with project implementers.

Results

The first output of the project is the Memory Map. The purpose of the Šančiai memory map is to collect and share images and narratives of our collective and individual history. The map should include not only officially protected cultural heritage buildings and sites, but also personal images conveying memories, legends of the place, etc.

More information

https://sanciubendruomene.lt/en/

3.4 Recommendations for training

The experts and active seniors mentioned that there are many factors to be considered, but the most important ones are the form of training and the trainer. The training form must be friendly, have gaming aspects and create excitement. The training content must meet the needs and interests of the trainees. People will come to the training if they see a pragmatic benefit. The trainer must be very flexible, have knowledge of different digital tools, e.g. user interfaces of different smart phone makes and models, and also have psychological knowledge of older people's learning patterns. The training must employ mutual learning, self-study (the topic must be interesting, relevant and beneficial for the learner), entertaining and gaming aspects must be included (quizzes, games, developing a comic book). Some interviewees noted that the training should have an element of novelty (e.g. using a different smart phone model, trying tablets). Creative self-study work assignments are necessary with practical application of assignment results. Experts note that older people prefer to have trainers of similar age and according to them curriculum should be developed together with seniors. Unfortunately, project-based training of digital skills does not lead to the development of a uniform skills training system. It was mentioned that the trainers must be patient and be able to explain the same thing in different ways. People must have the possibility to practice the skill and reinforce it at home by doing a home assignment.

The training should be organised in small groups of 2–3 people arranged by the tool/skill that older people want to learn and master. The training process should be organised in short sessions not overloaded with information. Face-to-face short sessions given on a regular basis and may be combined with online training. First of all, older participants should learn how to use online meeting platforms, e.g. Zoom. Then some of the sessions can be held online with face-to-face sessions in between for consultations and explanations of the next sessions on Zoom. Intergenerational training through joint activities between young and old generations using digital tools may be useful.

The curriculum should not include a lot of information; it is better to learn to use fewer tools, but master them well so that people could use them independently after the training course. There should be some gaming aspects to create excitement and show that learning ICT is fun. Young people can bring creativity aspects into the training, show tools that even the trainer may not know. The tools must be useful in older people's daily life and support their autonomy. The atmosphere must be friendly so that the learners should not be afraid to ask questions.

3.4.1 Needs of the end-users

According to the answers of experts and active seniors, people are different and have different needs. They want to learn basic tools for easier daily living, such as online shopping, banking, making appointments, getting e-documents, etc. Others want to master creative skills using digital tools, such as photo editing, making different effects with photos, even drawing. People

want to learn to use smartphones, chatting apps, find friends and communicate with them, online banking, e-shopping, making an appointment with the doctor. More advanced learners want to find information for their hobbies, about using some tools. To listen to the radio and watch TV programmes using smart equipment.

Older people need to understand technologies in different contexts, to get confidence and freedom to explore how technologies can help them to involve in community life.

3.4.2 Obstacles to actively participate in the community

According to the experts interviewed, the obstacles for participation in community activities are physical, psychological and IT skills-related. Among the physical factors are restricted mobility and physical functions due to age and health, saving energy and time resources for more important and prioritised activities. The more active seniors may have time as they are caring for a family member, helping out with grandchildren, or still working. The psychological factors are internal and external. Some older persons are inactive in general and live by inertia. Usually they have low self-esteem and think they are too old or not as smart as others, the community activities are not for them. They may have a psychological fear to participate, especially going to the event alone. Some feel negative towards community events, which were imposed and obligatory in the Soviet times. The external factors involve the prevailing culture of isolation and silence in the society, lack of tolerance, negative attitudes, and a weak sense of community. These situations have, to a great extent, been determined by the inequality of income among older people. Richer pensioners despise community activities as, in their opinion, they are for the poor who cannot afford to go a SPA or buy an all-inclusive holiday package in Turkey or Egypt. Another important external reason is that organisers of activities for older persons, or even professional social workers treat older persons as inferior, deprive them of autonomy and make dependent. Older people do not like such approach and refrain from gatherings and community events. The IT skills-related factors reduce the opportunities for older people to participate because they do not get the information, cannot socialise in the virtual environment. Many things in the communities are organised online, especially during the COVID 19 lockdown. Subsequently older people are left behind, do not know the latest news, and, finally, choose not to participate.

3.4.3 Strategies to attract and address potential training participants

People are very different, some have basic ICT skills, and others don't. Potential participants should have basic ICT skills because otherwise it will be difficult to arrange group work with different levels of skills. Participants may be attracted by hobbies and interests. Some participants may have expertise in using a particular digital tool (digital maps, editing photos), so they could act as trainers transferring their skills in using that tool to others.

The timing of the training in terms of season is also important: in winter time streets are slippery and some older persons find it dangerous to travel; in the summer, when the weather is hot, health issues may occur. In late spring and early autumn older people go to their allotment

gardens or summer houses and want to spend time in nature. Early spring or late autumn are the seasons when it is the easiest to collect the group of older people for the training.

It is easiest to collect a group of seniors from the same organisation/club/community. The things they have in common will be helpful for organising the training process.

3.4.4 Appropriate training contents and methods

The training content must meet the needs and interests of the trainees. People will come to the training if they see a pragmatic benefit. The training must employ mutual learning, self-study (the topic must be interesting, relevant and beneficial for the learner), entertaining and gaming aspects must be included (quizzes, games, developing a comic book). There should be an element of novelty (e.g. using a different smartphone model, trying tablets). Creative self-study work assignments are necessary with practical application of assignment results. The curriculum should be developed together with seniors. The training should focus on practicality.

The trainer must be very flexible, have knowledge of different digital tools, e.g. user interfaces of different smartphone makes and models, and also have psychological knowledge of older people's learning patterns. Older people prefer to have trainers of similar age. The trainers must be patient and be able to explain the same thing in different ways. The trainers first of all must have a moral obligation (not only to reach the project goals) to help older people, to make changes.

Contact training individually or in small groups is the best form of training. The important factors are speed, repetition, exercising to master the skill. Continuation of skills training and trying in real life is very important. There should be a possibility to reach support, when necessary. The training process should be organised in short sessions not overloaded with information. People must have the possibility to practice the skill and reinforce it at home by doing a home assignment.

The training venue must be easy to reach and accessible. Individual physical needs of older people must be considered: trainers must speak slower, louder, clearly. Digital technologies should be adapted to the changes of finger and hand movement, to mobility in general.

The training programme must help older people to be autonomous and independent. Older people learn slower, they are afraid to press buttons with shaking hands, their eyesight and hearing is getting weaker.

3.5 Feedback on the relevance of the project

Modern environment requires digital skills. The ongoing transformation creates areas where one cannot survive without ICT knowledge and skills. Public life has now almost completely moved to the virtual level, community meetings now take place online, therefore older people must develop and improve their digital skills so that they can participate in public life, socialise and deal

with personal problems that arise on a daily basis. Digital literacy and involvement in community/public life is very important for psychological stability and self-realisation of older people. Participation helps to overcome loneliness, sadness and boredom.

A training programme specifically designed to older people would better meet their needs. Digital skills must be practiced regularly, so older people need different kinds of training programmes to maintain and improve their skills.

4. Relevant stakeholders and potential cooperation partners

District offices of local municipalities should be interested in reaching the residents of the district through ICT tools, e.g. by creating virtual communities of the district.

Healthcare system administrators should also be interested in reaching older patients by digital tools.

Local projects, like Kaunas city of culture 2022 and Genius Loci need to involve community members of all ages. As it is difficult to inform older people about the project activities and events (all information has gone online), they would be interested in specific training for older people in communities.

5. Quotes of interviewees

“Modern environment requires digital skills. The ongoing transformation creates areas where you cannot survive without ICT knowledge and skills.”

“Universities of Third Age should be involved in the development of Artificial Intelligence as knowledge-carriers. Knowledge-carriers must be provoked and intrigued about such an opportunity”

“During the lockdown we celebrated five anniversaries on Zoom platform. We could not go out and celebrate as we used before, but we still had fun meeting and celebrating online.”

“Our older-age Members of Parliament do not identify themselves with older persons and seldom speak on behalf of this age group.”

“An example of demonstrating transformations of our life brought by ICT. In older times drivers used to inform each other about the road police checking posts by blinking the headlights. Today drivers do that with smartphone apps.”

“The society/community surrounding older persons must also be trained to support their autonomy and independence. We all are responsible for maintaining self-esteem and confidence of older people. Digital skills training is one of the ways to achieve that.”

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Annex 1: Lead questions for interviews with stakeholders or experts

Organisation: …

Professional background: …

The **Bridge the Gap!** project aims to train, empower and support older people to explore, analyse and (re-)shape their neighbourhoods as activists according to their interests and needs and to make use of digital tools to do this.

Q1 Why is it important to increase the digital literacy of older people in a project like **Bridge the Gap!**?

Q2 What are the main obstacles for older citizens to actively participate in their community?

Q3 What benefits can digitalisation bring to older citizens?

Q4 What disadvantages do you see for those who cannot use digital tools?

Q5 In your opinion, what are the main barriers preventing older citizens from using digital tools?

Q6 What is particularly important when teaching knowledge about the use of digital tools to the group of older citizens (e.g. regarding settings, proceedings …)?

Q7 Which digital technology skills are older citizens particularly keen to learn?"

Q8 Which training methods can you recommend?

Q9 What should be considered to in reaching out to older people with fewer opportunities (e.g. socio-economic or health issues) and involving them in a digital training to improve their neighbourhoods?

Q10 Do you have ideas or know about inspiring examples of creating age-friendly environments with the help of digital means?

Annex 2: Lead questions for interviews with older learners/activists

Age: …

Gender: …

Educational level (ISCED 2011 level 0-8): …

Participation in courses in the last two years: … courses

Background in professional and/or voluntary work: …

Q1 Have you ever participated in a local project or initiative to create an age-friendly environment? If yes, please describe your activities.

Q2 Which digital technology do you use personally?

Q3 What advantages do you see in using digital tools?

Q4 Are you having difficulties in using specific digital tools? If yes, which?

The **Bridge the Gap!** project aims to train, empower and support older people to improve their neighbourhoods according to their interests and needs and to make use of digital tools to do this.

Q5 Is a project like **Bridge the Gap!** raising your interest? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Q6 Would you participate in a training for digital literacy and improving your neighbourhood? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Q7 How should such a training be designed so that it is attractive to you?

Q8 What would be a good way to reach out for disadvantaged people (e.g. socio-economic or health issues) and to encourage them to participate in a training for digital literacy to improve their neighbourhoods?

Q9 Do you have any ideas what should be done to improve your neighbourhood towards an age-friendly environment?

Q10 How could digital tools facilitate the work towards age-friendly environments?