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| This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. |
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Leading organisation: *University of Algarve*

Participant organisations: *University of Ljubljana, Slovenian Adult Education Association, Tallinn University, University of Wroclaw*

*Faro, 20 October 2017*

*Integrated report*

This report gathers the analysis of the data obtained from the investigation done so far by the partners of Old Guys project. In Slovenia, Estonia, Poland and Portugal, partners followed similar guidelines in the following activities: first, we have searched for good practices in our countries, relating informal learning in the community, performed by older citizens and if possible, men. The main aim was to have a first insight on the real situation of men learning in the community. Secondly we implemented original investigation. Each partner interviewed in selected communities a sample of 90-100 men. In addition, focus-group debates were organised in those communities, joining local power members, and members of civil society organisations. The team built scripts to the interviews and to the focus-groups. Nevertheless, each partner had some freedom to adapt those scripts according to local conditions, if necessary. The report joins the contributions from all partners and depicts the present state of the Old Guys project.

**1. Introduction: some theoretical perspectives on older men, learning and well-being**

It is widely recognised that learning is influenced by a relatively big set of variables: educational background, gender, income, geographical isolation, digital literacy, or foreign languages domain, are some of them. In the OLD GUYS projects we were intrigued by the patterns appearing when we analyse learning and gender. Table 1 shows very recent numbers of adult participation by gender, in the EU28. From the observation of this table, we see than in average women participation is always bigger than male participation: when considered the EU28, the percentage of female participants is of 11,7%, against 9,8% of that of men, and a very similar difference appears when we consider the Euro zone. There are only 4 countries in which men participate in learning slightly more than women: Germany (8,5/ 8,3%); Croatia (3,1/ 2,0%); Switzerland (31,7/ 31,1%) and Turkey (6/ 5,6%). In Greece and Rumania, these percentages are equal. But in the rest of these European countries, women do participate more than men in learning. In some countries (like, for example, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Slovenia, Finland or Sweden) this difference is considerable.

**Table 1: Adult participation in learning by gender (%) – 2016 – EU28**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Total** | **Men** | **Women** | **Country** | **Total** | **Men** | **Women** |
| EU 28 | 10,8 | 9,8 | 11,7 | Luxembourg | 16,8 | 16,7 | 16,9 |
| Euro area | 11,2 | 10,4 | 12 | Hungary | 6,3 | 5,6 | 7 |
| Belgium | 7 | 6,5 | 7,5 | Malta | 7,5 | 6,9 | 8,1 |
| Bulgaria | 2,2 | 2,1 | 2,3 | Netherlands | 18,8 | 18 | 19,6 |
| Czech Republic | 8,8 | 8,6 | 9 | Austria | 14,9 | 13,5 | 16,3 |
| Denmark | 27,7 | 22,8 | 32,7 | Poland | 3,7 | 3,4 | 4 |
| Germany | 8,5 | 8,7 | 8,3 | Portugal | 9,6 | 9,6 | 9,7 |
| Estonia | 15,7 | 12,9 | 18,4 | Romania | 1,2 | 1,2 | 1,2 |
| Ireland | 6,4 | 6,1 | 6,7 | Slovenia | 11,6 | 10,2 | 13,2 |
| Greece | 4 | 4 | 4 | Slovakia | 2,9 | 2,6 | 3,2 |
| Spain | 9,4 | 8,6 | 10,2 | Finland | 26,4 | 22,6 | 30,3 |
| France | 18,8 | 16,3 | 21,2 | Sweden | 29,6 | 22,7 | 36,7 |
| Croatia | 3 | 3,1 | 2,9 | United Kingdom | 14,4 | 13 | 15,8 |
| Italy | 8,3 | 7,8 | 8,7 | Iceland | 24,7 | 21,3 | 28,3 |
| Cyprus | 6,9 | 6,7 | 7,1 | Norway | 19,6 | 17,9 | 21,4 |
| Latvia | 7,3 | 6,1 | 8,5 | Switzerland | 31,4 | 31,7 | 31,1 |
| Lithuania | 6 | 5,1 | 6,8 | Turkey | 5,8 | 6 | 5,6 |

Source: Eurostat, last update 27/10/2017

Hyperlink: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&lang>

This pattern is not new. Table 2 shows the evolution of adult learning in the same countries belonging to EU28, starting in 2002. The observation of the table show us that the total percentage of citizens aged between 24 to 65 years old participating in learning has been growing gradually but at a relatively low pace. Comparing the differences between the years 2002 and 2016 gives us a simple measure of the magnitude of this increase. Total participation in learning has grown 3,7% in this period of time; men participation has grown 3,2 % and women participation has grown 4%. Even if the difference is not that high, it seems safe to state that women participation in learning is growing a bit faster than that of men. We should say this is general data. Average values can gain new contours when disaggregated in multiple ways or looking into specific indicators inside each one of these countries – for example, by age or by type of learning.

**Table 2: Adult participation in learning by sex (%) - EU28 - 2016**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Time\Sex** | **Total** | **M** | **F** |  | **Time\Sex** | **Total** | **M** | **F** |
| **2002** | 7,1 | 6,6 | 7,7 |  |  |  |  |  |
| **2003** | 8,4 | 7,8 | 9 |  | **2010** | 9,3 | 8,4 | 10,2 |
| **2004** | 9,1 | 8,5 | 9,8 |  | **2011** | 9,1 | 8,3 | 9,8 |
| **2005** | 9,6 | 8,8 | 10,3 |  | **2012** | 9,2 | 8,5 | 9,9 |
| **2006** | 9,6 | 8,7 | 10,5 |  | **2013** | 10,7 | 9,7 | 11,6 |
| **2007** | 9,4 | 8,5 | 10,3 |  | **2014** | 10,8 | 9,9 | 11,8 |
| **2008** | 9,5 | 8,6 | 10,4 |  | **2015** | 10,7 | 9,7 | 11,7 |
| **2009** | 9,5 | 8,6 | 10,4 |  | **2016** | 10,8 | 9,8 | 11,7 |

Source: Eurostat, last update 27/10/2017

Hyperlink: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&lang>

It seems, therefore, than men are becoming minority participants in some spaces and sectors of learning (Golding, Mark & Foley, 2014), although the various national provisions, policies, and structural conditions of the population makes homogeneous explanations of the fact literally impossible to attain. What we can do, for the time being, is to research the phenomena involved in this issue, in our own countries and in a diversity of contexts, and try to find explanations that can provide some practical recommendations to the communities. In fact, the goal of the project Old Guys is look closely at the community and the role that men learning can play in the community. The team of the project did not randomly take this choice. We took into consideration, not only previous international research, but also some exploratory research done by the team:

One of the few recent books dedicated to men’s learning brings together exploratory research work from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, Greece, China, Australia, and New Zealand. An important conclusion to be emphasised from this exploratory accounts was, precisely, that *informal learning based in the community* was very effective to men:

“The research we have analysed shows that, almost counter-intuitively, the most effective learning for most men with limited prior experiences of learning is informal, local, and community-based, which builds on what men know, can do, and are interested in. Learning for such men is less effective if it assumes that all men have a problem, that particular masculinities *are* the problem, or if it requires them to be served up curricula and assessments for qualifications, vocational training or literacy, as students, customers, clients, or patients, which presupposes a deficit” (Golding et al., 2014, p. 256-257).

Previous research in Australia (Golding, 2011, 2012) showed also that fostering learning among older men, especially those with high levels of illiteracy, could make a difference in various dimensions of their lives, affecting positively their well-being – namely their physical and mental health. Moreover, informal learning taking place informally in the community generated in Australia a huge social movement (the men’s shed movement) that has similarities with the more recent movements in some European countries (in fact, only a few).

Previous exploratory research conducted in Slovenia, Estonia, Malta and Portugal (Jelenc Krašovec & Radovan, 2014) revealed some promising results. In these countries, there is a big diversity of informal, non-structured spaces where older men feel secure and where various activities had a direct and indirect influence on their well-being. These diverse learning spaces constitute symbolic spaces that frame people’s sense of belonging, one built from symbols that have powerful meanings in the community (Kurantowicz, 2008). Illustrative examples of this statement can be found in Slovenia (Jelenc Krašovec, Radovan, Močilnikar & Šegula, 2014), Estonia (Tambaum & Kuusk, 2014), Malta (Galea & Farrugia-Bonello, 2014), and Portugal (Ricardo, Tavares, Coelho, Lopes & Fragoso, 2014). For us it becomes clear that the informal spaces where men interact have the ability of building a sense of belonging that ties them with community and of allowing older men to contribute positively, in some way, to their communities. It is within these symbolic, informal spaces in the community that the importance of socialising appears to be crucial for older men. This is coherent with McGivney’s (1999) claims that education is especially successful when taking place in informal community spaces. Interacting socially is a way to fight back the natural, progressive deterioration of social networks generally associated with ageing. It also can prevent isolation and loneliness that, associated with other factors, can eventually reduce men’s well-being.

An important finding of our previous research done in those countries refers to the activities and types of informal learning which older men prefer (Jelenc Krašovec & Radovan, 2014). Our conclusions show that men tend to choose hands-on activities, problem-oriented activities in some cases, and those characterised by competition in other cases (either in sports or in simple games like dominoes or cards).

“However, in many instances, what the case studies unearthed was an informal, situated, community-based and non-structured form of learning, millions of miles away from the rigid structures involving formal learning and vocational training that increasingly crowd in and create extra pressure on professional life. The informal learning style preferred by men is also deeply embedded in their own past and present experience, independent of the source of such experiential knowledge (stemming from work and working life, or roughly coming from leisure)” (Fragoso & Formosa, p. 103).

We also know that the processes of ageing bring inevitability some social, physical and mental decay across time. Socialising, as we have stressed, is of outmost importance. We know that it is common that ageing processes brings the breaking of the social networks of older adults and the progressive diminishment of intergenerational contacts (Salgueiro & Lopes, 2010). Nevertheless, even or especially in these cases, keeping the community ties and networks is still the best answer to the older citizens’ situation:

“For older adults – more so than for other social groups – the community level is of importance for their social life, when mobility decreases in later life. When the radius of action becomes more limited also in a geographic sense, the local surrounding gets more and more important and becomes the most important resource of areas of action, learning opportunities, and intergenerational encounters” (Formosa, Jelenc Krašovec & Schmidt-Hertha, 2015, p. 207-208).

Much is played not only in the way that older men make the transition to retirement, but also on their capacity of adaptation to retirement. The transition to retirement is a process embedded in a number of overlapping contexts (Grenier, 2012), which force us to have a special attention into a number of factors. It implies a loss of old social roles and the gradual replacement to new ones (Smeaton, Barnes, & Vegeris 2016). It depends on the subjective perceptions on how older citizens look at retirement, on their adaptive capacity and on how the potentially states of vulnerability interfere with the ageing processes (Loureiro, Ângelo, Silva & Pedreiro, 2015). Transition therefore can mean a path towards social isolation and individual progressive devaluing (Quaresma, 2007). But on the other hand, numerous factors might contribute to a positive transition to retirement, and to the agentic capacity of individuals to rebuild their social roles. Being active, socialising, and learning in the community are ways to promote older citizens’ well-being.

**2. Older men, learning and well-being: the national contexts**

2.1. Slovenia

The aging population brings up many questions regarding the availability and accessibility of social care and medical treatment for older people, but, at the same time, also presents questions regarding the possibilities of keeping older people involved as members of society. The data shows that older people are extremely vulnerable to a disadvantaged lifestyle, being at a much higher risk of poverty - one twice as high as that of the general population in Slovenia (Hlebec et al., 2010); in 2011, among all persons classified to be within the at-risk group for poverty in the country, retired persons comprise the largest group, amounting to 32% of those considered (SURS, 2012). Research in Slovenia show that educational opportunities for older people differ between urban and rural areas (Kump & Jelenc Krašovec, 2013); in urban areas older people have access to better services, formal and non-formal educational institutions and programmes, information. Our findings are in congruence with findings of other research (Wen, Browning, and Cagney 2007, p. 2653), which show that structurally deprived neighbourhoods negatively influence activities in the neighbourhood. These are areas, deprived of economic and educational resources, with high poverty, low educational attainment, low safety, little open space, little vegetation, etc. Also the World Health Organization (2007, p. 39) stress the importance of access of older people to different activities close to home, in the neighbourhood, their research in the project presented the opinion of many older people, that access to activities fosters bonding and bridging in community (with other age in culture groups). Data also show that these activities are rarely as accessible as they should be.

In Slovenia each new-born boy can expect to live 77,96 years or a six years less than a new-born girl, who can expect to live 83,86 years. In Slovenia, among 2.062.874 inhabitants, there were 390.420 inhabitants (18,9%), older than 65 years.

The municipality of Ajdovščina, which lies in the western part of Slovenia, was hit by two economic crises in last 30 years; however, the western part of Slovenia had a higher quality of life comparing to regions in eastern part of Slovenia (Gregorčič in Hanžek, 2001), but it lost its privileges and is now in the national average. After the last crises in 2008 unemployment raised till 14,7 % and then gradually fallen till 9 % in 2017 (SURS, 2017). Until 2011 Goriška region had the lowest risk of social exclusion (13 % comparing to national level of 19,3 %) and worsened it afterwards (to over 20 %) (SURS, 2017). Both economic downturns claimed high price among the elderly, because most of them lost their job just few years prior to their retirement age and those, whose pensions were lowered because of unpaid contributions of companies. Most of the burdens were carried out by women, because a lot of men died soon after retirement or after losing their jobs. In the last 15 years men have approximately 9 years shorter life than women, both in Ajdovščina and in Slovenia in general (SURS, 2017). According to this, women are mostly emphasised as those who took the power to fight against those economic and material detraction and faced poverty.

The results show that older men (60+) were not that much appreciated in Slovenia. Women are generally seen from the point of view of the masculine determinacy, based on working areas and working life, which put women in specific position (lower income than men, lower position in the labour market, etc.). Men in the third and fourth life stage are self-marginalized and live their life with less quality as supposed and as discussed in this paper. Findings, that participation of women in non-formal learning is higher than those of men (Jelenc Krašovec in Radovan, 2014; Krajnc, 2016 idr.), came true in Ajdovščina, too. Besides having a lot of learning and educational possibilities and free-time activities for older people in Ajdovščina (in U3A, Folk high scools, association of retired people and other municipality and non-governmental organization), men (60+) are rarely participants in those activities.

In quarter Bežigrad, which is the wealthiest quarter according to the high GDP on inhabitant in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, they have quite a number of poor people, more than 10% ('...it's not about food, but it's old people that are poor, because they can't participate in organized activities, which are very low budget'). They use family support and neighbourhood support. Generally, they have a problem with access to solitary older people in blocks and skyscrapers (who live without family's support) and are vulnerable; there are women and men, particularly widows. They say that there are more women enrolled in organized activities; many men are not active and not responding to different calls; it's not depending on age, but on other activities, which they have besides. They used to have carving activities, where there were a lot of men, but this is now finished; they suggest to organize typically men's activities, like modelling, making stuff from wood, etc., which would attract more men. Their goals are oriented towards social problematic groups of people and suggestions to diminishing it, but also cooperate and suggest measures for helping socially endangered and excluded individuals, including older people.

2.2. Estonia

According to the law, municipalities have no responsibilities to provide activities for older people. Nevertheless, approximately one third of municipalities have established a local day centre for older or handicapped people. Older people activities organized by city or country municipalities tend to be a domain of women. A relatively fixed list of activities includes women’s handicraft, physical activity, as well as language and computer courses in general. Day centres do not advertise their activity to avoid the interest of hundreds of potential participants because of the lack of spaces and financial resources. Approximately 14.000 people were engaged in these regular hobby groups in Estonia in 2015 (Day Care Centre Services).

There is a long history of French type of universities of third age in Estonia. Tartu University offers the elite and prestigious programs in seven cities, the Tallinn University of Technology in two cities and, in addition to them, Tallinn University, Tallinn city municipality and one NGO are providing mass lectures for older (female) adults.

According to data of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) (2015, wave 5) 13% of men aged 55+ are engaged in some kind of club activity (18% of women respectively), 7% has participated in some training during last 12 months (10% of women), 6,5% have been engaged in voluntary work (7,5%) and 4% have been active in political activity (3%). All these numbers indicate approximately one-half of the average of other SHARE country.

There are 17 older men clubs operating in Estonia, 4 of them in Tallinn. The second biggest city, Tartu, has also one older men club that connects more than 80 men. There are clubs in six smaller cities (Viljandi, Võru, Pärnu, Kuressaare, Elva, Põlva) and in six towns or villages (Narva-Jõesuu, Haaslava, Kehtna, Viimsi, Pühalepa, Sangaste). Altogether, only four municipalities out of 15 do not have older men clubs (Jõgevamaa, Järvamaa, Lääne-Virumaa, Läänemaa). The first club was established in 1995, but we can see some kind of boom starting from 2012. All clubs follow British principles of U3A, based on self-initiative, and all activities are planned in a democratic way. All older men clubs in Estonia have their network initiated by Tartu city club. The annual gathering is organized by rotation. Physical activity, games and self-organised trips prevail in their programs.

Ida-Viru County is one of the 15 counties of Estonia. It is the most north-eastern part of the country. The county contains large deposits of oil shale and the big share of older men used to be employed by some part of oil industry. In January 2016 Ida-Viru County had a population of 146 000, constituting 12.6% of the total population in Estonia. Four fifth of them are non-Estonians. In Ida-Viru County 39 interviews took place.

Võru, Põlva and Valga counties with 100.000 inhabitants form the research area of South-Estonia. In this area, the implications of population ageing is most visible. There are no exception areas in Estonia in sense of providing supportive environment for older people engagement in society. In South-Estonia 45 interviews took place.

2.3. Poland

Błędowski P., Szatur-Jaworska B., Szweda -Lewandowska Z., Kubicki P., 2012, *Report on the situation of the elderly in Poland*, IPSS, Warszawa.

According to the Report on the Situation of the Elderly in Poland, the percentage of older people in Polish society is increasing rapidly. By 2035, the share of people aged 65 and over (65 years generally assumed retirement age) will approach 1/4. The aging of society will be uneven, to a greater extent, shaping the demographic structure of the urban population. According to the GUS forecasts in the cities will be significantly. A higher percentage of people aged 80 and over. This means potentially larger. It needs a lot of help and support for the oldest inhabitants of cities. The main causes of the increase in the proportion of older people in society are primarily the prolongation of the life span of people and the reduction in the number of births.

The aging of society, expressed in the increase of the percentage of people, is characterized by significant features of social policy. Among them are: feminisation of old age, peculiarity in old age, double aging, diversity of old age. While the task of the state is primarily to create an appropriate legal framework, implementation of social policy towards the elderly and effective financing rules at the level of local government, the most appropriate local government is responsible for implementing this policy.

The Golden Book of Good Practices, Supel D. (ed.), Published in 2016 by the Ombudsman and the Committee of Experts on Elderly in Warsaw, is a kind of response to these projections.

The book presents various projects that are functioning in polish cities and that are created to spread the information on places that are elder people friendly. The projects launched in Krakow, Lublin and Wrocław are concentrated on local communities activation, generation integration, creating local events and using the potential and experience of elder generation.

The projects described in the book are made to encourage older generation to spend time outside home. Therefore the main idea is to present places in the public area that are older citizens friendly such as shops, pharmacies, but also various institutions (educational, public and other). The list of such places is growing every year. The most important aspect is to create the generation integrity in education simultaneously counteracting social exclusion of older people. Seniors want to be active and seek self – development despite advanced age.

Creating social areas is a practice that enables to create universal and addressed to everybody space in public life. Seniors can feel comfortable in such places, because they are adjusted to their needs. The idea of places that are older people friendly is becoming more popular and the organisations responsible for creating such places are constantly expanding the list of the places available in the social area.

Nevertheless, there is still a lack of projects or research focusing on older men, their needs and activities. In spite of some significant publications on masculinity, the problem of male experience still seems to be poorly recognized. There are no studies that address the issue of older men learning. In the Polish society, the duality of two permeating and defying paradigms on masculinity is still visible. The first of them, the traditional, captures masculinity as domination, aggression and specialization in specific areas, and puts the man in a constant struggle to confirm his masculinity and maintain opposition to the qualities considered feminine. The second paradigm, based on postmodern thought, maintains that the characteristic of the "new" man is co-operation rather than domination and concedes the man's right to express his own emotions and desires. According to Zbyszko Melosik (2002), a modern man was found in a "socialization trap". It is difficult to answer the question "who is to be a man?". In an even greater "identity misery" is an ageing and old man who, with age, "loses attributes" of masculinity (less powerful, less physically and sexually active). Males in Poland are significantly less prominent in the educational activities proposed by Third Age Universities and Senior Citizens. In European studies, the evidence on masculinity is lower than that of femininity. Consequently, knowledge about the learning, activity and interests of older men is smaller. Moreover, even more insightful is the knowledge of learning men (ageing and old) in small local communities.

In Poland, today, older men constitute a hot political issue. We have conducted the research in hot political discourses that are now at the top of the list of country problems. However our data reveals that the generation 60+ is not involved in actual political situation in Poland. Another hot issue is migration, which is not very much represented in the interviews. It seem to us, that the generation 60+ is not influenced (yet) by their children and grandchildren (2 million young men and women), who in 2004 emigrated to European countries because of economic reasons. The generation 60+ is not interested much in that kind of the changes that influence the younger generation who participate in national protests a lot these days. Poland is considered as very catholic country. However religion is not present in the men’s interviews, even the Catholic Church is much visible in public sphere and media.

2.4. Portugal

Portugal is one of the most aged countries in the world and the demographic projections are far from optimistic. In a population of about 10 million inhabitants, the population with 65 or more years old is of 2,023 million, representing about 19% of the total population. In 2015, 2.1 million people, almost 20% of the Portuguese population, were 65 and older. In fact, the ageing of the Portuguese population is a long-term trend that began some decades ago but has become more evident recently. Changes in the composition by age groups of the resident population in Portugal reveal the ageing of the population in recent years (PORDATA, 2017):

In the last decade, the number of older citizens has increased. The majority of the elderly are women. The ageing index has reached in 2010 its maximum value ever (INE, 2011): in 1990, the ageing index was of 68,1%, in 2000 102,2% and in 2010 it reached 120,1%. In fact, the proportion of elderly people in the population has been growing and this trend is expected to continue. According to national projections, in 2030, elderly people are expected to represent approximately 26% of the population, increasing to 29% in 2060. The number of people aged over 80 will more than double between 2015 and 2060 and is expected to rise from 614 000 to 1 421 000 people (Gonçalves & Carrilho, 2006). The magnitude of these numbers and the predictable economic, social, educational and cultural consequences would advise for immediate policy action to tackle the situation (Paulos & Fragoso, 2017).

Nowadays, the number of elderly people has long exceeded the number of young people in Portugal, and the ageing index reached 140 seniors for each 100-young people in 2015 (PORDATA, 2017). Life expectancy was in 2015 of 83.3 years old for women and 77.6 years old for men. The results from the 2011 Census show a country with an old age dependency ratio of 28.9, well above the EU27 average, an index of renewal of the active population close to 94.34, and a declining proportion of young people (Fonseca, Abreu & Esteves, 2017).

Still under the effect of the 2008 crisis, the employment rate for people aged 55 and over maintained the downward trend, having fallen from 27.6%% (2011) to 26.3% (2015), although an inverse trend has been noted for the 55 - 64 age group, whose employment rate increased from 47.8% (2011) to 49.9%% (2015). These changes reflect two opposite trends: the increase in the working population aged between 55 and 64 (88.1% between 2011 and 2015) and the fall in the working population aged 65 and over (-16.5%).

Significant consequences from the ageing of the population have been occurring over the past few years, namely the prevalence of chronic diseases, reduced mobility, increased morbidity and prolonged hospitalization. These factors demonstrate that priority in Primary Health Care and community services should be given to meet older people’s needs to delay or reduce a loss of independence and autonomy. The factors that explain these numbers are the increase of average life expectation, desertification of rural areas and the changes in family role (Pereirinha & Murteira, 2016). National statistics indicate that more than 1,2 million older people live alone (400 964) or in the exclusive company of other older adults (804 577) (INE, 2012), reflecting a phenomenon which dimension has increased 28% in the last decade. It is also important to stress that the majority of the ones living alone are women.

However, national numbers and averages hide the regional and local differences within the country. In Portugal, urban areas are mainly located in the coastal areas whilst inland rural areas increasingly resemble human deserts (Paulos & Fragoso, 2017). The region of Algarve, in which we have done our fieldwork, is not an exception. The Algarve has a thin layer of beaches where mass tourism and the growing in the services economic sector print a certain dynamics, both economic and in the population. However, all the north part of the Algarve – roughly two thirds of the territory – is a mountainous area with very different characteristics. The population lives isolated, fragmented, with only a few unimportant urban areas. The infrastructures to serve the population are very deficient. Some of these rural areas are heavily aged – it is common that the ageing index of these places ranges from 200% to 400% and more: the area of Alcoutim, for example, has an ageing index of more than 500% - five times more adults over 65 than youngsters up to 14 years old. Hence, in this investigation, we had to include population from the urban areas, and population from the northern rural territories.

In this project, we interviewed older men from three towns/villages: Faro and Olhão (costal urban areas) and São Brás de Alportel (inland, mountainous, rural area). Faro is a municipality with 64 560 residents in 2011 (PORDATA, 2017) and is the capital of the district, in the region of Algarve. The city is close to Olhão, with 45 396 inhabitants (INE, 2017), which includes a fishing port/ community, and São Brás de Alportel, a municipality north to the city of Faro, whose population was, in 2011, of 10 662.

**3. A comparative analyses on national good-practices**

One of the outputs of this project was to collect cases of good practices of older men learning in the community, in our national contexts. Each partner collected about ten cases of diverse nature. In this report, we will present, from each partner, two/three of these cases of good practices. We will also produce some comments on these cases. However, one cannot do a truly comparative analysis of the cases, as they are strongly influenced by the national and local conditions. Hence, it would be wrong to make a comparative analysis, even if we can highlight some of the commonalities between them.

3.1. Slovenia

*3.1.1. Jelenc Krašovec, S., Močilnikar, Š., and Radovan, M. (2016). Learning of Older Men in Voluntary Associations. International Scientific Researches Journal, 72 (9), 39-51.*

Existing research data shows that men, especially those who are less educated and socially deprived are often excluded from educational activities in educational institutions. At the same time, they might be rather active in community associations. Research in Australia (Golding, 2011; Golding, Foley, & Brown, 2007; Golding et al., 2008, etc.) and in some European countries (Withnall, 2010; McGivney, 2004), has shown that older men often need and want different options for active social inclusion in their communities. Golding (2011, p. 113) find that education within a community has a significant influence on the well-being of men in Australia, but this positive influence is brought about by their participation in community organizations, which, according to respondents, provides more diverse and abundant learning opportunities than adult education institutions (Golding, 2011, p. 114). Learning in voluntary associations (VA) in the community is often occasional, incidental, and informal.

The purpose of our study was to examine the offering of activities of VAs in two selected town quarters (Polje and Bežigrad) in the urban community of Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia. We mapped the current situation to determine the possibilities for learning in VAs and analysed the opinion of older men about learning and socializing in voluntary associations through selected case studies. The research described in this article shows that there are more educational offerings for older adults in educational institutions in urban areas in Slovenia, while the VA plays a more important role in the development of social activities and the learning of old people in rural areas. In our research, we used a mixed methods research design. First, we performed a quantitative survey of the state of the art VAs in selected quarters in Ljubljana, and supplemented it with case studies. Our main thesis was that voluntary associations (VAs) played an important role in the social gathering and learning of older men in the community. We suspected that although older men value learning highly, they have different learning needs than women and that they probably prefer learning activities that occur in less formalized and structured settings.

The findings of our research showed that the motives of older men for participating in VAs were mainly for socialisation purposes. The positive influence of membership and informal learning in VAs, which resulted in a better quality of life and well-being of members, and the local community as a whole, was also stressed. Our study confirms that membership in a VA provides the opportunity for an individual to stay connected with his peers, and to meet other members of the local community.

*3.1.2. Šegula, S. (2016). Older men learning in rural communities – municipalities Gorišnica and Sveti Andraž v Slovenskih goricah. Diploma thesis, Ljubljana: Faculty of Arts.*

The author collected information about the existing associations in the municipality of Gorišnica and in the municipality Sveti Andraž in Slovenske gorice. Two out of all associations have been chosen (where more than a half of the members were male, and some of them were aged 60 years or more): in Gorišnica – Chess club Gorišnica, and in Sveti Andraž in Slovenske gorice – Wine and fruit growers of the association Vitomarci. Semi-structured interviews with inactive elderly males have showed that they miss socializing with their peers. The interviews also provided important clues about the programs that would be more interesting to elderly men.

Our results show that there are only a few voluntary associations in selected communities with a dominant share of older adults, and among these, even fewer associations can claim older men as representing the majority of their membership. Most of the associations organise activities for their own members, so being a member of an association in a community might be an important factor for being active, socialising, and learning. Although some associations organise educational or learning activities and others do not, informal and unintentional learning occurred in all of them through activities, gatherings, socialising, and conversations among their members. Older men in selected associations had more often social than cognitive motives for joining; they appreciate being a part of the community, which is an important mission of most associations.

Older men appreciated activities with an emphasis on sports and leisure time. There were also some differences in motives for older men participation in associations. While men in rural communities highlighted tradition as one of the important motives for participating in association, men in urban communities stressed the importance of having the opportunity to perform in those activities. Tradition is obviously more valued in rural areas. The research also stressed the positive influence of membership and informal learning in voluntary associations, which resulted in a better quality of life and improved well-being of members and the local community as a whole. Membership in a voluntary association not only provided the opportunity to stay connected with their peers, to meet with people of other generations, and to come into contact with other members of the local community, but also the chance to stay active, to enjoy life and feel satisfaction, and to feel useful and respected as older men. In the men’s opinion, all of these factors contributed to their quality of life, well-being, and longevity.

3.2. Estonia

*3.2.1. Amway.* During a semi-structured interview, one of the respondents – let us say Tom – told a story of his “rise from the dead”. Two years ago, after a depressive year and climbing out of a wheelchair, he was invited to join a local Amway network. Amway is an international network marketing business (www.amway.com) that runs a branch in Estonia. Members can buy commodities from Amway with reduced prices. In case the old member finds a new customer, a little share of his or her future turnover belongs to the “finder” or “founder“. There is the possibility to earn money that is significant for men with a low income.

To the great surprise of both, the interviewer and Tom, goals and principles implemented through this business model satisfied easily those described in theory of older people learning. Members of Amway network are encouraged to deal with learning on regular bases, to be concrete, at least 15 minutes a day. People learn about human psychology including new knowledge about oneself. They study Amway products and these useful features, through what the awareness of environmental issues improves. All network members are equipped with professional learning material produced both on paper and CD-s. It is important to stress that all learning material is translated in local language.

Educative meetings are organised on regular bases, and thereby intergenerational contacts are supported. People who do not know each other are expected to meet and talk. As Tom said, the most valuable feature of this communication process is the fact that everybody is interested in your success and improvement. No intrigues, no ill-will what he felt and met in his previous days. The main advantage of this movement lays on the community and personal growth. Tom admits his change. Now, as an old man, he recognizes his growth as a person. He claims that he does not postpone tasks any more as he used to do during his long life.

*3.2.2. Kanepi municipality*. The Kanepi municipality is located in South Estonia. There are 1 small town and 21 villages, the population of the municipality is 2,431 and the population density is 10.5 persons per square kilometre. The municipality boasts clean living environment, modern infrastructure and well-maintained road network; broadband Internet is accessible all over its territory. A special feature of Kanepi is the strong village communities, valuing the elderly and involving them in the local social life. The population of the municipality, including numerous men over 60, are involved in an active cultural life; cooperation between associations and societies is based on the local cultural tradition and heritage.

There are more than twenty different societies in the municipality, most of them being either directly meant for the elderly or involving people over 60: the retirees club “Elulõng”, club of the elderly “Ajaring”, non-profit organisation MTÜ Põlgaste Jahtkond, Kanepi Educational Society, Kanepi Health Club, Theatre Farm, Põlgaste Rural Affairs Society, Pokumaa Foundation, Valgjärve, Ihamaru and Kooraste village centres, ABC Arendus (Meie liigume), Orienteering Club Põlva Kobras, Kanepi Singing Society etc.

The municipality provides material support to the collective activities (financial, facilities etc.), and there are annual project contests, where new initiatives and ideas receive support. One of the priorities of the Kanepi municipality is to create an active and healthy living environment for all residents, including the elderly. Opportunities for sports are consistently developed; there are sports halls for gymnastics, ballgames, table tennis, as well as tennis courts and tracks for Nordic walking. A network of bicycling paths has been built in the municipality. The local government consistently finances the organisation of public sports events.

3.3. Poland

*3.3.1. Case study Commune of Jędrzejów (central part of Poland):*

Jędrzejów is half village, half town commune. Some notes on the socio-cultural background follow. The population of all commune (main town Jędrzejów and the villages) is about 30 000 inhabitants including 15000 living in the main town. The commune is rich in historical traditions and inhabitants seem to be very proud of that. Their local identity started in XII century, when the Cysters Closter and the church were erected in the year 1140 and it is still open and used by the locals. The second local treasure is the Museum of Sundials (solar clocks) that was invented in 1985 by a local doctor who was interested in astronomy. When we started speaking with the locals they switched to both of “past” proves of the local wisdom and richness: the Closter and the museum. We think that the locals starts communication with the people from the outside by presenting their “visit card” as a big heritage that consists of at least two achievements mentioned above. Apart from the material historical heritage Jędrzejów commune is also rich in symbolic heritage that the locals reconstruct and reflect on. One reason of this reconstruction, was the very strong resistance movement that was in this region during World War II.

What was special in Jędrzejów? What we have found in our research according to the educational potential /adult education is a phenomenon of the way that local society is built/ moderated. This is a bottom-up local initiative that covers at least three levels of communication through technologies: 1) peer website communication (men of 60+ and younger); 2) face to face communication of the locals who ‘met’ earlier on the website. And then they meet in both the real world and on the web; (3) regional and global communication involving mature people (men and women) who share their interest and inspire local knowledge through narrative stories (storylines from their parents, neighbours); about the pieces of local culture and the past of the region.

The interaction that is a part of local activities was so interesting for the local municipality that both for the foreman/leader and the mayor are proud of the bottom up commune promotion and as historians appreciates the input of the locals who voluntarily register the data of the past. The unpredictable activity is not only telling stories but writing them by old people (80 +), not only men but women as well, and publishing them on the website and in some small printing houses. The local model of animation started innocently at the very basic level. One man, interested in some topics eight years ago started to manage the private local website www.andreovia.pl. The interview conducted with the moderator revealed that he would never expect so deep interest in materials that are presented on this website. The moderator appeared to be a very sociable person and created the website as the meeting point for discussions, sharing the points of view, exchanging the memories, collecting the documents, exchanging the knowledge sources just for those who care. The first users were just the locals. When the members of local municipality saw how the average people communicate with one another, made teams in real life, and deepened their knowledge. They started supporting the teams that have been constituted by/through/thanks to the local website. The museum staff appreciates that the website covers so much of their job and they cooperate very happily with the website. Our visit to Jędrzejów and the meeting with the mayor, the foreman, and the local activists was overwhelmed by the discussion of a new way of moderation and a kind of local “solidarity” directed to the preserving of the local stories. The mayor said “nothing constitutes our local identity and uniqueness in a global world as our ancestor’s fall”.

*3.3.2. Case study Commune of Żmigród – Lower Silesia Region*

Another place of good practice where we have done research is Żmigród. The district lies in the belt of Central Polish Lowlands, in the Macroregion of the Milicz-Głogów Depression, in the Mesoregion of the Żmigród Basin, on the northern outskirts of the Province of Lower Silesia. In the north it borders on Rawicz District, in the east on Milicz District, in the south on Prusice District, in the south-west on Wołów District and in the west on Wińsko District. The total area of the District is 292 km2. Out of 15,258 inhabitants, 6,477 people live in Żmigród itself and 8,781 in the remaining 30 villages of the district.

The northern and eastern outskirts of the district are covered by big forest areas. There are fishing ponds with an area of 1,427 ha, which makes 4.5 % of the district area. The fishing farms specialize in breeding carp, they deliver their products onto the domestic and foreign markets. The forests are home to deer, fallow deer, roe deer, etc. The hunting grounds are popular with hunters from Poland and abroad. The local economy is based mainly on agriculture, farming and breeding. However, Żmigród is not only agriculture. Across the district, especially in the town itself, there is a wide network of services from different branches – shops, wholesale outlets and companies with different profiles. Every year, the Association for Promotion of Lower Silesia grants the prestigious award The Lower Silesian Key to Success. So far, Żmigród can boast about being nominated three times in the category of The Thriftiest Town-Rural District. The community seems to be active and a developing district. We contacted the leader and few members of The Association of Żmigród Friends and we conducted a focus group and individual interviews with them. One of the member of that Association is the leader of the Association “Golden Autumn” and another one who is the leader of The Association of Żmigród Friends is member of “Golden Autumn” too. However, the interviewed men highlighted engagement on many levels. As they said… “we are socially active for the good of the local community” and they try to keep the politics aside. The community presents a strong cooperation between inhabitants and local government.

3.4. Portugal

*3.4.1. The Amateur Fishing Club of Faro*

*Ricardo, R., Tavares, N., Coelho, A., Lopes, H., & Fragoso, A. (2014). Learning in Informal Spaces in the Community: A Case Study from Southern Portugal. In Sabina Jelenc Krašovec & Marko Radovan (Eds.), Older men learning in the community: European snapshots (pp. 63-78). Ljubljana: Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts.*

A group of friends created the amateur fishing club in the city of Faro (southern Portugal) in 1956. Initially they did their own unofficial competitions but soon they build teams and start to participate in official competitions. In a few years, they became regional, national and international champions. Because of the need to guarantee the continuity of their successful performance in competitions, some members of the club decided to dedicate some time to teach the fishing techniques to a group of young people – and thus a new generation of champions was born. Today the amateur fishing club is one of the best clubs in the country. The club was considered of public utility and received the city medal for sport merit.

Today there are approximately 280 members in the club, most of whom (85%) are men. The ages of the members go from less of 25 to 82 years old; 29% have +65 years. Our investigation was bases, in a first phase, in document analysis (members’ files, minutes of the meetings the meetings, etc.) and informal conversations with key-informants in order to understand the origins and evolution of this group. Naturalist observation followed, in different moments of the day. Finally, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994) to different club members: to those who had been directing the club or had an historical memory of its evolution; to those who took part in the official fishing competitions; to the woman who managed the bar; to those who although not participating in fishing, still used the club spaces to socialize and to do other daily activities.

Our main findings can be synthesised as follows:

(1) The older men participate in local or social fishing events and use the club spaces for different purposes: socialisation, gathering and participating in social games like cards, snooker and dominoes. These men see the club as their own space, a place where they feel secure and which they identify with. They said that this club was different from the others because they knew each other and felt that it was a safe space.

(2) Socialization did not occur only among their age group. The games or simple conversations happened between people of very different ages. There are three different generations of members using the club and participating in fishing.

(3) People learn the complex fishing techniques through informal dynamics, similar to the everyday learning occurring during socialisation or other sort of informal relations. Our findings also show, at the other hand, the potentialities of learning from practice. These men were able to build a common narrative from practice, which has the consequence of building a strong sense of belonging. This sense of belonging extends to the community. In fact, the club joins often the city communities in civic occasions.

*3.4.2. An informal group of retired fishermen in Olhão*

*Fragoso, A., Ricardo, R., Tavares, N. & Coelho, A. (2014). Shoulder to shoulder? Masculinities and informal learning in later life. Andragoska Spoznanja (Andragogic Perspectives), 20(3), 27-39. DOI:* [*http://dx.doi.org/10.4312/as.20.3.27-29*](http://dx.doi.org/10.4312/as.20.3.27-29)

In this study, we discovered retired fishermen still working on shore six days a week, repairing nets or doing maintenance jobs in the boats. In this context, interviewing the anglers would seem too intrusive and therefore unreasonable. Aside from observation, we had to use long periods of informal conversations. In an initial phase, these conversations did not have a precise objective of collecting information. In a second phase, we decided to try to guide the conversations towards the understanding of their past as fishermen, in a way trying to do a superficial biographical approach. We had to understand if the patterns of learning and socialising through their work as fishermen had something to do with these men’s lives today.

The participants ages ranged between 64 and 72 years old, they were all married and with children and grandchildren. Most of them had spent long periods of time in fishing ships, distant from their families, but with the company of their mates.

Their professional life also gave them diverse opportunities for learning. Their trips along the Portuguese coast, Mauritania, Senegal, South Africa, Angola, USA, and Morocco, enabled them to come into contact with other cultures, customs, and languages, as well as to acquire knowledge of geography, management, and economics.

After the retirement, these men's working place was near the docks, from which vessels sail out to sea, and where the fish is discharged to be sold and resold. They worked in short and narrow places similar to sheds, filled with all sorts of fishing material. It is a typical male-only environment; there were always men arriving, others going out to sea, and still others who just wanted to talk to each other.

For almost all of them, this was the only life they knew and to keep working allowed them to continue to live with people who use the same language, sharing meanings and symbols. Also, all of the men admit that earning some more money is a key factor, as it allows them to help their families financially.

We think that the profession and way of life of these men directly affects the way that they learn. For them, the fact of working in a group does not mean that there is a collective learning process. Although some of them have taken courses, they stated that what they have learned in formal terms was not enough to be fishermen. It was the everyday struggle at sea that taught them. In a boat, one learns primarily through practice and by observing the older or more experienced comrades. However, each man learns primarily by himself. The work done ashore is different from what many of these men were used to doing at sea, but the means of learning is the same: through practice and with each other. The professional life in a boat is very hard and some of the times, men rely on each other: not just in daily details, but also for surviving. This forces a very distinctive way of building relationships. We believe that after retirement, it is only natural that these men seek for each other companions. It seems that their sense of belonging and living is stronger towards their mates, than towards their families or even to other members of the community. Community, for them, means the comrades that share a symbolic space of meaning, learnt through work.

3.5. Analysing the team good practices

As we said before, we have no conditions to do a truly comparative analysis. However, the cases selected by the partners as good practices do reveal interesting common patters, or bring forward specific points of interest in the context of our project. Some of these points are the following:

1. Only a few cases (a minority of those selected) show settings where men are predominant. This was explicitly told in one of the Slovenian cases and, though these accounts, it seems that men-only contexts are rare. The exception to this rule is Portugal, where both cases show environments where men are the majority. These statements suggest two different comments on the issue. First, we claimed, in the theoretical section of this report, that men and women might have a different way of learning. Moreover, men prefer, contrarily to women, hands-on activities, sometimes mediated by gaming and competition, but anyhow informal and distant from vocational activities or similar. In these terms, it would be a good idea to promote various activities with these characteristics. It might then happen that men are attracted by these learning opportunities and use them to improve their quality of life. The second comment is that we have to use precaution in our research, and try to understand the subjacent meanings and contexts deeply. In the case of Portugal, it is very common to find, in the community, examples of environments where men are predominant. To mention just a few: pigeons clubs, volunteer fire brigades, hunters clubs, fishers clubs, *pétanque* clubs, among others. However, we cannot separate the fact from its historical and cultural origin. Very traditional divisions on gender roles, especially in rural areas, conducted the men towards the domination of public spaces as natural spaces of leisure. At the same time, women were constrained in their use of public space, condemned to live mainly in the private space of the household or rural small property. This leads us to the second point of interest:

2. The importance of understanding the social-cultural context. The cases selected in Poland illustrate perfectly this need. We would not be able to interpret the results in Jędrzejów without a deep understanding of the historical and cultural background of this territory. In this case, the shared identity of the population is strongly anchored on their proud of having in the community important historical symbols. Only this identity allows that an activity that started without any particular ambitions could grow and become a part of the community. Similar phenomena appear to happen in Estonia, in the municipality of Kanepi. Only the cultural characteristics and the historical background produce an environment where to have a special attention (even at an institutional level) to the opportunities towards the elderly is the norm, and not the exception.

3. The individual transformation. Our project intends to have a close look on community and the social mechanisms around it, in its links to informal learning and older men well-being. However, this does not mean that individual cases are not important. The Amway case in Estonia shows precisely how a learning opportunity can make a difference in changing the life history of a person.

4. The key importance of socialisation: most but not all the cases stress that older men need to socialise and keep their ties to other men or remaining community members. The case of two city quarters (Polje and Bežigrad) in the urban community of Ljubljana, Slovenia, illustrates this. The motives of older men for participating in volunteer activities show they seek mainly for socialisation. Often we, as educators, think this is not enough. Rather it is fundamental to anchor older men in community, to keep alive their sense of belonging. Socialisation prevents isolation and tackles the shrinking of social networks. It is the base to build a community. Only in a community can citizens have the (learning) opportunities to improve their lives.

5. Informal learning is crucial. All the partners have displayed the importance of informal learning practices for old men. Through the involvement in volunteer associations, as members of the board or just as associates, older men maintain contact with their peers and younger people. Associations and old workplaces are described as privileged spaces of socialisation, where old men can gather, play games or just talk about their past and present life. This dimension seems to be of huge importance since this feature is referred in all the countries of the partnership. The associations or the gathering of men in the workplace, like the Portuguese informal group of fishermen, intentionally or unintentionally provide learning or intergenerational opportunities, mostly informal.

**4. Lessons from the fieldwork: national perspectives**

4.1. Slovenia

In 2017 we've conducted 100 in-depth semi-structures interviews with men (60+) and three focus groups with members of local community municipalities, local NGOs and other associations in community. In Slovenia we basically selected two areas: the municipality of Ajdovščina and a quarter Bežigrad in capital city Ljubljana; both were selected according to socioeconomic measures and well-being of older men. We will here present some findings of focus group in Ajdovščina and key findings from the interviews, made in Ljubljana, Bežigrad.

On focus group in Ajdovščina there were seven people (authorities, members of different organizations). Main findings were focused to a 'social connections' and 'social participation' (Ybarra et al. 2008; Cachadinha et al., 2011; Golden, Conroy in Lowlor, 2009; Reynolds et al., 2015) (instead of health and psychological measures), because activities in older age bring new insights into social life of older people. They emphasised activation of older members, 'cohabitation' and 'linking', which involved institutional, charitable, individual, spontaneous, as well as 'mutual help'.

In the municipality they have mentioned particularly bonding and connections with vulnerable groups (older people amongst them), which show that in the area there is a strong support network of institutions and individuals. They have used the crises as a change (Gregorčič et al, 2011), which brought new opportunities and 'moral power'. However, reflection was confronting the general poverty of older population, a generation, who 40, 50 and 60 years ago set all the material and emotional wealth in the country, which is now in the process of destruction. There is a confrontation with destroyed social bonds, bitter identification with the job and the loss of health and life-energy. They emphasised older women with very low pensions (farmers, widows, ex social carer), who could not do it further on and are now in a very bad position. Men were not emphasised, because they have died earlier and were mostly never in this situation; however, women are now taking care of those old guys.

When they have talked about the loneliness, exclusion and inactivity, they refer to men, but when they talked about creativity and participation, they pointed to women. They were also pointing to men (60+), who reject creativity, confirm self-confinement, who were mostly in a bad social and economic situation and living without social networks. In Ajdovščina, men are participating in a theatre programme, recreational and sports activities and in activities in church institutions, which are not gender based. Besides, they are gathering in three bars in the city of Ajdovščina and associations for men's activities and hobbies. If things are planned and organized, then women came, not men. In ‘rural’ Ajdovščina there are some community homes, which attract more men than it happens in 'urban' Ajdovščina. Men in rural areas are more spontaneous and informally gather in farming, culinary, tourism, church organizations, Bowls playing, and other free time activities, which happens divided from women; here are therefore chances to form 'a men's learning space' (Carragher & Golding, 2015). It is a need to make information more accessible and more reachable for older men. Further ideas will be developed when we insert also the data from the interviews.

In Bežigrad we will present two groups of men: we've selected 6 old guys, who were not members of any association in the community (and are members of Retirement home for older people), and 6 members of Day's Club for older people in community. Looking generally, this was a generation, who was pressed to retire due to the change of the system, which prevented them from the unemployment; most of them were retired at age of 50-59 (Kump & Stropnik, 2009, str. 81)..

First group was a group of men, older than 78 years, most of them over 80 years, who were members of Retirement Home for older people. The ratio in Home for older people is 20:80 (men: women). Most men in Retirement home decided to enrol when they have lost their wives, and most decided because they have felt lonely and lost. Among them there is nobody who would have wife still alive, which shows that men are very much dependent on women non-formal care of a family. In Slovenia, patriarchal relations and traditional perception of maternity prevail (Kolarič, Rakar & Kopač Mrak 2009), which means that women play important role in management of typical family/household work (non-formal, unpaid household work). Living in the Retirement home for older people is in a way very stressful, is the last exit they have, and many state that they have lost sense in life; despite some are very positive, they can't escape this embitterment.

Family is one of the important activities in men's life, which has mostly gone in these men's life, since women have died. Women were very important to take care of them. Generally, most men feel happy with their life; they do not have high expectations, but just to live the life through and make another day. Also social support in family went in congruence with non-formal emotional and material help, so mostly men give support to their families, however they can. They expect their family members to come to visit them if they have time and do not press to get anything else. In the Retirement home for older people, we can notice a manipulation and threats from some family members to older people.

In previous life, some men were very active mostly in sports activities ('real men's activities'), fostering identity grow despite how important they were. However, they do not see that men's activities, organized separately, would do anyhow better, because they are not that active anyway. They believe men are too lazy to do anything; they are not active and are absent. Men are therefore not very active in home's activities (they believe there is not a lot of activities in the home itself); they think all is organized, it is offered and that is not something they can influence. The home is more appropriate for ‘passive older people’ who do not take care of themselves. Interviews show that there are really low expectations regarding the things offered in the home itself. Some men play cards (Tarok) and chess, there is a gym and a nice park and they also meet at the bar; some men use it regularly. There is a library and socializing in different circles, but it is more dependable on a person and his/her will. However, they miss more social activities, based on interpersonal relations. They think they are too old to enrol, and that is the fact.

There are differences in level of education of inhabitants, which makes the conversation different for different persons. Some men with lower education do not see the exit of the situation and perceive things as they are. Some men are more active in areas, which are more feminine (for example ‘the poetic circle’). Some are not happy with their previous life, which was full of empty work, full of unworthy activities, which does not bring joy to life. More active men said there is a lack of a place, where you could use the working tools, you used at home. This idea is similar to Men's Sheds organization.

The second group was a group of older people, living in neighbourhood BS3, the environment with 74 blocks and about 3500 people; they were enrolled in a Day Centre for older people. The neighbourhood is well equipped (three public kindergartens, primary school, bank, post, pharmacy and a lot of shops) and from 2006 there is a Day centre for older people, offering different activities, from yoga, Pilates, gym and different languages. They also have hands-on activities, offer access to web and reading. In the winter, there are 60-70 members, in the summer there are less participants. Most members are women.

Interviewed men were mostly members of different activities; they were having some common points:

* most were employed in different vocations;
* most were retired under pressure of unemployment and austerity measures and their identity was shaken when they had to leave the job; the more important role the job played in their lives, bigger are the problems now;
* they filled the left time with other supportive activities (sport activities, leading activities); they also have to face a lower income; if they do not find substitute activities, become apathetic, passive and bitter, they become less productive, which show that it was a men's domination they have led before;
* family is very important in their life; without wife, life has no meaning; wife is the person they ask for support in every problematic issue; one of the examples is: “I paint a lot, but my wife should do other things...so...I have an understanding in the family...also for my hobbies, not only for this painting” (Lj 12); if they are without family, loss is even more obvious; the oldest guy, who doesn't have a life-energy and life-spirit any more, said about this happiness: »No, no.«;
* family support is moral and material (financial), from older people towards younger; men are much more dependent on the family support (non-formal family support);
* they have friends, but not that much and not as much as before;
* connections with neighbours are relatively good, support between neighbours is quite well, but depending on a block and a person;
* women are more active and creative in non-formal space and faster find supportive activities;
* men were very active in a socialist era; they had a lot of leading activities and were very socially-politically active (a hegemonic masculinity);
* there is a missing link among inhabitants and the municipality; they suggest a coordinator, who would make a connection;
* people changed their way of doing, each one takes care for himself and not for others; there is no solidarity, no connections among people; old organizations have gone and there are no new supportive ones; there is no socializing on a community level as it was before and only old people remember, how it was.

Most of them believe that men are without willpower, without the energy and rather watch TV instead of going somewhere. They believe there are many men, who do not want to be enrolled anywhere, and it is impossible to persuade them to do it. It is also a problem of access to information. It seems that the most important is the influence of his previous activities; those who try to find a new way will do it, others hardly find a place for themselves. Women are much more active in non-formal space, in education, in socializing, in organizing things. They made connections, help each other, emotionally and with solidarity. Interviewed men did not give any reason for this. Being a part of DCA is the most important thing in their life; they say that without it they would not have so many friends and so many contacts. They go to DCA to meet new friends, to avoid loneliness, to go out of the house and to learn something new. The problem is that there are mostly women there.

4.2. Estonia

In spring 2017 we have conducted 94 semi-structures interviews with men (60+). By composing the sample, we tried to keep a balance between men with active and passive lifestyle. Although there were more active men interviewed, also passive men were largely represented in our results. In Estonia we selected two areas: the municipality of Ida-Viru (East part of Estonia, the eastern border of EU) and three municipalities of South-Estonia. The principle of selection was geographical distance from the capital, as far remote areas are underrepresented in qualitative surveys of older people.

In September 2017 two focus groups were carried on in both areas.

Only professionals took part in Ida-Viru (north-east Estonia) focus group. Briefly, topics in focus group were the following: men are more passive than women are and this is due to the general nature of men and men are active at gardening. Older men activities depend on their previous habits.

Interviewees in the focus group explained this with their life experiences, saying that men are not just as social as women are but there could also be some stereotypes among focus group members. The idea was that they do not think it necessary to distinguish between them or to organise special activities for men, but rather to tie generations together. Based on their experience, they have shown that, for example, when grandparents can teach their grandchildren something, this could be one factor that brings men out of the house and makes them act. Participants in the focus group expressed the opinion that why should older men just want to be together. One of the participants in the focus group said that older men had expressed the opinion that, for example, when organizing an event, they would still want to see and watch the young people, making their eyes shine. It also emerged that, for example, fairs are the place where men are willing to come out and interact and participate. During the discussion, it turned out that in fact, the level of organising free of charge events in the Ida-Viru County (or at least in the Mäetaguse and Lüganuse rural municipalities) was enough for the older people, and the money should not, in their opinion, be the reason why older men do not come out of the house. The reason why men do not come out was the fact that it also depends on a person. Who is accustomed to go and act, it comes, but who is not a person of this nature, it does not come. It also became clear from the debate that many have farmsteads and, consequently, have enough of their own household to get out of the house. The reason for not attending was the health aspect – bad health is the reason why one does not want to get out of the house.

Deeper analysis of the focus group showed that many people are afraid of their own ageing process, which impedes them to participate in discussion. Social workers do not see older age groups as a group in need and therefore they are not willing to deal with them.

The focus group convened in Võru (South Estonia) and involved 11 individuals (three local leaders, eight representatives of organisations from various regions of South Estonia). The goal was to discuss the opportunities for men over 60 to participate in social life, how to bring such men out of their homes, offer them participation in organisations and events, help to solve vital problems of men over 60. The opportunities differ dependent on the region. Small villages with few residents, from which the young have left, often lack any social life, initiators, places for meeting (no schoolhouse, club, library or day centre). Men over 60 often lack transport or finances to attend events in neighbouring villages or towns or taking part in the activities of some association. Men in small villages are often socially more passive, concentrating mostly on taking care for their household and family. Finding such passive men, making contact with them and motivating them to get out poses a serious problem.

Larger towns and villages with more residents also have more organisations and associations meant for the elderly, where men could also take part. At the local level much depends on the local government’s attitude towards the elderly, whether they are noticed and valued, whether the organisations of older people are provided with space, financial assistance, support to instructors and activists etc.

There are numerous organisations for the elderly in South Estonia, yet most of them are attended by women. One of the central issues of the focus group concerned the activities of associations, in which men would participate and the organisation of events, which would attract men.

The basic categorisation of transcribed interviews gave a preliminary insight to Estonian older men attitudes, used and unused opportunities, their preferences and experiences as learners and community members. The main results and conclusion arising from interviews are the following. There revealed extremes in men’s life attitudes: some expressed a great will of life (“There is an appetite for life. I want to reach a hundred“) and others contrary felt that life is over. However:

* All interviewees considered working as an important part of life.
* Making new friends as an important aspect of activeness is complicated.
* Importance of men’s family members turned out, including an important and directional role of wife’s.
* Among the oldest old, there was pessimism or giving up feelings related to learning and making friends.

Many different hobbies, learning undertakings and activities were mapped during interviews. At the same time, activities provided by local day centres and other institutions, targeted to older people, were rather unattractive among men. Older men had found their self-realization in Estonian Defence League (East-Estonia), by collecting antique (both), in garage cooperative society. They carry some regular responsibilities in the community, like building up skiing tracks every winter. Men are pleased to have single contractual jobs like plumber works and repairing apartments. They have regular culture activities (singing, dancing, and going to theatre) especially if his partner directly supports them (they dance together, go to public sauna together etc). Gardening is a common activity among Estonian older people both working and non-working persons, but the question is does this activity join people in the community or how big is the component of development and growth in this. Some cases described also men as initiators of social events.

There revealed a clear list of external or internal obstacles and barriers older men experience. Relatively simple but largely prevailed obstacle was lack of transportation in rural areas. We saw also that local councils have been targeted their resources only for basic needs of older citizens and mental and social needs are underestimated. This also explains why men often do not have opportunities nor offerings of interesting activities by local institutions. Some respondents claimed that full engagement in household work had taken all his time. Deep and systematic problem is lack of informal leaders in communities and individuals’ self-initiative as the only possible expectation by the community.

Internal barriers are unwillingness to communicate which is interpretable also as a lack of communication skills (men often used to be professionals of individualistic type of jobs like a car driver). In addition, unwillingness to learn or try something new was mentioned. Unhealthy life habits as obstacles were pointed only by talking about others. Deteriorated health condition were listed by talking about himself as well as others.

It was interesting that there were more than one respondent who mentioned a family physician or a medical doctor being part of his social network. The importance of medical doctors in older men’s social network can be explained by the fact that many men were suffering from chronic deceases. Close friends tend to be rather long-term friends from school or college time.

What regards to identity, Estonian older men often see their role as an unimportant which seems to be a mix of withdrawal and modesty. There is a need for outer motivation and a personal call.

4.3. Poland

After the first analyse of the collected data we have found/recognized some categories, which we treat as a kind of lessons – to be develop later on.

So far we have realized some of the problems that can cause the barriers listed below:

* Afraid of being lonely – afraid of wife’s death- presents of wives keeps them in safe balance.
* Low involvement in social actions - Lack of experience of democratic participation in different groups (formal and informal). Associate models from the past block them to be socially active.
* Transparency in the social life - Because of age they often feel excluded from social activities – they offer support, experiences, knowledge “but people don’t vote for them” – the younger generation does not appreciate the knowledge, experience and practice (the 60+ think that is because of age difference).

List of the barriers that 60+ men experience:

* Low pensions – limits their projects/life plans – the money get from the state (a pension) is OK as long as the elderly men are healthy, as long as they don’t need curing themselves or going to the doctors, when you live reasonably you can save money for holidays.
* Longing for grandchildren because of their territorial distance.
* Slow acceptance and understanding of changes in physical and mental condition (longing for good health from the past).
* Ambivalence in health and well-being - “carpe diem”– everyday activities depend on everyday well-being and condition.
* Limited number of friends (lack of social contacts at work milieu, most of the time friends do not live anymore – “there is nobody to call” “some people are rejected from my pocket-calendar”.
* “Life monitoring” - Unconsciously ‘thinking/learning’ to be ready for death. (Taming the death - learning to tame the death)

Family Models in generation 60+:

* Traditional – a man is responsible for earning money, a woman – for keeping a house and bringing up children.
* Possible is changing a partner (divorce);
* Possible is changing a partner (divorce);
* Common is to find a new partner-friend after the spouse death.

Community network:

* The need of ritual meetings , face to face meetings and talks but not every day, just from time to time
* Making sense of the local events

Identity:

* 75-80+ -the oldest generation that experienced the war and after wartime; very often orphans brought by the family members. Among them we elicited the following identities:

1. The survivors - Very basic expectations toward life, very modest life style. Do not complain much, happy in a family milieu.

2. Multi-activists - Social Enthusiasts - Active in a society – inspiring the others for the common actions. Multi-acting in a local society. Not healthy but not telling much about it. The action come first and the health in second.

3. New creator - connecting worlds -different generations in actions, looking into the symbolic and real social and material heritage of locality.

* 60-70 years old

3. The edge generation:

a) Politically addicted - (entangled) - After war generation but influenced by the traumatic family memories and personally participating in socio-cultural and political turning points in Poland. Very often forced to be the central (communist) party members. They have a very limited trust toward any groups and associations. Their life was addicted to the political system and they experienced the political blackmail,

b) Politically independent - the communist regime defenders, Independent in political thinking, more right than left wing directed, very careful in trusting the others.

4.4. Portugal

Our findings relate to a first analysis of our interviews to older men and not yet to the focus-groups. After a first attempt, our content analysis was producing very scattered results. We tried an alternative path: to define groups of people that had more commonalities among them. Three groups seem to make sense (G1, G2 and G3):

G1) Older men living in urban areas, very low literacy, non-qualified workers:

This group includes men with four years or less of schooling (some of them illiterate). As it seems logic, they have a past history working as qualified workers: as waiters in restaurants or coffee shops, civil construction, fishermen, unloading boats at the docks, making small tasks in the informal economy, etc. It is very rare that we find someone in this group possessing a driver’s license and none have a car – bicycles are more common. Not all have TV. They never used computers or other digital devices apart from the mobile phone: but not all possess a mobile phone and the ones who do make a basic use of it. Some of them are working because they need it to survive: for example, Manuel earns a pension of 180€, in a country where the minimum wage is about 560€ and renting a very small flat will cost at least 250€/month. Some of these men, therefore, live in precarious conditions or even in poverty; some of them do not have enough nor even to eat – they go to day-care centres, or similar institutions, to get two meals a day. If men in this group have serious health problems, this triggers a biographical turning point: health problems can be the cause of an earlier retirement that further deeps their poverty; or reduce physical and social activity dramatically.

Their transitions to retirement, when happened, were generally problematic. Among these men social networks tend to be small in dimension and very unsatisfying. Some are alone, some have some family, and some others have family but do not meet family members regularly – João, for example, does not even know where his two nephews live and the only contact with his sister happens when she takes him to the medical centre – when he really needs transportation. Contacts with neighbours tend to be good but not deep and friends are in the decrease. Loneliness is a problem. Their expectations towards life in general are very low. In the words of António:

“There is only motivation when there’s a job so that we feel good; one needs a goal in life. I still have some objectives, but the rest is lacking, work is lacking, a house to live is lacking (…) Tell me, what strength you think people like me have to live, as things are today?”

These men patterns of activity include no intellectual activity at all; no physical activity; only some socialising, usually in neighbourhood coffee shops, or public spaces in the community.

These men have a very level of participation in activities/ learning/ associations. The motives they point to such a fact are lack of money, lack of public spaces for people to gather, mobility problems, no motivation. Some do not even know what to say. Most of them are not able to identify activities they would like to participate in, whilst others indicate cultural activities opened to everyone, or miss places for people to gather in the community. Nevertheless, they have strong belonging feelings towards the community, especially those living in Olhão. Only a small minority thinks it makes sense to have activities only for men.

G2) Older men living in urban areas, medium/high literacy levels, qualified workers

This group includes men whose educational level goes from 9/12 years of schooling, until tertiary degrees. The professional trajectories in this group are very diverse, but some of them had professions with high incomes and high social status. The majority lived transitions to retirement successfully. The remaining had difficulties either because of unemployment, either caused by unexpected health problems. Most of them are well integrated in the community and keep a wide range of activities of various natures: physical activity, intense socialisation, participation in clubs, associations, and even local administrative bodies.

Social networks in this group tend to be big in dimension and diverse in the type of contacts it includes. Family is of outmost importance to them all. There is a second type of social networks: the ones that look smaller in dimension (especially because friends are decreasing with time), but even so satisfying. In one case or the other, men think these social networks are crucial, both to give and receive support (of various nature), and friendship. There is not a defined pattern concerning neighbours: some have very good relationships with the neighbours, while others do not even know who is living next door. Important is to stress some of these older men are supporting members of the family, financially.

Men in this group think the main problems of the elderly are: mobility issues, isolation, and a big majority talk about health care. They look happy with their current pattern of activities and cannot imagine other activities they would like to do. They have moderate reactions to gender differences – the general discourse is in favour of gender equality and, maybe because of this, they are not in favour of men-only activities.

G3) Older men living in rural areas, very low literacy, small farmers or non-qualified workers

This group includes some illiterate men, some with a basic level of education and only a few with secondary education. Their geographical space is determinant in diverse ways. They live in a mountainous, characterised by a strong isolation and fragmentation. Most live in small places with a reduced number of neighbours and all services are some kilometres away, only accessible with a car – since public transportations are scarce. Most of these men were or are subsistence farmers, while others were manual workers. There are a few who performed technical jobs and a high percentage of them worked for the city hall – a main employer in these areas. Only a minority use computers, but all of them use mobile phones.

It makes no sense to talk about transitions to retirement. Either they are farmers and hence never retire (even if it is the case, formally, they keep a daily routine of working the fields); or when they retire they find something to do in small farming places. So the main activity they keep in physical activity (farming and related activities in the rural world), but no cognitive or activity at all. Socialisation is general a problem due to isolation. They would like to have close contacts with families, but they are usually away or emigrated. They can contact daily with neighbours, but conflicts with neighbours can mean a strong isolation. It is only natural that their social networks are small in dimension and nor rewarding up to problematic. There very few or none cultural opportunities. Socialisation opportunities can be kilometres way and mobility a barrier. These men consider that the main problems faced by the elderly are: health problems and access to public health, lack of places to socialise, lack of cultural events and loneliness.

There is a very low level of participation in activities/ learning/ associations, mostly motivated by its inexistence and difficulties in transports or mobility. Gender roles are basically generational driven, but an evolution is noticeable; although gender roles are traditional and based in male dominant, older men state that more equalitarian roles would be fairer and point to the new generations as free from ancient divisions. Their belonging feelings to the community and identity are strong and based in the idea that, culturally, the mountainous areas are different from the coastal cities. But is an identity of despair: they believe there is no future in northern Algarve – almost a human desert today.

**5. Lessons from the field-work: a comparative analysis**

Comparative analysis is always very hard to make. Our four countries are very different from each other and include a diversity of contexts within. Being so, our task is to call the attention to some general patterns emerging, without compromising the identity of each national research. National interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations, will always be valid by their own internal merits and capable of being applied in national settings. Comparisons, in this case, call on commonalities when they exist, point striking differences when useful, and are an important opportunity for critical reflection. This represents a moment of pause to think in what we have achieved so far, to better plan the future. The points we want to stress from reflecting on the national contributions are the following:

1. *Is it possible to find patterns of activity and participation, in the community, different for men and women?*

In most partners findings it is possible to identify clear differences between men and women. It is somewhat amazing that there are similar statements in different countries. Men are roughly depicted as lazy, more passive, preferring the stay indoors, not participating easily, while women are depicted as determined, active, always ready to participate, etc. Of course, statements are not always as explicit as this. Discourses take alternative forms to get to this meaning. Using the words of the Slovenian partners on the Ajdovščina focus-groups:

“When they have talked about the loneliness, exclusion and inactivity, they refer to men, but when they talked about creativity and participation, they pointed to women”.

We have no doubts that these patterns do not express any kind of “biological deficit” only men possess – or a “biological advantage” that evolution has granted to women only. Other categories would better fit the peculiarity of having the same patterns of participation in four different countries. Our theoretical introduction has partially provided some explanations: men and women prefer different activities and types of learning. If there is possibilities and conditions to have a hands-on practical activity, informal and with a minimal structure, men would appear. Whenever and wherever learning is more structured, planned, organised, women would appear. This is consistent with the partners’ accounts that in some organisations and specific types of learning women are a very clear majority. The universities of third age, partially coming from the French model, are today rooted in all our countries. Is there any European country in which the majority of participants in the universities of third age *are not* well-educated, middle-class white women?

On the other hand, we have also many accounts that in some types of activities and learning, men do appear and participate. In Estonia, men carry some regular responsibilities in the community, like building up skiing tracks during winter. Men are pleased to have single contractual jobs like plumber works and repairing apartments – again, hands-on practical tasks. We find Portuguese men repairing fishing nets or participating in informal clubs of various natures.

In these conditions what is truly remarkable is that our four countries are equal when it comes to the dominant forms of learning – and the relative absence of the remaining. The evolutions in education; the expansion of formal education and the consequent diminishment of value given to informal learning; marketization and commodification as increasing tendencies in most European countries… all of this and much more can explain the similitudes of what can be dominantly “offered as learning”.

This bigger expression of women social activity – or the minor expression of socially active men – can also have roots in inequality patterns, which are very common in the historical past of Europe. We can notice that in all our countries traditional gender roles are very similar. They were based in male dominance, a profound asymmetry between the daily tasks of men and women, a full dominance of the labour markets by men, etc. The feminist movement emerged only about forty years ago. Education and more precisely formal education was a battle women had to won gradually. Generations of women across Europe saw in education an instrument (among others) to feed their social mobility and the struggle to liberation from male domination. But even today as we speak, this battle is not over. The labour market is still unfair and unequal as to place barriers for women to get to the top positions in the labour market, earn equal salaries, fight stereotypes that associated motherhood with low productivity, etc., without giving-up on their femininity. This means that qualifications, especially tertiary qualifications, are still crucial for women. Higher education is gradually more attended by women when compared to men. The fact that women are increasingly performing better than men in higher education, allows the speculation that generations of women across Europe still *live* formal education differently. And if socialised under these dominant perceptions, then is only natural that they appear when learning if formal and structured. Concluding, it is possible that gender inequalities are good enough to explain our common findings. It is a clue that might deserve more attention from the team.

2. *The importance of considering past experience at large*

It is striking that the partners of this project all state – although in different ways and forms – that past experience of men is fundamental to understand their patterns of activity or participation in the community. This is valid for indicators that we knew before to have a general influence on learning – for example, educational background or income. But it is also valid to those cases in which partners claim that former professional life, habits, masculinities, and former pattern of activity influence today’s patterns of men participation. That is, our findings would be clearer if we could understand men’s past, and men’s histories embedded in their cultural and social contexts. As we have stated in the theoretical introduction, different contexts build different communities; and different communities display different symbolic meanings where men experiences are anchored. The Portuguese older men who are fisherman all share some commonalities, and can be used as examples to illustrate this point. The nature of their professional life is such that they spend many years building strong social relations with their mates. For these men, community means their companions in whom they have to trust to feel secure. Retirement pulls them away from their community, and pushes them to a new community – their families and a set of neighbours that commonly are somewhat strange to them. Their natural community will always be that of the other men that share a different vocabulary, expressions, fishing objects and instruments, meanings and forms of expression. When retired, they daily gather with former comrades, usually in specific places in the city. This means to keep in touch with “their” community.

Also the Jędrzejów community has its important specificities: basically, a strong identity built around the historical past of the municipality. The historical heritage and its marks, visible in the community, creates and maintains symbolic spaces alive which, shared by the locals inhabitants, can frame and determine people’s participation. Opportunities for learning that attract people massively are necessarily embedded in this cultural environment. Concluding, past experience is, undoubtedly, of outmost importance. The social and cultural qualities of community allow the building and rebuilding of shared symbolic spaces that frame people’s patterns of learning. But this general statement means that each partner will have to look closer in each community past and present to better frame their interpretations.

3. *The importance of social networks*

The features of social networks seem key in our findings. In a social network, we include the family members, former or present friends, and people from different ages with which men have the opportunity to contact with, etc. All these themes are present in all the partners’ accounts. It seems safe to state, for example, that family is crucial in all countries of the partnership – although in some, men suffer from a shrinking in their social networks due to new models of family emerging or evolving. Common statements related to social networks, in our countries, are also the following:

a) Neighbours are important but not so much as we might expect. In fact, the growing individualisation, the increased mobility of people, and the fact that apartments in cities are frequently built in blocks that make daily social contact between neighbours difficult… These are only a few of the factors that took out the importance that neighbours used to have. There are no many stories, in our findings, which illustrate that neighbours are a source of support today.

b) Friends are decreasing with age and commonly connected to profession. Retirement can have an immediate effect of reducing the number of friends.

c) Social networks dimension is influential over the social support men can either give or receive. On the other hand, social networks can be shorter but still satisfactory – there is a quality and not just quantity in social networks.

It seems also that bigger and more satisfying social networks would naturally favour learning – at the very least because we learn from peers or friends from the networks. But engaging men on activities can have the consequence of enlarging their social networks, fundamental to their well-being. Concluding, social networks are important to understand deeply in our project.

4. Barriers to men participation in activities and learning

Barriers to men participation in learning are numerous, diverse, multidimensional and partially emerging from context specificities. That being said, it would probably be of no use to make a list with *all* the barriers that partners found to be important. However, it seems important to stress that many of these barriers that partners identified are outside the control of older men and are deeply rooted in structure. We do not expect, for example, that older men living in poverty and having difficulties even to survive with some dignity would have the necessary conditions to look for opportunities of learning in the community – taking for granted that they exist with some visibility in traditional forms accessible to these men. Frequently mentioned barriers that stay out of men’s control include, for example:

* Low incomes/ unemployment/ severe financial problems.
* The scarcity of informal learning offers/ public spaces for gathering in the community.
* Health problems, especially mental problems (dementias, etc.)
* Mobility and difficulties in public transportations;
* Social-geographic isolation and loneliness

One could eventually say that other barriers to men participation are somehow attitudinal or, at least, can be tackled more easily. The shrinking of social networks is not irreversible; the communication capacity can be learnt and developed; older men can learn more on ICT and suddenly begun to have immediate access to a new digital world and information on activities and learning; the willingness to participate can, in theory, depend on simple individual motives. All this is valid. There are, however, two problems when thinking in attitudinal barriers: the first is the circularity that learning presents in its causes and effects. For example, learning can foster participation; but participation requires learning and this fact can hinder men from learning in the first place. We have to understand which the trigger to unlock some of these situations is. The second problem is that we would have to assume that individual attitudes and choices are not determined by a set of inter-related, inter-subjective factors that go beyond the sphere of the “individual choice”.

It is also important to consider that some barriers partners identified are very particular from a specific context, so we will not mention them here. But this does mean they are unimportant. Barriers to participation, on the contrary, will be fundamental for local recommendations to civil society organisations and local power administration. They give us all something to work with and try to solve some problems.

5. *Does it make sense to promote activities, in the community, for men-only*?

This is a sensible point that we need to analyse further. In the present, we have justifications, in all our countries, *for not promoting directly* activities for men-only. Several social actors, both during the interviews or during the focus-group debates, stated there is no sense in this option. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for promoting informal, non-structured activities. There are also good motives for promoting inter-generational activities of various natures.

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