

Reasoned Opinion issued by the National External Evaluator of the Project “Old Guys Say Yes To Community”

Introductory Note: This Opinion is produced with regard to the Project Document
“Recommendations for Local Administration and Civil Society Organisations (Portugal)”

It is clear when reading the text at stake that the authors have carried out their research through two parallel lines of work: analysis of the more recent literature on the selected topic and direct contact with representatives of the target group. And one could add a third input, the personal knowledge and experience of the three authors over the matters at study.

A basic assumption was construed at an earlier stage, that there are strong shortcomings in the Algarve region with regard to the access of older people to cultural and educational facilities. Even when specific institutions exist and cater for this stratum of the population, like the widespread “Third-Age Universities”, the participation of men in general and, in particular, of those with low schooling levels is significantly deficient. Therefore a particular emphasis was put by the Project on older men when assessing their situation regarding education and learning.

The first conclusions shown in the document are already quite relevant: there are, in the Region, several institutions aiming at senior citizens, either of a formal or informal nature. And they provide a variety of services: health and social care, learning activities, leisure and informal learning. Nevertheless, such institutions cannot properly serve those who live in remote and isolated rural areas and, even when they provide education and operate in urban settings, they fail to attract the male sector of the population.

In order to better draw their conclusions and recommendations the authors have rightly decided to divide the field of study in three main groups: older men living in urban areas with very low educational background; older men living in rural areas with low educational background and older men living in urban areas with medium/high academic background. The general characteristics of these three conditions were analysed and described in some detail and, after a preliminary general survey, three focus-groups were organised “in situ” for each different category. All in all, 90 older men were interviewed in this research.

Out of the focus-group debate some conclusions emerged, namely:

- Belonging to a generation that was condemned to poverty, lack of appropriate schooling and the habit of cultural fruition is felt as a huge and irreparable handicap for living today a healthier and happier old age;

- Due to the variety and the depth of the negative aspects of ageing for a great deal of senior citizens in the Algarve, a closer cooperation among the different institutions and organisations concerned is a crucial requirement;
- More information, better organisation and a wider diversity of the initiatives designed for the older citizens are necessary prerequisites for greater participation.

The work process implemented by the research team finally led to a list of relevant and realistic recommendations. Being aware of the complex situation of senior citizens in Portugal, the authors did not forget that there is a need for more adequate (both in quantity and quality) public policies at the central level. For a start, there is a need for a nationwide policy for increasing education, culture and qualifications of the whole of the Portuguese adult population. Furthermore, a holistic approach to the problems felt by the elder citizens will require appropriate and well-funded government measures in a variety of sectors but converging unto a personal-oriented approach at the local level.

The majority of the recommendations have naturally to deal with the local (and in a few times regional) level. This is, in fact, the delivery level and 12 recommendations are made by the authors addressed mainly to local authorities but also to the whole range of institutions whose work can significantly and positively impact on the lives of older people. The Document calls for more cooperation among them and more integrated work at the local level. Partnerships are seen as the key factor for success in the provision of the required answers. Education provision at the old age is not neglected either, thus promoting the principles and values of Lifelong and Life-wide Learning.

The whole amount of recommendations, as seen in this Document, constitutes a coherent and pertinent programme whose implementation would, no doubt, ensure a happier and healthier ageing not only in the Algarve but in the whole of the country.

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