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The European Network "Learning in Later Life" (LiLL) - Review-Preview!

Cordial greetings to all participants of the *LiLL Conference 2005* which takes place from 25th to 28th November in the European Academy Otzenhausen, greetings to all friends of the LiLL-Network and to all other colleagues working in "seniors' continuing education in Europe".

Over 70 scientists and heads of Universities of the Third Age and other organisations of continuing education for older adults from 14 European countries – Germany, Estonia, France, United Kingdom, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Czech Republic, and one participant from Canada - come together in Otzenhausen to exchange ideas about "New Methods in the Continuing Education of Older people for Strengthening of European Civil Society".

I thank all of you for coming and for your readiness to contribute your experiences, competencies and reflections about the future to the conference.

With this conference we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the European Network „Learning in Later Life“ which was founded in December 1995 in Ulm. It is an amalgamation of Universities of the Third Age and other organisations from meanwhile 21 different European countries working in the field of science-oriented general adult education and concerned with developing new methods of continuing education for older adults.

At the beginning, I would like to say a few words about the founding, the aims and some important stages of the European Network "Learning in Later Life", and then I will briefly describe what it was that prompted this conference and its specific objectives.

In February 1995 an international conference took place at the University of Ulm. The subject of the Conference was „Competence and Productivity in the Third Age. The Contribution of Academic Continuing Education to Preparing People in the Third Age for new Tasks and Fields of Activity“. 156 people from 19 countries participated. The Conference was sponsored by the European Commission and the German Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, briefly called BMFSFJ (Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth).

It soon became apparent that education organisations in many West, Middle and East European countries - with extremely different forms of institutions, theoretical premises, goals and forms of continuing education - have very interesting concepts and experiences which are well worth sharing and making them available to experts from other countries. We have also found out that the networks of AIUTA, TALIS, EFOS and ECUS already had important functions in international cooperation. Moreover, we also could identify a need amongst institutions and scientists/researchers for an professional exchange and discussion about how in the actual social and demographic development older peoples' experience and their potential may be utilized in appropriate roles and tasks in society, respectively how these can be applied by them and which contribution science-oriented continuing education may make.

A central question was what contribution could science-oriented continuing education make to the development (together with the seniors) of new forms of civil engagement, in supporting the seniors in accepting new tasks and in qualifying them for new activities according to their needs. To promote exchange of information and collaboration on a European level, some of the professionals from the institutions of continuing education in the third age proposed the creation of a European network.

In *October 1995*, invited by ZAWiW, 32 scientists/researchers and professionals from scientific continuing education for older people in East and West Europe met in Ulm University to discuss the realization of the proposed European network. The meeting served to define and to develop ideas, to clarify different points of view and to explore in detail the aim of the project and various attitudes towards it. This meeting was financed by the European Commission.

With the support of the BMFSFJ we were able to hold yet another meeting of experts at the University of Ulm with the objective of establishing the network. This meeting took place in *December 1995* and present were 50 experts from East and West European countries, all engaged in the field of scientific continuing education for older people. It was unanimously decided by those present at the conference, that the network should be called *European Network "Learning in Later Life"*.

The following objectives concerning future cooperation were formulated:

- Promotion of information-sharing, communication and co-operation between institutions of science-orientated continuing education for older people in Europe and between older people themselves
- Promotion of "good practice" in continuing education for older people
- Development of an information and communication network "Learning in Later Life" (LiLL) in and through the Internet
- Creation of a European Bulletin "Learning in Later Life"

ZAWiW was named as coordinator of the network and assigned, supported by other institutions, to make applications for financial support which should enable the realisation of the project ideas.

Since then the members of the network have come together in a loose, but continuing alliance on a professional as well as personal level. New colleagues joined, some older friends and initiators of the network have unfortunately died. A fruitful cooperation has developed between some of the participating institutions on the level of theoretical and practical exchanges, through meeting programs, joint seminars and also project partnerships.

Within the framework of the European Commission's Socrates-Programme, area of Adult Education, ZAWiW of the University of Ulm, together with partner institutions from France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Finland and Italy have developed together a *quadilingual information and communication platform „Learning in Later Life“ (LiLL) on the Internet* (www.liill-online.net). This platform contains areas of information and scientific research related to continuing education, areas for communication and self-presentation, and the beginnings of online study programs. The model development of the German part of "LiLL" was supported by the BMFSFJ. This data bank is a source of relevant information and contacts as well as examples of good practice. When in the year 2000 the financial support ended, the data bank could no longer be maintained properly. In the last years, senior students and ZAWiW's staff have on honorary basis updated the address data and information about important forthcoming events. It would be worthwhile to build on the given structure and to actualise and extend the LiLL platform. There are many more people using the Internet today than was imaginable 10 years ago!

The four issues of the „*European Bulletin, Learning in Later Life*“ published in the frame of the project in online and in print form have supported contact and information exchange especially amongst seniors in various European countries.

In 1995 the most of us were not familiar with the new information and communication technologies. There was very little experience in general continuing education in Europe with the new media, the new technology was still very user unfriendly and the seniors and the seniors' education in general were far from applying it in their work. We all had to overcome ignorance and inhibitions. Some partners in the LiLL-Network were aware of the social importance of the IT-media and their implications on economy and society. By promoting the use of the Internet by seniors and by the organisations themselves, they accomplished real pioneer work.

The theme of the LiLL Conference in *December 1998* was: *“Senior Students Online. The Benefits of the Internet for the Senior Studies in Europe”*. Over 70 professionals from seniors' continuing education institutions met to exchange ideas and experiences about the use of the new media in the framework of seniors' education and cooperation at an institutional level. Introduced were examples of good practice in opening of the Internet to older adults and in its constructive use. The Conference was sponsored by the BMFSFJ.

The European project *“Self-organised Learning in Later Life” (SoLiLL)*, sponsored by the European Commission, coordinated 2000-2002 by ZAWiW in partnership with institutions from France, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Czech Republic, was path-breaking for new forms of co-operation between senior groups from different European countries with the use of the Internet. (www.solill.net).

In *June 2000* ZAWiW invited to the European Conference *“Europe: Life and Visions - People over 50 Present European Issues by Means of Multimedia”*. The conference took place in Ulm and addressed professionals and multipliers of continuing education in the third age as well as seniors interested in education and in European issues. The Conference was sponsored by the European Commission.

In *November 2001*, in the framework of the LiLL-Network and the SoLiLL project, a three-day workshop for educators/facilitators *“Working Together Over the Internet”* took place. The goal of this workshop was to inform about aspects of current learning culture related to self-organised learning forms and to provide a platform on which professionals from the area of seniors' education and the seniors themselves present their project work, exchange experiences about (European) co-operation in the way of “learning through research” and explore new possibilities of working together. This way, the foundations for intensive European co-operation in the development of new learning concepts and European virtual learning projects could be laid.

These experiences were positively received by many network partners. Further innovative Internet-based cooperation projects in changing partnerships came to being, for example

- „*European Computer Network*“ (EUCONET) (www.gemeinsamlernen.euconet),
- „*Townstories*“ (www.gemeinsamlernen/townstories),
- „*Open Doors for Europe*“ (ODE) (www.gemeinsamlernen.de/ode).

In the last years, also other educational organisations have carried out successful projects on national and international levels. New forms of international cooperation in the form of real meetings were tested, summer universities, meeting programs, continuing education study programs such as for example „*Geron*“ ([| 14](http://www.uni-</p>
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ulm.de/uni/fak/zawiw/ab_europa/de). Some of these projects will be introduced in this conference.

Between the participants of these conferences, workshops and the many project meetings, with the help of the new media, a patchwork came to being, in which through the information and experience exchange and the inclusion of new contacts and cooperation partners, important developments and action steps were achieved. In the combination of the assumptions from the education theory and experiences from the education praxis lied /lies the strength of the LiLL-Network!

Now have a look where we are in 2005!

We live in times characterized by enormous demographic changes and changes in technology, science and economy. These changes affect people's life style and conditions in a drastic way and change society as a whole. These developments demand from all people - independent of sex and age, education, social position - the willingness to learn and to accept individual and social responsibility. (Continuing) education is no longer a privilege, but a basic necessity in order to be able to follow social and economic changes and to influence them. Those who are not prepared to learn continually will soon not be able to cope with the new world.

The ageing of the population is a development in all industrialized countries in the world. Many older people have extensive life and professional experiences, they possess experience knowledge that they wish to apply, they are willing to learn and are in search of new meaningful tasks. Europe is more for them than a legal or an economic entity. In this context, general science-oriented education acquires a new, important role: to give older citizens the possibility to learn on the basis of their already given knowledge and experience about new scientific developments and findings in all areas, which are of importance for the shaping of the present and the future, and which make active participation in the shaping of society possible.

A central challenge for the education institutions is to develop and to test new activating methods of continuing education which relate to the older people's knowledge and their interests and which strengthen the individual, the community and with it also the civil society.

The following applies:

- To advise older people in the process of self-organisation of learning
- To introduce them to the constructive, cooperative use of the new communication technologies and to create the relevant platforms for them
- To support them through appropriate adult education methods and materials
- To prepare them and support them in the acceptance of new tasks and fields of activity in the way of civic engagement

The LiLL Conference 2005 should provide the opportunity to think about these new challenges, to exchange good practices again and to develop together joint strategies for future work of the LiLL-Network and beyond.

With the call for papers, which was sent to all contact addresses, a call was made for active participation in the conference. The variety and the heterogeneity of the offered contributions made the structuring of the conference themes not easy. But just in this tension between theory and practice lie also the attraction and the challenge of this conference. The many interesting papers which came from the various countries in such a short time show the participants' high motivation.

The conference takes place in three languages (English, German and French). On Saturday and Sunday evening we shall test creative activating methods together.

We are sure, that the communication between the participants in the combination with inspiring subject matter, good organisation and excellent conference atmosphere will work well.

In the name of the members of the LiLL-Network and all conference participants, ZAWiW would like to thank

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(translation: Gabriela Körting)