

Carmen Stadelhofer/Gabriela Körting

Danube-Networkers – A Network of Seniors' Education and Social Participation along the Danube

Zusammenfassung:

In diesem Artikel beschreiben die Autoren die Ziele des derzeit entwickelten Netzwerks „Danube-Networkers“, ein Netzwerk, in dem Bildungs- und Kultureinrichtungen aus dem Donauraum sowie einzelne Personen aus dem Bereich der Bildung durch die Teilnahme an gemeinsamen Aktivitäten eine aktive Rolle übernehmen. Diese sind Pilotprojekte, die durch die Programme der Europäischen Kommission und von deutschen Institutionen finanziert werden, sowie die Teilnahme an relevanten Konferenzen und politische Aktionen wie der durch die Kommission ausgerufenen Entwicklung der Strategie für den Donauraum.

Schlüsselworte: *Donauraumstrategie, Zivilgesellschaft, Lebenslanges Lernen, ein neues Feld an Aktivitäten für die Nachberufsphase*

Abstract:

In this article the authors describe the goals of the currently developed network “Danube-Networkers”, a network in which educational and cultural institutions from the Danube Region as well as individual persons from the field of education take an active part through participation in common activities. These are pilot projects financed by the European Commission programs and by German institutions, as well as participation in relevant conferences and political actions such as responding to the Commission's call for participation in the development of the Strategy for the Danube Region.

Keywords: *Strategy for the Danube Region, Civil Society, Lifelong Learning, New Fields of Activity for Post-professional Phase*

Introduction

The countries covered by the EU Danube Strategy face an enormous demographic change. According to the newest Eurostat estimations (1/2010), 23.3 % of the population in the Danube Region will be aged 65 and over in 2030. In 2010 the rate is 16.5 % and this will bring an increase of 6.8 % in the next twenty years, which means a growth rate of 40 %. All Danube countries will be concerned by this development, their ageing rate even exceeding that of the EU-27 (average increase of 5.8 %). Many Danube regions are additionally affected by migration of the working population, aggravating the age shift.

These changes imply major effects on societies, with consequences for the social, welfare and economic life as well as education and culture.

Older adults (55+) can no longer be regarded as a homogeneous group of passive people or a burden in need of care. Rather, they are an active age group with various life styles and social milieus differing considerably between and within countries – just like any other part of the population. Contrary to widespread stereotypes, mental skills do not necessarily diminish in later life. Older adults just need to be stimulated by learning activities. Furthermore, brain research results show that learning improves seniors' health and is thus an important asset in health prevention.

Elderly possess experiences and competences that are valuable to society and to younger generations, e.g. in the fields of personal, social and professional competences. Older workers and their specific knowledge are needed in the Danube Region labour markets. The active participation and social inclusion of this population group fosters civil society and is absolutely necessary for the prosperity of society as a whole.

Ageing societies like those in the Danube Region simply cannot afford to waste the enormous potential of older adults. Lifelong learning is the key to assuring that the competences and productivity of older adults are not lost to society. It is imperative to provide this growing share of population with learning offers stimulating self-directed learning and social participation. In a world shaped by science, technology and fundamental social changes university based education must be fostered and developed to prepare older adults to take on new challenges and new tasks in society, economy, science and culture. Formal learning offers must be combined with informal and non-formal learning environments, e.g. in self-organized groups and post-employment activities. The importance of cooperation between universities and organisations representing civil society should be acknowledged in educational policies and funding.¹

Danube-Networkers – a network for seniors' education and social participation

In 1995 the Centre for General Scientific Education (ZAWiW) of Ulm University, Germany initiated and coordinated the non-formal European network “Learning in Later Life” (LiLL). Within this framework, since 1997, it has successfully conducted, together with many other educational institutions, numerous

European projects in which groups of older adults from European countries took an active part. The aim is to foster lifelong learning for older adults by utilizing their competencies in the learning process. However, many Danube-countries and the elderly from these countries had not been involved. For this reason ZAWiW initiated in 2008 a cooperation of educational and cultural institutions especially in the Danube Region in order to establish a network intended to strengthen seniors' education and social participation as well as intergenerational cooperation in the Danube Region. This until now non-formal network operates under the name Danube-Networkers.

Universities and non-governmental organizations of all Danube countries working in the fields of education, culture and social affairs are involved. More than 60 institutions coming from all Danube Region countries supported the statement "Lifelong learning programmes for older adults as a societal necessity in the Danube Region" submitted by ZAWiW in the frame of the public consultation of the European Commission concerning the Danube Strategy (see point 6 and <http://www.danube-networkers-2008.eu/statement-2010-684.html>).

Parallel to the development of structures, transnational projects are implemented, in which groups of seniors from different Danube countries are working together. In this context, Internet tools play an important role in cross-national communication and co-operation. The overall coordination of the network is done by ZAWiW. (www.zawiw.de, www.lill-online.net, www.danube-networkers.eu)

Realized projects and seminars

Starting point in 2008: the seminar "Home country – Danube country"

Starting point of the network was a seminar "Home country – Danube country" held by ZAWiW of Ulm University in which delegations from all ten Danube countries participated (one representative and 2–3 seniors from each of the participating educational or cultural institution). The seminar took place from 7th to 12th July 2008 in the context of the International Danube Festival in Ulm, Germany. It aimed at creating a basis for long-term co-operation of seniors' groups alongside the Danube (alternatively: laying a foundation).

The participants shared their personal relations to their country as a Danube country, discussed their common historical and cultural roots as well as the dividing lines. In the course of the seminar exhibits were created for the exhibition "Home in a box" that was presented in the Donauschwäbisches Zentralmuseum in Ulm. At the end, all participants passed a resolution that addressed issues in the area of education and social participation. An educational network Danube-Networkers should provide chance for transnational cooperation in the Danube Region. (www.uni-ulm.de/uni/fak/zawiw/danube_seminar/de)

Grundtvig-Learning Partnership Danube-Networkers

In September 2008, a two-year learning partnership "Danube-Networkers", co-ordinated by ZAWiW of Ulm University and funded by the European Commission's Grundtvig-Programme started its activities. Senior groups from seven cultural and educational institutions from the Danube countries Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria par-

ticipated in the project. In all groups, impressive texts and videos were created dealing with the topics "Bridges alongside the Danube – Bridges between people" and "Natural monuments alongside the Danube". These were shared and discussed via the Internet and in four partner meetings. At the end of the project, the participants made their concerns heard in the European Parliament's Danube Forum.

The various outputs of the project partners' groups are presented in the project website www.danube-networkers-2008.eu.

In-Training Seminar for disseminators from the eastern and the south-eastern European countries

In June 2010, ZAWiW held a one-week In-Training Seminar, funded by the European Commission's Grundtvig Programme, for disseminators in the field of adult education. It especially addressed disseminators from the Danube Region and aimed to train them as "managers of virtual learning in the field of senior education in Europe, especially the Danube Region". In the framework of the training, ideas for future co-operation were developed which were then included in future project applications and realizations (see below).

Citizens' Project "Danube-Networkers – Neighbours at work" (DANET)

From December 2010 to November 2011, ZAWiW conducted the project "DanubeNetworkers – Neighbours at work", in co-operation with five partner groups (each group consisting of a university and a NGO) from six Danube countries (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria). The project was funded by the European Commission's Programme "Europe for Citizens", by the Baden-Württemberg Foundation and other sponsors. In citizens' panels concerning central social topics, organised in each of the partner countries, the project aimed at encouraging older citizens to participate actively in the European Commission's Danube Strategy. The results of the panels were elaborated in web-based discussions. The central issues of the panels were discussed further in a transnational seminar in Croatia in June 2011. In November 2011, in a final conference in Freiburg, Germany, the results were presented to representatives of the European Parliament. Over 250 participants from the six project partner countries were involved in the project.

Amongst the main results were a resolution formulated by the project participants and a DVD documentation of the final meeting and conference. The resolution and other findings are presented at the project website www.danet-at-work.eu.

Establishing seniors' universities alongside the Danube (DASUN)

In the project "Danube Seniors' Universities" (DASUN), which was funded from December 2010 to July 2011 by the Baden-Württemberg Foundation and the Heidehof Foundation, possibilities for science-based education for older adults were analysed at the universities of Belgrade, Serbia, Craiova, Romania, Sofia and Ruse, Bulgaria in close cooperation with cultural and educational NGOs. After the analysis, educational offers for seniors were developed and tested in each of the partner organisation. The "academy weeks" of ZAWiW, the co-ordinator

and scientific leader of the project, served as a model. Each university determined the needs and interests of their senior learners via questionnaire and developed a concept for an education day for seniors at their university. These seniors' education days that were held in June 2011 were evaluated and documented. The partners' concepts for the academy days and their evaluation together with other materials that may be useful to organisations wishing to initiate similar education activities were collected in a brochure that can be downloaded free of charge from the project's website www.dasun.eu.

Senior-Volunteer-Exchange alongside the Danube

Within the framework of the Grundtvig-Program "Senior Volunteering Project" an exchange was realised through the cooperation of ZAWiW/ViLE e.V. and the University of the Third Age Bratislava, in which four senior volunteers spent three weeks in the partner country in order to participate in voluntary initiatives. All volunteer exchange activities have been documented in a weblog. www.svp-project.eu

European Learning Partnership "European Women in older Age" (EWA)

The European learning Partnership EWA was initiated by ZAWiW of Ulm University and was funded by Grundtvig-Programme from September 2010 to August 2012. Danube-Networkers partners from Germany, Austria, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic and two groups from Italy participated in the project and exchanged experiences about the lives of women in their country. The main results were: a project website www.european-women.eu and a DVD presenting the researches and interviews carried out by the national project groups, posters for a poster exhibition and a book in the partners' national languages and English containing a selection of the women's portraits.

Danube-Networkers-Lectures (DALEC)

From December 2011 – July 2012 a project Danube-Networkers-Lectures (DALEC) dealing with the topic "Values and paths alongside the Danube" took place in a partnership of scientific education and civil society institutions from six Danube countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Romania and an associated partner in Bulgaria). This media project for old and young alongside the Danube had been implemented in co-operation with the Danube office Ulm/Neu-Ulm.

Five lectures on scientific subjects were offered by scientists for lay people at five different locations (in Ulm, Belgrade, Vienna, Budapest, and finally again in Ulm) and presented in an online-lecture series in German with a consecutive translation into the partners' national languages to a live audience on location as well as being transmitted over the Internet to all partners' locations. The lectures were followed by transnational discussions over the Internet. www.donaubuer.de/dalec.

Personal Town Tours

A new Grundtvig Learning Partnership "Personal Town Tours" started in August 2012 (end July 2014) with partners from the Danube countries Slovenia, Romania, Germany and two partners in Italy. Partners from Bulgaria and Croatia were on a waiting list.² The project should lead to the development of cultural tours that can be offered to national as well as international

guests of the participating organisations and other interested parties in the project partners' cities. Through cross-national exchanges, the projects' learners gain know-how in the linguistic, cultural and historical backgrounds of other project members' living environments. The tours and other project results will be presented in the project website.

European conference July 2012

To foster communication and cooperation between the colleagues from the Danube-Networkers network and professionals and disseminators from other European countries, ZAWiW realized 8–10 July 2012 a European expert conference "Active Ageing and Intergenerational Dialogue – a Challenge for the Danube Countries in a Common Europe" that took place in the Congress Centre Edwin-Scharff-Haus in Neu-Ulm within the framework of the 8th International Danube Festival Ulm/Neu-Ulm and the European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity. It was the 6th conference of the European Network "Learning in Later Life" (LiLL) and the first conference in which the network Danube-Networkers introduced itself. Over 200 scientists, representatives from the fields of culture, adult and seniors' education as well as seniors with disseminator function from 24 countries focused on the subject "new directions in seniors' education" handled in lectures, workshops and a poster exhibition from intergenerational and intercultural perspectives. One day of the conference focussed on issues of Danube Strategy and cooperation along the Danube. (Conference website: www.lill-danube-conference2012.eu/conference.html).

Projects in planning

Within the framework of the public consultation on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, ZAWiW provided the elaborated project proposal "University-based Lifelong Learning and Use of ICT, especially E-learning for Fostering Older Adults' Social Participation in the Danube Region". The project demands that civil society and especially older citizens with the competences they have earned in their job, their families and society, be included in the design of answers to the pressing questions for the Danube Region. The Danube-Networkers are willing to participate.

Danube-Networkers and the European Commission's Danube Strategy and the Danube Civil Society Forum

The European Commission's Danube Strategy

The goals and activities of the Danube-Networkers are a concrete answer to the Danube Strategy. The European Commission's Regional Policy Department created an action plan in 2010³ which stated how the co-operation between the 14 Danube countries (9 EU-countries: Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania and 5 non-EU countries: Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Moldavia) and Ukraine should be strengthened in the areas of mobility, transport, environment, socio-economic development and security. Five international conferences and a public consultation gave representatives of relevant institutions and organisations the opportunity to participate in the process. ZAWiW represented the Danube-Networkers in all conferences

and submitted the statement “Lifelong learning programmes for older adults as a societal necessity in the Danube Region”, which was signed by 60 institutions of adult education and others from 9 Danube countries Danube-Workers’ Statement: www.danube-networkers-2008.eu/statement-2010.html

Furthermore, ZAWiW submitted the above mentioned project proposal “University-based Lifelong Learning and Use of ICT, especially E-learning for Fostering Older Adults’ Social Participation in the Danube Region”.

Danube Civil Society Forum

In the context of the European Commission’s Danube Strategy-conferences a work group was formed, coordinated by the Austrian Foster Foundation, in order to found the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF). The DCSF acts as a platform for civic organisations and institutions from Danube countries who want to represent and actively involve civil society in the relevant areas of the Danube Strategy’s process. The founding event of DCSF was held on June 30th and July 1st 2011 in Eisenstadt/Austria. As the representative of the Danube-Workers, ZAWiW is one of the initiators of the DCSF, Academic Director Carmen Stadelhofer is responsible for the Working Group three of the DCSF that focuses on aspects of knowledge based society such as education, life-long learning and research. (<http://www.danubestrategy.eu/>).

The Danube-Workers’ co-operations

The Danube-Workers co-operate with various institutions of civil society (education, culture, and environment) in the Danube Region on regional and national level. They are in continuing contact with the organisations represented in the Danube Civil Society Forum, with the Danube Youth Citizens Forum (DYCF) and the Ulm/Neu-Ulm office of the Council of the Danube Cities.

They work in close co-operation with the Danube office Ulm/Neu-Ulm and their work is supported by the Baden-Württemberg Foundation’s branch office Eastern Europe (Geschäfts- und Servicestelle Osteuropa (GSO)).

The vision

The vision for the educational network “Danube-Workers” is that citizens of all countries and of all ages actively participate in various thematic fields to further strategy developments for the Danube Region.

With the aid of local, regional and cross-national projects and activities, the network wants to actively contribute to the development of the Danube Region.

To make this vision come true, governments must provide the needed frameworks. Various institutions are urged to support this process along the Danube. Adult education insti-

tutions, universities, schools, but also civil society institutions (NGOs) are urged to become active. Successful project work needs stable financial resources, supportive politicians, and many people who want to take part in democratic decision-making and civic engagement in the common Danube area. This way the network wants to continue to shape the common European House.

Join us!

The network Danube-Workers welcomes all institutions whose aim is to promote seniors’ education and the inclusion of older citizens into the Danube Region societies. If you are interested in joining the network, please contact us. www.danube-networkers.eu

Notes:

- 1 More information under: <http://www.danube-networkers-2008.eu/statement-2010-684.html>
- 2 As of August 2012
- 3 Action plan http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm

Carmen Stadelhofer

is the Academic Director of the Centre for General Scientific Continuing Education of Ulm University (ZAWiW). Research focus: innovative methods in general scientific continuing education of people in the third age; facilitation and application of the new media in adult education; fostering of self-organised learning of older adults with the aid of the new media. Carmen Stadelhofer chairs the national network ViLE e.V. and the Institute ILEU e.V. at Ulm University. She is a member of the managing board of BAG WiWA Germany, Vice-president of the worldwide Association of the Universities of the Third Age A.I.U.T.A. and a Chairwoman of the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) with focus on aspects of a knowledge-based society such as education, life-long learning and research. Numerous publications.

Gabriela Körting

is a Senior Researcher and Project Manager at the Centre for General Scientific Continuing Education of Ulm University (ZAWiW) with tasks in process management of European projects coordinated by ZAWiW as well as partnerships with other institutions; the concept-development and organisation of cross-national workshops and conferences; supervision of senior’s study groups in the way of learning through research. Co-editor of various publications and of the online magazine Learning in Later Life www.lill-magazine.net.