

Arts, Culture and the « grey power »

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With increasing generations of older people and a decreasing of birth rate, the demographic developments face Europe with new challenges. All governments at all levels are expected to find answers for the new chances and needs that the ageing of the population entails. Furthermore new types of partnerships are required between associations, NGOs, corporates with local, regional and national authorities.

On November 14, 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) issued a position paper on « Participation of older people in society »¹. Among his key points, EESC recommended a more positive evaluation of the elderly's potential and effective participation from governments, NGOs and the media. EESC also insisted on the necessity of developing long-life learning and digital inclusion. Finally, EESC enhanced the role of older people as consumers and the need for corporates to produce goods and services answering the needs of an ageing society. Moreover the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union « recognises and respects the right of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life »².

Three main trends may be identified as far as the arts and culture are concerned. The first one has been acknowledged for years, at least concerning long-life learning through formal and informal plans. The second one consists of the elderly as audiences of the arts and culture. The third one requires combining training and participation, in order to have older people committed as actors in various cultural activities.

Long-life learning

In 1972 Professor Pierre Vellas set up a « université du troisième âge » at Toulouse University. It had various aims: to slow down the ageing process, to allow older people to access the arts, culture and the cultural heritage, to promote a new 'lifestyle' for the elderly. Many initiatives were taken, through specific types of organisation in each country: popular universities in Sweden, « Third Age Trust » in the United Kingdom, a « National

¹ EESC, SOC/448 EESC-2012-1526 Own-initiative Rapporteur: Maureen O'Neill.

² 7 décembre 2000, article 25 : « The rights of the elderly ».

consultative council », in Finland to better coordinate informal sector and universities³. We can also quote various examples in Portugal and Spain, such as the Master for Senior education launched by Madeira University under the aegis of Alice Mendonça and António V. Bento⁴ and the « Programa Senior » initiated by Navarra University. The Arts and culture are at the core of this curriculum – visual arts workshops, classes of modern poetry... Of course, such examples should be spread throughout the European Union. Generally speaking, the arts and culture should play a prominent role while designing a new long-life education, notably in the formal sector.

The elderly as audiences

In their compared analysis of cultural practices in France and the United States of America, Angèle Christin and Olivier Donnat dedicate one chapter to the ageing of audiences notably in France⁵. Since the eighties, a change of the audiences has been observed. Due to a better education and to health improvement, today older people are more committed to the arts and culture than the previous generations. The elderly – at least up to 75 - are the greater consumers of classical music concerts, books, jazz concerts, theatre, opera, exhibitions and heritage. According to Serge Guérin, a French sociologist, the conscience of « been old » only begins at 69, which means a radical mutation with previous generations⁶. Nevertheless, two criterias are at the core of this analysis. Muriel Boulmier suggests three categories of older people⁷: the age of performance (60 – 75), the age of mini-handicaps (75 – 85), the age of dependence: 85 and more. In 2011, in France, INSEE identified that 60-64 were 6,3% of the population meanwhile 65 and more amounted to 16,8% of the population. These figures must be taken into account so that the the State or local authorities may properly articulate the elderly's cultural participation with the possibility of specific accessibility means.

³ See Agustín Requejo Osorio, « La educación de “personas mayores” en el contexto europeo », EFORA, Vol.3, March 2009.

⁴ According to Eurostat, Portugal is the European country with the lowest rate of fecundity (1,28 child per woman). 2012.

⁵ *Pratiques culturelles en France et aux Etats-Unis. Éléments de comparaison 1981 – 2008*, ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Département des Études, de la Prospective et des Statistiques (DEPS), 2014 - 1

⁶ Serge Guérin, *La nouvelle société des seniors*, Michalon, Paris, 2011.

⁷ Muriel Boulmier, 2010 Report to the French Housing State secretariat, *L'adaptation de l'habitat au défi de l'évolution démographique*.

Beyond the age, the level of incomes and the 'cultural capital' are essential for the elderly's artistic participation. Olivier Donnat tried to expose a typology of the various attitudes towards the arts and culture. He proposed the following classification in 1994⁸: « The excluded » (15% of the respondents), « The deprived » (31% of the respondents), « The average crossroads », « The informed », « The trendy ». This classification identified five levels of knowledge in the arts and culture, generating tastes and participation. It appears that the two first categories – « The excluded » and « The deprived » - consist of the oldest people. Concerning « The excluded », the average age is 50. Most of them ended school at 15. They live in rural areas. 40% out of them are retired – former farmers, workers - or housewives. These persons never accessed the world of culture. Their only links with society are television and the daily regional papers. They suffer a lack of sociability and do not take part in any association. « The deprived », one third of the population over 15, include 17% of 65 years old persons. They know about famous artists and take part in French debates, sometimes with provocative assertions – Serge Gainsbourg rather than Molière or Mozart !... They also watch television but they read more books and magazines than the first group. On the contrary, among « The informed », one can find a minority of 60 years old persons – notably women – who benefit a higher education and a good knowledge of classical culture.

Briefly speaking, various methods should be explored to reduce the gap between favoured and resourceless old people⁹. In July 2012, a report dedicated to public French libraries showed that the elderly stopped visiting libraries after 55 for opposite reasons: some of them are too busy, others think that libraries are a young and student space and they feel excluded. Beyond the setting up of various facilities – portage, meetings with authors, public readings, buildings' accessibility and more convenient opening hours, the author of the report concluded that the main challenge for libraries was to organize the intergenerational cohabitation¹⁰.

The same conclusions appear about museums and their use of technologies. Internet is misused by a majority of older people and they do not appropriate the various tools. That is why four Italian researchers proposed

⁸ *Les Français face à la culture*, La Découverte, Paris.

⁹ At the EU scale, this gap also exists between western and eastern countries.

¹⁰ *Les bibliothèques et l'accès des « seniors » et des personnes âgées à la lecture*. Yves Alix, Paris, July 2012. Report of the Inspection générale des Bibliothèques to the French Culture and Education departments.

a new set, a booklet interface physically and functionally similar to a real-world book (as an introduction kit to museums)¹¹.

Finally, cultural tourism is a source of participation for the elderly - at least the better off - granted that their specific needs are taken into consideration: focusing on domestic tourism offer, promoting travels at the low season, enhancing health tourism, articulating strong proposals with tour operators...

Volunteering: an economic and cheerful contribution

In 1999, French writer Alexandre Jardin created « Lire et faire lire ». One of the key objectives was to have older people committed in the public reading of books, authors' presentations and other events. Today the association consists of 12 000 volunteers in 5 000 educational organisations¹². Usually, people already involved in associations during their life, are more eager to participate after 55. This means that the others need to feel safe to become actors themselves. Created in 2010, The Arts and Older People Project organises artistic workshops in rural areas across Herefordshire, with the cooperation of artists and the possibility for the elderly to practice theatre, dance, music¹³... Other types of initiatives could be transferred to the cultural field, like the one launched by the municipality of Murcia, Infojoven, which allows older people to help students along their practices in corporates¹⁴.

Finally, as Serge Guérin stated it about France, « without the retired, the associative cloth would collapse »¹⁵.

As a conclusion, a specific policy must be undertaken in favor of the elderly, in the fields of the arts and culture. Nevertheless specificity should not mean discrimination - ageism. A strong partnership must be launched between educational, cultural, social and health administrations, while

¹¹ Galena Kostoska, Denise Fezzi, Beatrice Valeri, Marcos Baez, *Sharing museum experiences: an approach adapted for older and cognitively impaired adults*. MWA 2013 : Museums and the Web Asia, Dec. 14-15, 2013, Hong Kong and Peking.

¹² Co-funded by the French Culture and Education Departments.

¹³ Funded by the Henry Smith Charity and the Big Lottery.

¹⁴ We could quote many other initiatives initiated by artists such as *Subito Presto* created by François Bardier and the *Benficarte Project*, launched by Marco Almeida.

¹⁵ Quoted by Yves Alix, *Ibidem*.

consulting the already involved elderly. The best practices must be spread throughout the European Union, notably from *Europe 2020* viewpoint.