

Building a Community Legacy Together (BCLT) – An Intergenerational Program for Youth and Older Adults Aimed at Promoting a More Equitable Society*

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Published: May 8, 2019

Abstract

Societies in Europe and around the world are facing an unprecedented ageing of the population. This situation raises policy questions regarding how to ensure the inclusion of older adults so that they can enjoy full human rights in all domains of life. Ageism compromises human flourishing and represents a social justice issue. A solution is connecting the need for lifelong learning with intergenerational programs (IGPs), which promote inclusion, active citizenship and personal development. This concept is only partially understood, both at the policy and practice levels. To address this issue, an Italy – United States collaboration was formed to test an empowerment-based model, called “Building a Community Legacy Together” (BCLT), that creates environments for co-learning between older people and youth. Through this case study we argue that to support projects of living for older adults, it is necessary to rethink the current policy framework, offering opportunities for personal and social growth.

Le società in Europa e nel mondo si trovano ad affrontare un invecchiamento della popolazione senza precedenti. Ciò solleva interrogativi sulle politiche a tutela dell'inclusione sociale degli older adults volte al godimento dei diritti umani in tutti gli ambiti. L'ageism compromette la realizzazione di sé e rappresenta un problema di giustizia sociale di alta priorità. Una soluzione è quella di coniugare il bisogno di apprendimento permanente ai programmi intergenerazionali (IGP) che promuovono inclusione, cittadinanza attiva e sviluppo personale. Tutto questo, tuttavia, è solo parzialmente compreso, sia a livello politico che pratico. Per risolvere questo problema, si è creata una collaborazione Italia - Stati Uniti per testare un modello basato sull'empowerment, chiamato “Building a Community Legacy Together” (BCLT), atto a creare ambienti di co-apprendimento tra anziani e giovani. Attraverso questo case study vogliamo dimostrare che è necessario ripensare radicalmente l'attuale quadro politico, offrendo opportunità di crescita personale e sociale ai longevi.

Keywords: Intergenerational Mentoring; Active Ageing; Youth Development; Community Service.

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1. Introduction

We are facing an unprecedented global demographic change: the rapid ageing of the population in Western societies. In Europe the number of adults aged 65–79 years will increase by over 37 percent between 2010 and 2030. With life expectancy increasing dramatically, European Member States are experiencing a rising number of very old persons (those aged 80 years or above); an anticipated increase of over 57 percent between 2010 and 2030 (European Commission, COM, 2005). Similarly, the percentage of the population in the United States that is 65 and over is expected to increase from 15 in 2014 percent to 24 percent in 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2017).

This population shift will create a major challenge for policy makers to find sufficient social and economic capital to support this segment of the population. At the same time, the increase in age segregated communities and a decrease in contact frequency between generations contribute to the prevalence of social isolation among older adults. Social isolation exacerbates the detrimental health problems that typically accompany aging, for instance increased risk of falls (Faulkner, Cauley, Zmuda, Griffin, & Nevitt, 2003), re-hospitalization (Mistry et al., 2001), cognitive decline and dementia (Fratiglioni, Paillard-Borg, & Winblad, 2004), likelihood of cardiovascular diseases (Shankar, McMunn, Banks, & Steptoe, 2011), and all-cause mortality (Steptoe, Shankar, Demakakos, & Wardle, 2013).

It is unrealistic to assume that sufficient governmental resources can be found to accommodate these rapidly growing needs. Therefore, identifying informal ways to alleviate social isolation and the related deterioration of older adults' physical and cognitive health must be a high priority. Such initiatives have the potential to increase older adults' quality of life and in turn reduce the pressure on medical and social welfare systems.

The European Commission has addressed the challenge of ensuring that older adults are socially included and can fully enjoy all their rights by introducing new policies on lifelong learning. Similarly, The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has affirmed that one of the key sustainable development aims is to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. According to the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, this goal is motivated by a humanistic approach to development established on the basis of human rights and dignity, social justice and inclusion (UNESCO, 2015).

Increased social cohesion is an objective in most Western societies. However, in practice issues regarding inclusion, cohesion and citizenship have typically been considered in terms of employability by most countries sharing the OECD's economic orientation (Field 2006). In the United States and Europe, policymakers have emphasized «active aging». This paradigm holds that both individuals and societies benefit from keeping older adults engaged in work, volunteer, and family roles. Conversely, ageism and age segregation are seen as important societal and cultural barriers to the maintenance of multiple roles.

In this context, research on adult education within a social justice perspective focuses on groups marginalized due to the interplay of different personal characteristics, such as social class, gender, or ethnicity (Jackson, 2011; Wolf & Brady, 2010). We hold that age must be a critical component of social justice approaches to lifelong learning. In this article, we investigate the nature of intergenerational programs (IGPs) and their indispensable place in the research and policy-making in the sphere of adult education. Connecting the issues of social justice and lifelong learning is an innovative aspect of this article.

We begin by outlining the theoretical framework for examining policies concerning adult education, participation and social cohesion. We incorporate the literature on IGPs and their potential benefits in the context of social justice, active aging, and lifelong learning. We then report on an intervention project that applied these ideas, called *Building a Community Legacy Together*. We report selected findings of this case study and discuss implications and future directions for further research.

2. Theoretical and Policy Background

Over the past decade, a number of policies have been formulated to incentivise lengthier participation in the labour market and to augment the employability of older adults as a means of contributing to social inclusion (Hamblin, 2010) and promoting active aging. In the United States, legislation such as the Age Discrimination in Employment Act prevents occupational age discrimination, thus enabling older people to remain in the workforce longer than in some European nations.

Even in the context of lifelong learning, European policies have evolved in accordance with productivity criteria, equating learning to a global strategy to satisfy market requisites and to allay the repercussions of a structural rise in unemployment. The resolutions on lifelong learning adopted by the Commission of the European Communities (Commission of the European Communities, 2002) as a guiding principle for educational reforms tended to support interventions aimed at retraining relatively older workers and to keep them as long as possible active in the labour market, with a view to contribute to economic growth and social cohesion. Furthermore, when lifelong learning appeared as a focus internationally in the 1990s, the emphasis was on supporting economic performance, whether individual or societal (Boshier 1998; Field 2006). Most EU efforts to intervene in national educational affairs were closely correlated to the core EU aims as educational measures had to be justifiable as fostering the common market.

From the mid-1990s, international policies started to involve social and cultural objectives; a range of programs (Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.) were launched and 1996 was designated the European Year of lifelong learning. By the turn of the new millennium, therefore, lifelong learning had become a distinctive feature of EU education policy. A new landscape was set by the Lisbon European Council (March 2000). The EU set itself “a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world [...] with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (CEC 2000, p.2).

Education and training systems were encouraged to adapt to “the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment. (ibid.)” The Lisbon agreement set a target for increasing the participation rate for older workers (aged 50 to 64) in the labor market and identified lifelong learning as making a contribution toward greater employment through improving older peoples' skills and adaptability.

Since 2000, the ‘economic competitiveness’ orientation of international lifelong learning provided space for the EU to develop lifelong learning policies and practices which gave some space to citizenship and social cohesion, but with a predominance of vocational concerns. Examples include:

- *Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems* (CEC 2006a), for example, was concerned to a small degree with adult learning and aimed at improving the employment prospects of less well-qualified individuals in vocational education and training.
- *Adult Learning: It is never too late to learn* (CEC 2006b) posed adult learning as relevant to competitiveness, demographic change (ageing and migration), and social inclusion. It underlined that barriers to participation had to be lowered and that members had to invest more in improving quality of provision for older people and migrants.
- *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework* (CEC 2007) was designed to “provide a European-level reference tool for policy-makers, education providers, employers, and learners themselves to facilitate national- and European-level efforts towards commonly agreed objectives” (p. 3). To achieve this purpose, older people were encouraged to remain or return to work to transfer their skills and knowledge to other generations.

The Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011/C 372/01) considered lifelong learning and skills development as key elements to respond to the economic crisis, to address demographic ageing, and to respond to the economic and social strategy of the European Union. However, adult learning was the weakest link in developing national lifelong-learning systems in relation to targeted learning for migrants, school dropouts, and young people not involved in education, employment or training (NEETs) to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship during the period 2012-2014.

The 2012 European Year for Active Ageing tried to mark the political commitment to promoting rights and social inclusion of Europe’s older population and to emphasise the importance of enhancing solidarity between generations. Although the EU was committed to promoting the potential of an ageing population, the impact was limited by the fact that lifelong learning is usually conceived of as time spent in activities directed at producing goods and services, or at developing capabilities to be able to do so.

The Europe 2020 Strategy acknowledges lifelong learning and skills development as key elements in response to the current economic crisis. The crisis, in fact, has highlighted the major role which adult learning can play, by enabling adults to improve their ability to adapt to changes in the labour market and society, or by up-skilling or reskilling those affected by unemployment, restructuring and career transitions. Adult learning makes an important contribution to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.

Active ageing, however, does not necessarily translate into increased productivity or a prolonged working life, but rather it refers to a scenario of active participation and generativity (AUTORE). Older people constitute a strategic resource, both in terms of intergenerational and social solidarity. Faced with the lack of a systemic vision on ageing, there is a clear need for a change in public policies, institutions and individual behaviours on the same subject, addressed not only to the extension of the working life, but also the maximization of use of the potential of the elderly in all the aspects of their social life.

Specifically, solidarity and the creation of links between generations should not be considered only in financial terms (Peeters et al., 2014). The intergenerational relationship also includes an ethical dimension that characterizes social cohesion for societies, reached by guaranteeing security for all citizens, not only those able to produce a financial contribution (Walker, 2010). As Sen has asserted, one must go beyond the human capital definition, that is, the idea that people learn to become more productive in a socio-economic system (Sen, 1999). Sen’s definition of capabilities, or ability to execute actions, entails an economy built on the opportunity to act and to transform the reality on the basis of the own agency, that is, the power to express one’s own identity along a life project (Margiotta, 2013).

If capability is determined by the space of possibilities open to an individual and is also constrained by personal, institutional, or environmental factors (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017), the quality of life of older people may be concretely ameliorated. To accomplish this improvement, they must be empowered to express their formative potential, giving rise to their capabilities, abilities, attitudes and dispositions that they have not had the opportunity to develop or realise previously in life. To this end, incentives can be aimed at experiencing old age as a way of discovering new opportunities and roles, chief among which is the formation of the younger generations.

Against this background, the growth of intergenerational practice has emerged as a medium for intensifying generational proximity, developing acceptance and communication, fostering dedication to reciprocity and solidarity, and for building bridges across generations (Sanchez et al., 2008; Hatton-Yeo & Batty, 2011). According to the Grundtvig 4 network PEFETE (Pan-European Forum for the Education of The Elderly), several main strengths characterise senior citizens' education:

1. Self-directed and experiential learning: senior citizens have a lifetime of experience to offer others and generally feel strongly involved in the education process;
2. An immense volunteer reserve: senior citizens work as volunteers in senior/youth citizens' education;
3. Contributing to cultural heritage and human capital: senior citizens can play an important role in relation to cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, in many countries education systems have not yet started to address the emerging needs of this group of citizens, who also have enormous potential in terms of what they can contribute to the learning of future lifelong learners. Moreover, the growing numbers of retired people in Europe should be regarded as a potential source of educators and trainers for adult learning. In this sense, education represents the result of life transitions across different events, which creates an individual learning space that empowers agency and attention to the socio-cultural context.

3. One Solution: Intergenerational Programs

Intergenerational programs (IGP), which promote activities that bring together two generations for mutually rewarding purposes, are potentially an answer to the above challenges. IGPs represent the medium for the exchange of resources, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values among older and younger generations (Hatton-Yeo & Ohsako, 2000). The number and variety of programs have proliferated, as program planners in both the youth development and aging sectors have recognized that IGPs help to increase the contact between generations and have discovered benefits for both youth and older participants.

The evidence suggests that IGPs help the youth to promote positive change in attitudes toward older adults (Aday et al., 1993; Chapman & Neal, 1990; Chorn Dunham & Casadonte, 2009; Chua et al., 2013; Couper et al., 1991; Darrow et al., 1994; Dooley & Frankel, 1990; Kassab & Vance, 1999; LoSciuto et al., 1996; Meshel & McGlynn, 2004; Proller, 1989; Taylor et al., 1999), and increase knowledge toward older adults (Kassab & Vance, 1999; LoSciuto et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 1999). In terms of social behavior, IGPs have been found to increase positive attitudes toward community service (Taylor et al., 1999), increase pro-social behavior (Kessler & Staudinger, 2007), and reduce substance use behavior (LoSciuto et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 1999).

Among older adults, IGPs appear to promote positive attitudes toward the younger generations (Aday et al., 1993; LoSciuto et al., 1996; Meshel & McGlynn, 2004). In terms of social behavior, IGPs may improve emotional health (Teater, 2016) and increase higher complexity of emotion regulation (Kessler & Staudinger, 2007), reduce social isolation and loneliness (Murayama et al., 2015; Teater, 2016), increase intergenerational exchange (Sakurai et al., 2016), and increase generativity (Kessler & Staudinger, 2007). For cognitive functioning, IGPs may help to improve performance on speed and word fluency (Kessler & Staudinger, 2007), and to maintain memory functioning (Newman, Karip, & Faux, 1995). In terms of personal well-being, IGP participation has been found to be related to increased self-esteem (Proller, 1989; Teater, 2016), increased psychosocial well-being (Herrmann, Sipsas-Herrmann, Stafford, & Herrmann, 2005), reduced depression (Proller, 1989), improved physical functioning (Sakurai et al., 2016) and health (Teater, 2016), and health-related quality of life (Kamei et al., 2011).

Thus, intergenerational programs build on the positive resources that different generations have to offer each other and are an effective way to address such key priorities as building active communities, promoting citizenship, regenerating social bonding and addressing inequality. The concept of intergenerational learning, however, has not been well-integrated into theory and research on intergenerational

programs, or at policy and practice levels. A number of barriers have been identified to justify this gap such as a lack of understanding what IGPs are, a lack of an evidence base concerning the results of IGPs at the community level, a lack of cooperative thinking between different government institutions, and a lack of available funding for IGPs (Melville & Bernard, 2011). This situation leads to policies and activities focusing on a one-way transmission of skills, values, and attitudes from one generation to another. Indeed, intergenerational learning appears to be, in most countries and at the European level, a policy driven concept rather than a bottom-up process that was later taken into policy.

To date, most efforts to promote intergenerational learning are publicly funded. For this reason, they rarely become sustained programs of an organisation and often have a very short lifetime without the possibility of sustaining significant impact. To address these issues, Cornell University in the United States designed a program to create environments for co-learning between older people and youth, focusing on the transmission of practical advice from elders to young people. This program was adapted and implemented in Italy, allowing for validation of the model in two different cultural and social settings.

4. Building a Community Legacy Together: A Case Study in Empowering Intergenerational Learning

4.1. Conceptual Framework

The Building a Community Legacy Together program (BCLT) was designed to promote the concept of Intergenerational Learning as a transversal model underpinning potential changes in our contemporary ageing societies, one where generations work together to develop social capital and social cohesion.

The impetus for the program is supported by theory and research suggesting that advice-giving and sharing of wisdom can be beneficial for older people. By sharing advice, older adults acquire an active and contributing role during interactions with youth, which helps to increase generativity and a sense of meaning (Hegeman, Roodin, Gilliland, & Ó'Flathabháin, 2010). Generativity is defined as a desire to guide and assist the development of the next generation (Erikson, 1968), and giving advice is one of the means to achieve such goal. Offering concrete guidance to younger people provides an opportunity for older adults to reappraise their past to determine the advice that they deem as most useful and valuable. Older adults derive the advice in the context of reviewing their past experience, which may also have beneficial effects (Sabir, Henderson, Kang, & Pillemer, 2016).

Advice giving also encourages reciprocity during the intergenerational interaction. Older adults often do not perform a contributing role in IGPs. A large proportion of IGPs are service-learning programs, in which youth volunteer to serve the older adults who are perceived as having deficits in health and social support. Limited involvement and absence of reciprocity of older adults diminishes the anticipated outcomes of IGPs and are associated with increases in depression (Hernandez & Gonzalez, 2008). Similarly, a widespread intergenerational program involves “life history” interviews with older people, under the assumption that the opportunity to “tell their story” will benefit elders. In such programs, the elder is understood to be the recipient of attention and interest.

In contrast, by featuring advice-giving in the intervention, both generations serve as provider and receiver during the interaction. The older adults receive the opportunity to interact with younger generations and to have the satisfaction of sharing advice based on their personal experience. The youth can benefit concretely from the advice received, and more broadly engaging with elder wisdom on a personal level can assist in identity formation of young people (Kessler & Staudinger, 2007).

The empirical basis program for the BCLT emerged specifically from the Cornell Legacy Project (Pillemer, 2011; 2015), and in particular the emphasis on advice giving by older adults that is the main feature of the BCLT. The Cornell Legacy Project was a set of interconnected research studies that surveyed over 2000 elders regarding their practical advice for living. The Legacy Project experience revealed that sharing advice for younger people was perceived as empowering by elders. Based on this research project, an IGP was developed in which young people are trained to conduct advice-giving interviews with elders and to engage in group analysis of the information collected.

4.2. Program Components

The BCLT program has several core components. BCLT begins with an intensive interview training program, in which approximately ten hours of training and education are provided to youth. The goal of this training is to build skills and capacity for participants to interact with older adults. The training covers interview and communication skills tailored specifically to interactions with older adults; clarifying expectations when interacting with older adults, and methods to handle possible obstacles. The intensive interview training prepares youth participants to comfortably interact with older people. In addition, youth are responsible for designing the interview questions, thus the topics were relevant and of interest to them.

Following the training, the youth are paired with an older adult to conduct an individual interview. The older adults are briefed in advance about the purpose of the program and the interview questions; thus, they have ample time to review their past and be prepared to share their advice.

Youth in both countries were encouraged to develop questions to ask the elders. Typical questions generated by the youth participants are presented in List 1. The young people were encouraged to consider questions that were deeply meaningful to them; that is, questions they genuinely wanted answered. In so doing, their investment in the project was enhanced, and they were able to convey to the elders as sense of urgency in needing their advice.

Upon completion of the BCLT interview, each youth participant is instructed to summarize the major lessons provided by his or her interviewee. The youth then take part in a group meeting, in which these lessons were shared and synthesized into a single list of the most important advice received for each of the questions. Guidance is provided by the group leader in analyzing the qualitative responses of the older persons and coming to consensus on a core set of lessons learned.

The BCLT program culminates in a presentation for the community members, in which the youth present what they have learned about elder wisdom, showcasing the major pieces of advice for younger people. The goal is to provide an opportunity for youth to publicly foster positive images of older people as sources of wisdom, thus reinforcing their individual experiences in the interviews. The older adults are invited to the community presentation, which reinforced the importance of their participations, increasing their sense of generativity and meaning.

The design of the program helps to foster positive interactions between youth and older adults. The interview process uses contact theory as the conceptual framework, in which Allport (1954) proposed that social interaction between two groups can foster accurate perceptions and reduce prejudice under four conditions: 1) equal status; 2) common goal; 3) intergroup cooperation; and 4) support of authority. This basis prevents any potential hierarchical relationship between two groups, that one group is offering a service for the other group. The conceptual orientation also helps to ease the discomfort when first interacting with a novel group, as they perceive the other group as equal companion for a common goal. In the BCLT, lifelong learning is enhanced because both generations share the roles of receiver and provider, providing equal-status contact. Both generations are instructed to work together to elicit and record the advice of the older adults and apply them to the lives of young people.

The Cornell BCLT program was modified by the first author to enhance its effectiveness. Specifically, for the Italian administration of the program, a session was added in which the elders and youth were able to informally get to know one another before the interviews were conducted, thus allowing for greater comfort in the interview situation. In addition, a training component was added for the elders, providing them with information about being interviewed and orienting them to the goals of the project.

In the United States, the BCLT program has been conducted ten times in local areas of New York State. Approximately 12 elders and 12 youth took part in each administration of the program. In Italy, 20 elders and 13 youth participated in the Veneto region. A process-oriented, formative evaluation was conducted, in which both youth and elders completed pretest and post-test questionnaires.

List 1. Typical Questions Generated by Youth in the BCLT

- What is your advice on finding a fulfilling career?
- What are the secrets to a happy marriage?
- How can a person avoid regrets in life?
- What is your advice on finding happiness?
- What are the most important values on which you shaped your life?
- What do you do when you have too many choices? What's your favorite technique to simplify the process?
- How can a person find the courage to change his or her life?
- Did you learn any lessons on how to feel comfortable with yourself?
- Have you ever fallen in love? Could you explain how knew for certain that you were in love?
- As you look back over your life, what advice do you have about how to stay optimistic in difficult times?
- Did you learn any lessons on how to cope with ageing?

4.3. Contributions of the BCLT to Youth and Elders

The response to the BCLT program was extremely positive for both younger and older participants, confirming our hypothesis that lifelong learning can be enhanced by intergenerational wisdom-sharing. Responses to the program were very similar for both the United States and Italian participants. Approximately 95 percent of the youth found the experience very enjoyable, primarily citing that they enjoyed the interaction with elders and received good advice and wisdom. Further, over 90 percent of the youth would recommend this program to other young people, noting that it was a positive experience, and an excellent opportunity to interact with elders. In addition, approximately 90 percent of the youth reported that their experience in the BCLT was useful, both by learning new skills and by receiving helpful advice that will assist them in the future.

Similarly, among the elders, approximately 90 percent reported finding the interaction with youth enjoyable, and 100 percent of the elders would recommend the BCLT program to others. The elders often cited that the youth were enthusiastic and well prepared. They reported that they were happy to share both their life stories and their practical advice.

The qualitative data obtained from both the Italian and United States participants after the program ended were analyzed. Virtually all responses demonstrated qualitative perceptions of program success. Most of the youth reported that they had «learned a lot from the elders and «the interview was amazing, the person had so much to say». The youth stated that they «would like to conduct interviews with elders again. » Some youth reported a more positive attitude and view toward older adults, stated that «they are not different from us and are interesting to talk to». All youth also reported positively toward the training program and emphasized that the mock interview was particularly useful.

From a lifelong learning perspective, it is useful to examine the response of older participants in more detail. One major theme from the elders was the positive impression made by the youth participants, and specifically that interacting with young people helped to reduce negative stereotypes:

«I thought she was fantastic. She was well prepared, she spoke easily, she shared her feelings and she had a great outlook on life».

«I thought it was a great idea. I think sometimes young kids have a negative opinion of the elderly and I think it gave them a chance to sit and talk to somebody close up and get their viewpoint on things».

The second major theme related to the elders' increased sense of self-worth that resulted from the youth's genuine interest in the elders' lives and the lessons they had learned.

«A lot of times young people don't like advice from older people but she seemed to be listening and taking in what I was telling her».

«I enjoyed the relationships with the young people...I'm 95 years old so it's always great to talk to the young».

«I found myself enthused about the interview and often expanding on my answers, enjoying the give and take with the young person».

In summary, the present study showed the effectiveness of a theory-based intergenerational program. Both age groups reflected positively on the program and were interested to participate in similar programs again. The young people enjoyed hearing the life stories and learning the wisdom of the older adults, while the older adults were pleased to have an opportunity to share their wisdom with young people. Both groups reported improved attitudes toward the other group as a result of participation. Thus, wisdom-sharing appears to be a very promising component of lifelong learning in intergenerational contexts.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we return to the policy level and place the BCLT experience in the larger social context. There is concern that investments in continuous education will revolve around schemas that aim to qualify the “working citizen” rather than the “democratic citizen.” If such is the case, then increased opportunities for learning in older ages may be restricted to the creation of opportunities and modalities that make the older people economically useful, rather than in the expansion of the formative co-construction of knowledge, which is fostered in programs like BCLT.

For a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth towards the Europe 2020 strategy, we need to encourage policies and actions that promote intergenerational learning as a key component of active ageing. Policy makers must re-think lifelong learning in a broader, more humanistic perspective, involving the creation of a novel cultural spaces in which new meanings in education are constructed, without the limits of the dominant market discourse. An important task for the 21st century will be to find a role for the older generation to play. In this effort, societies should make use of the opportunities provided by intergenerational learning to contribute to social cohesion, solidarity, and active ageing, while also promoting economic growth.

We therefore need to rise to a challenge which is not only economic in nature, but is even more one of planning and culture: the redesign of a new welfare system geared not so much towards redefining the thresholds for entering and exiting the labour market, or towards delineating strategies to reintegrate mature workers, but to design lifelong educational policies. These policies should provide incentives to older people to remain active, to contribute to society through intergenerational mentoring, and to allow them the freedom to choose how to spend their time in old age.

To embrace and sustain the new projects of living for older people, it is necessary to radically rethink the current policy framework, giving a value and a sense of purpose to free time, fostering the creation of new belongings, and offering opportunities for personal and social growth. It is also necessary to pinpoint effective strategies for intergenerational learning projects that can help facilitate the implementation of policy and reduce the leaking of funds towards projects that use Intergenerational Learning as a way for accessing resources.

We argue that it is critically important to establish a clear policy definition for intergenerational learning that is accepted across countries and to place intergenerational learning at the core of policies designed to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the strategic framework (ET2020) for European cooperation in education and training. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure a long-term strategic approach that promotes the links between intergenerational learning, social solidarity, active ageing and economic competitiveness. The dramatic increase in the human lifespan provides a unique opportunity for societies, if the state’s social welfare system is more fully geared towards a schematic framework that is increasingly intergenerational. In so doing, societies can contribute to the reconstruction of reciprocity between generations and re-qualifying the different forms of human cohabitation, as well as the quality of life itself. The evidence we have provided regarding the BCLT program suggests that local efforts can contribute to this major goal and should be widely promoted.

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