



**COMENIUS UNIVERSITY IN BRATISLAVA**  
**CENTRE FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION**

# **The University of the Third Age**

## **Development and utilization of the potential of senior citizens' knowledge**

PhDr. Libor LUBELEC, CSc.

PhDr. Nadežda HRAPKOVÁ, PhD.

CCE CU Bratislava

Centre for Continuing Education Comenius University  
10/a Odbojarov Street, 821 05 Bratislava, +421 2 50117731



## **U3A in Slovakia started as an institution which should:**

- **secure a right to education to the elderly,**
- **provide not only education but also carry out research and collaborate with other,**
- **institutions for the benefit of the elderly as an institution of higher learning,**
- **satisfy educational needs and offer a range of study programs based on the latest scientific knowledge,**
- **create conditions for an active life orientation and room for intellectual and social realization and affiliation of the elderly,**
- **enhance an interest of our society and science in problems of the third age and participate in gaining deeper knowledge of this age group (Čornaničová, 2007).**

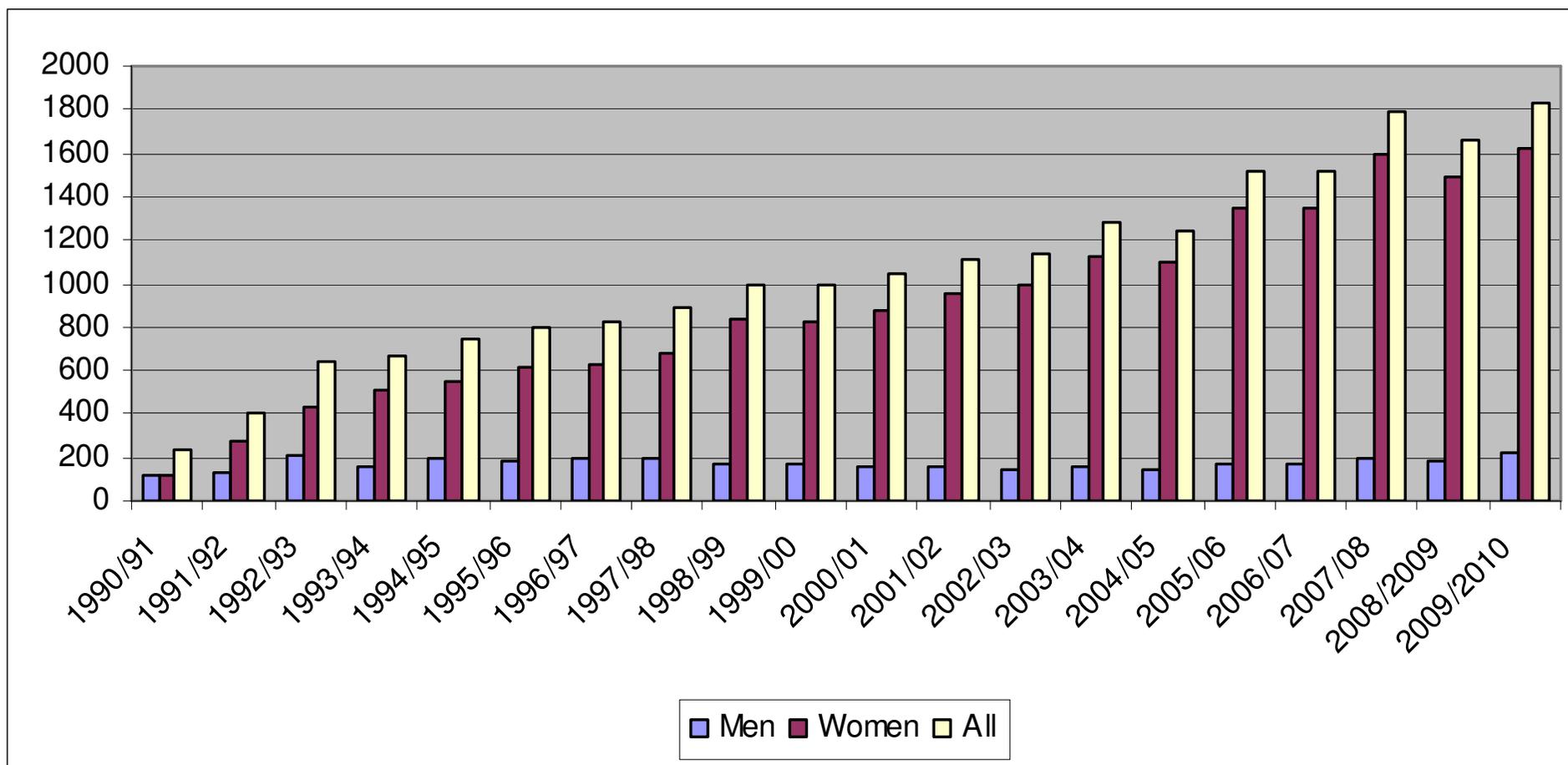


# Number of U3A students in Slovakia

YEAR	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	WOMEN	%
1999	2268	1728	76
2000	2584	2231	86
2001	2964	2322	78
2002	3119	2542	81
2003	3581	3018	84
2004	4154	3202	77
2005	4525	3808	84
2006	5274	4785	91
2007	6033	5244	87
2008	6205	5441	82
2009	6652	5762	87
2010	6217	5402	87
2011	6477	5608	87,5



# Growth in number of U3A students, CCE, Comenius University



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# What do you get from the study?

## EFOSEC 841/556 Senior Citizens Project findings

<b>new knowledge</b>	<b>88%</b>
<b>social contacts and meeting new people</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>better understanding of changes in our society</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>different view on the world</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>knowledge of new technologies</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>stronger personality</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>an easier way of problem solving</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>other</b>	<b>3%</b>

**Lifelong learning is a means of socialization and coping with aging. Lifelong learning is understood as preventing social isolation of seniors, the possibility of carrying out own life goals.**

**Education and participation in programs designed for seniors give participants:**

- *the chance of integration into society,*
- *the opportunity to pass on their own experience,*
- *the ability to use them for the society and in their own environment within the family, friends, clubs or between pensioners.*
- *opportunities for self-realization and participation in the life of society.*



## After 21 years of U3A existence it is possible to say:

- **U3A is an established system of further education of senior citizens which originates from the concept of active ageing with positive effects on its students.**
- **U3A in its further activities will have to respond mainly to the following social challenges:**

*extending the average lifespan and postponing retirement,  
retaining and improving the quality of life of senior citizens,  
growth of unfulfilled social needs and social services in our  
society enabling social involvement of educated and active  
seniors.*



# How does U3A work and how should it be working in response to the stated challenges?

## How does it work at present?

- with a wide range of study fields responding more to satisfying personal interests than developing practically used competencies,
- without educational partnerships and links of the educational development of the study participants with the development needs of the city, region, social institutions, etc.



# How does U3A work and how should it be working in response to the stated challenges?

## How does it work at present?

- It is underfinanced or inadequately financed as it is directly financed from the only source - the participants' fees.
- It is undersized regarding the space available as it does not have its own facilities and it solely depends on an agreement or good will of the rector's office or particular faculties or administrators of teaching facilities.
- It is in a phase of a generation change of its staff of lecturers which could be an opportunity for innovation of subject fields and U3A knowledge base. However, if obliging young lecturers to replace the predecessors cannot be found, the generation exchange can threaten all the functions of U3A.



# In its further activities it is vital for U3A to focus mainly on:

- interconnection of the offered U3A study fields in view of development needs of the study participants as well as those of the city, region, community service institutions,
- securing appropriate study conditions of the increasing number of persons interested in U3A (new facilities, new forms of study),
- innovation and rejuvenating of the lecturers' staff and their replace ability in the wide range of study fields,
- finding ways of maintaining, developing and social use of intellectual potential and practical experience of senior citizens – U3A students,
- networking and developing U3A students' knowledge potential, skills, experience and life energy,
- securing social advancement of a senior citizen from the position of a U3A student to the role of an expert in the given field transferring one's knowledge in social networks.



## U3A is an opportunity for people 50+

- to extend one's knowledge in the areas of individual interest,
- to exist in new social networks and conquer the feeling of social isolation,
- to transfer one's explicit and tacit knowledge to others in various socially beneficial projects,
- to minimize the risk of knowledge loss resulting from a generation change



# Communication, freedom of speech

Man can not live alone for a long time. He needs contact, communication, be with other people. His needs, we could describe as:

- need to be informed: to have information about the world in which man lives, to know what is happening in the city, have information about people nearby and relatives;
- need to speak and be heard: have the opportunity to talk to someone, to communicate;
- the need to belong to a group: to be integrated into social groups of students, the club, etc;
- need for love and understanding - fellowship gives meaning to a life.

## U3A is a socially undervalued institution:

- There is a pronounced difference between the social declaration of U3A importance, its significance for senior citizens' education and the real extend of state support.
- In the National program of senior citizens' protection, the Report on its performance in 2005 – 2006, besides the description of all the U3A assets there is also a requirement stated: **to prepare generally binding finance regulations applicable to the education of the elderly** (p.21).



## U3A is a socially undervalued institution:

- We are at the beginning of the year 2012 and U3A education financing has been so far, and it seems it will continue to be supported from only one source – the participants' fees. It is in contrast to many EU countries in which various models of multiple sources of finance exist. (In our country the university or its particular faculties are indirectly involved by providing free use of their facilities).
- On the whole, we assume that the documents of the given type are only a formal instrument of process management of the elderly care without appropriate realization mechanisms and without financing educational activities i.e. without their practical influence on the lives of the people aged 50+. By the symbol “+” we mean people of a productive age which is **up to 62** at present.



## U3A can fulfill socially important educational tasks:

- The idea to legalize the borderline of retirement for the age of 65 requires pre-planned projects of revitalization of seniors' competencies as well as mechanisms of their effective stay in the job market, or their joining the job market.
- Education of the seniors will be one of the major conditions of their job flexibility. (The project "Flexiistota" – "Flexisafety", which is under preparation, draws from employment experience of threatened social groups in the job market in the developed EU countries).



- Information empower individuals, give him a sense of security, well orientation, give him a greater ability to adapt, orientation in new environments and in changed conditions. Educated senior has a different view of the world, is more flexible, able to change his own ways of life and be better oriented in a society.
- In this context, we believe that education, as an active mental activity is an important way of contributing for building the quality of life of individuals.

## Based on the given facts U3A is at present:

- more an instrument of an individual development of its students even if it partially develops their socially significant competencies e.g. language and digital,
- more interest than competence education,
- without mapping development needs and developing learning in partnerships, e.g. with potential consumers such as the city and its institutions, region, state and its institutions.



# How to continue in the given area?

- Education gives seniors an opportunity to combine the development of their human potential with the development of other social entities in the areas of social life.
- This concept of education of seniors constitutes learning partnerships and education programs, which strengthen the responsibility of each of the parties involved in developing and utilizing human potential through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values in mutually beneficial types of activities for the seniors 50 +.
- It is mainly learning partnerships basis that contributes to the development of a better quality of life and social significance in the human life cycle at 50 +, apart from unnegligible regional and social development effects.



# The need of a new vision and strategy for further functioning of U3A and the overall further education and training of the seniors 50+:

- We think that 20 years is a long enough period for an institution such as U3A to prove to be functional and therefore it should generate an interest in a new vision and concept in its sphere of activity, i.e. a vision of how to advance in educating the elderly.

## The given vision and strategy, in our view, should mainly:

- consider and propose possibilities for further expansion of U3A activities from the preferred interest-based education to the competence development training necessary for successful preparation of the graduates to meet requirements and needs of the labor market in their neighborhood, district or region or to respond to the demands for community service, etc.,
- develop U3A educational activities and programs for the elderly through their active partnership involvement in view of their needs by making use of the skills and competencies they have acquired for the benefit of all the parties involved,
- introduce U3A not only to providing knowledge to its participants but also to mapping and using their explicit and tacit knowledge in informal learning groups and social networks with the aim to solve their own problems as well as those of the community of practice.



# In our view the given vision and strategy should mainly:

- develop forms of participation of the elderly on different projects dealing with solving social and other problems on a national as well as international scale (projects, microprojects),
- motivate seniors to gain, transfer and use their knowledge and skills for the benefit of all the parties involved and to reward them for their active participation in solving social as well as local problems,
- provide access to education from social sources of finance by means of specific programs and projects, grant schemes, etc.



# Thank you for your attention

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