

## Project “Moving your minds” in society<sup>1</sup>

“A healthy city is the one that constantly creates and improves physical and social contexts, implementing community resources which will give the citizens the chance to get a better life and to enhance their potential” (Project O.M.S. Città Sane, Comune di Udine)

### Introduction

In September 2012 the Healthy City office of the Municipality of Udine started a project in cooperation with some associations of the city, among them the Università delle LiberEtà.

The adoption of a healthy lifestyle is an excellent prevention to aging and promotes healthy aging. The city of Udine, which is already involved in initiatives to promote health and sociability, proposes this project which offers different activities to support cognitive health.

The project aims to offer guidelines on how to keep and support the integrity of cognitive functions in senior citizens, adopting effective and practical modalities, within the project targeting the old age problem in the town of Udine.

Adopting healthy lifestyles is already a very good start to promote a healthy seniority. When using a holistic approach, our most important target is the will to train our cognitive functions: this will give a positive response to the fear of decaying so often present in the mind of old people and will also contribute to enhance self-esteem. With our age progressing, we also have an aging of our brain: this fact gives serious consequences in the everyday life of seniors, especially considering the memory issue.

### Development

The “Health Profile of Seniors” 2008 describes the town of Udine as a place having a 23.94 % of people over 65. These seniors believe in a positive view of their city life and are very interested in cultural meetings and in more specific meetings about the health issue. We believe this fact could be a good starting point for our project. The division of the territory in administrative districts and the consolidated habit of having initiatives promoting health and social issues, are all possible paths to use for a further development of the project “Minds in Movement”, when dealing with “An Education toward a proper Mental Health”. The presence of these “Walking Groups” and the general attendance of people to projects about physical exercise are all important resources when dealing with the rapport between memory and physical exercise.

Mental exercises can help throughout our life to maintain our brain health. All free time activities and cultural commitments can slow down our natural cognitive decay. The protective effect could be given by some kind of cerebral plasticity, the capability of our brain to modify itself in front of specific stimulation of the moment. An active process of mental remodelling can be enhanced by favourable local conditions which can happen during our entire life, protecting our brain from the risk of cognitive decay. The personal profiles of seniors, living in the town of Udine, seem to indicate favourable conditions and a fertile ground for such a possibility.

The main aims of the project are:

- the making of sustainable environments responding to personal needs, which can offer favourable stimulus for a cognitive health
- promoting a healthy old age through a personal and a group empowerment
- to guarantee the continuity, the development and diffusion of this initiative, involving the participants to this project

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- the making of a model of scientific intervention based on everyday situations and adopting exercises and a field of interests that can help people to maintain their cognitive power following a path of a healthy lifestyle
- the promotion of significant intergenerational exchanges

The trained cognitive functions and proposed activities are:

- attention and focus: perceptive games, gradual elongation of necessary time
- memory: visual-auditory-linguistic memory games, sense related activities (sense of touch included) , recalling and memory strategies
- language: production and comprehension, practice for semantic and phonetic skills, rhymes
- logical functions: abstraction, categorization, activities about logic, riddles, arithmetic thinking, completion of grammar and literature elements.
- Space-time orientation: orienteering, city maps, geographic and historical maps, history and types of calendars.
- Manual skills and abilities: how to copy geometric figures, drawing and picture completion, object assembling and disassembling, eyes-hand coordination, simple and complex movement coordination, puzzles, guides, how to use manuals, forms.

## **Recommendations**

Università delle LiberEtà participated in the project as a key association providing educational activities to over 65 senior citizens. A 24 lessons English language course “English as a everyday language” was set. There was a huge demand for this course, being seniors very interested in discover how English words are used every day at some different levels, sometimes they do use words that they do not even know they are English. Motivation was a key point: seniors were involved because they strongly believed that the course could help keeping their mind on work.

Thus, we suggest to use the available resources of the territory so to vary and enrich the activities and, at the same time, to enhance motivation, proposing entertaining and practical activities and stimulating personal creativity and the pleasure of discovering new things. We must always keep in mind that the right approach is a natural approach: we should promote inter-generational exchanges, including knowledge of new technologies, network resources and the pleasure of sharing these notions with all the others. These personal exchanges will work as a linking bridge between generations among participants of all ages, helping to prevent and erase existing prejudices.

We suggest to get in touch and ask the cooperation of Clubs dealing with card games, chess, entertaining math, cross words, social games, poetry and prose reading, music schools etc. You could also ask the population to contribute, bringing to a collection point suggestions, ideas of games, quizzes, drills, pictures, maps, proposals which will be evaluated and put into practice after being readapted to the situation. The setting up of all these materials will require great care and attention.

This text is part of the book “Education and quality of life of senior citizens”. See the full book in <http://www.edusenior.eu>

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