Approaching Leadership from a Lifelong Learning Perspective:
Best Practices at University Programs for Seniors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lifelong learning is increasingly widespread in our society. Probably, the international increase of the elderly people, as a social group, could be a key factor. In its social dimension, ageing could be conceptualized in terms of real participation and contribution of the elders on several dimensions, as, currently, on the economic factor, where elders have become the most (and sometimes the only) economic pillar in their family. This chapter is focused on the development of the lifelong learning philosophy at the Universities, specifically on the University Programs for Seniors. We would like to reflect on different intervention models and on their principal features and quantitative and qualitative indicators, as educational strategies, student's and professors' expectations, systems of evaluation, cultural adaptations,...and the methodology of the systems of evaluation (internal and/or external qualitative agencies, interviews, discussion groups, mentoring,...) framed within the best practices.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Process of Building a Learning Society in the 21st Century

One of the great changes our society has seen in the last two centuries has been the progressive globalisation of access to education. However, the institutionalization of the right to education in all its different levels is one of the greatest conquests of humanity. It is a social conquest with an important expression and with the extension of education among the seniors' collective in a progressive and rapid process. In any case, it is a process that the learning society of the 21st century and the progressive emergence of a century of seniors will not only consolidate or lead us to a fresh approach to the real significance of education, its goals, length, institutionalization and final approach, but it will also imply a profound change in the legal and factual conceptualization of the older adults, their role and their input in our society. From this perspective, university programs for seniors will be analyzed, as well as the best practices in education among this collective and the future of lifelong learning, taking the role of the older adults in the learning society as a reference.

From the Right to Education to a Lifelong Education

The institutionalization process of lifelong education is made through several stages. In the first stage, the legal and social institutionalization of school, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, was not only a reaction to the need of an emerging process of structuring of the industrial and capitalist mode of production, but also an actual shaping of the right to education that the most developed and prosperous countries shaped in their political constitutions. Therefore, if the progressive globalization and generalization of schools find their roots in the contributions, not only for an integral human development but also for the social prosperity - with all of its contradictions, insufficiencies, setbacks…- it is worth pointing out the dichotomies between the right to education and educational equity. Anyhow, it should be stated that this is but the first step toward a process of educational democratization in a new social, political and economic context. One of the most defining aspects in the social reality of these most developed countries is the generalization process of education toward every social group; in fact, the institutionalization of education has been one of the most meaningful phenomena from the perspective of the democratization of education.

The second stage in this globalization of education process has been the extension of education not only to those spaces liable to being educational tools, but also to a wide range of ages. A democratization of education capable of reaching each and every social group, men and women alike, as well as each and every territory. It is also capable of reaching a wide range of ages, making lifelong learning feasible

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