

RESEARCH

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PROPOSAL FOR INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THIRD AGE AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

PROPUESTA DE COMUNICACIÓN INTERGENERACIONAL ENTRE TERCERA EDAD Y JÓVENES EN LA SOCIEDAD DEL CONOCIMIENTO

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ABSTRACT

Old age as a social issue is gaining more interest due to demographic calculations that predict that within a few decades these citizens will be the largest segment of the population. A fact that has and is provoking a heated social debate because of the relevant consequences it has for several generations of citizens. A debate even harder because of its deep implications with another social dilemma: immigration. Which is, at first sight, the quickest answer to the problem but, once again, crosses its path with another great social problem: the dire need for work and the high rates of unemployment for those new generations we need in order to improve the pension system. We aim to review the topic of the elderly, to seek theoretical foundations, to discover where the discussion appears, the different points of view and actions, to later make a creative proposal that reflects the real needs of this segment and the social system as a whole. The methodology that has been used in this dissertation has consisted in an analytical and qualitative review of documents belonging to authors and projects to discern the status quo of the issue. The approach of the question is multidisciplinary from Education, Communication and Sociology approach.

KEY WORDS: Active aging – Health – youth – communication - new technologies - Knowledge management– long-term education.

RESUMEN

La tercera edad como cuestión social está cobrando un mayor interés debido a los cálculos demográficos que predicen que dentro de algunas décadas estos ciudadanos sean el mayor segmento de la población. Un hecho que ha provocado y está provocando debate social por las importantes consecuencias que implica para el

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presente y el futuro de esta y futuras generaciones. Debate azuzado por su profunda imbricación con otro tema candente a nivel mundial, como es el de la inmigración, que supone la solución a priori más rápida pero que se encuentra de frente con todavía otro problema importante de la sociedad: la ausencia de trabajo para esas generaciones jóvenes que necesitamos para sostener el sistema de pensiones. Pretendemos revisar el tema de la tercera edad, buscar fundamentación teórica, descubrir dónde aparece la discusión y los distintos puntos de vista y acciones para, más tarde, realizar una propuesta creativa que refleje las necesidades reales de este segmento y del sistema social en conjunto. La metodología con la que se ha procedido en esta disertación ha consistido en una revisión analítica y cualitativa de documentos pertenecientes a autores y proyectos para divisar el *status quo* de la cuestión. La aproximación de la cuestión es multidisciplinar desde la Educación, la Comunicación y la Sociología.

PALABRAS CLAVE: envejecimiento activo – salud – juventud – comunicación – nuevas tecnologías – gestión del conocimiento – formación continua.

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RESUME

A terceira idade como questão social está gerando um maior interesse devido aos cálculos demográficos que predizem que dentro de algumas décadas estes cidadãos sejam o maior segmento da população. Pretendemos revisar o tema da terceira idade, buscar fundamentação teórica, descobrir aonde aparece a discussão e os distintos pontos de vista e ações para, mais tarde, realizar uma proposta criativa que reflita as necessidades reais de este segmento e do sistema social em conjunto. A metodologia com a qual se procedeu em esta dissertação há consistido em uma revisão analítica e qualitativa de documentos pertencentes a autores e projetos para divisar o *status quo* da questão. A aproximação da questão é multidisciplinar desde a educação, a comunicação e a sociologia.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Envelhecimento ativo – Saúde – Juventude – Comunicação – Novas tecnologias – Gestão do conhecimento – Formação continua.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The current state of the art of old age tells us that this issue is taking a greater interest in the demographic calculations predicting that, within a few decades, these citizens will make up the largest segment of the population (United Nations, 2012). There is talk of an aging population and a rejuvenation of the third age (Filippi, 2013). If Europe continues with zero growth rates or close to this figure, in addition to other effects due to the economic crisis that strikes Europe, for example, in the Spanish case, due to the return of foreign immigrants to their countries (Latinos, Arabs, Africans, etc.) and due to the immigration of the Spanish youth, the Spanish National Institute of Statistics predicts in 2021 a decrease of the population of half a million inhabitants.

2. OBJECTIVES

We intend to revise the topic of the third age, to seek theoretical foundations to later make a creative proposal that reflects the real needs of this segment and the social system as a whole.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this dissertation has consisted of an analytical and qualitative review of documents belonging to authors and projects that raise direct themes to the topic of the third age (such as adaptation to the use of new technologies or the state of generational exchange due to sociocultural factors) or factors that are a little more indirect but also affect (social debate on the preference of help for the third age or youth) to reach a state of the art. In addition, we have proceeded to project a triple proposal of actions to promote communication between the Third Age and young people, taking into account all these concepts and the possibilities offered by new technologies as a virtual space of social encounter.

4. DISCUSSION

The new technologies are basic tools for development in society and for access to the knowledge and consumption-based society. In Education, the statement that we learn in society or surrounded by others is a fact that is not usually discussed. It is postulated by authorities such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vigoski, etc. Eduardo Punset (2011) disseminates it through a biological foundation due to the neurological finding of the mirror cells. This communicator diffuses that, through them, we imitate the actions or the adaptive learning of the other social agents. Daniel Goleman stresses the importance of knowing how to live in society through the book *Social Intelligence* (2006).

It is a reality that, since the 1980s, the European Union is investing in training programs that respond to this need so that today's young people are called "digital natives" and continues to propose programs such as Open Education (2013). Those belonging to the third age by social contagion have to adapt to the use of new technologies ranging from the use of the mobile phone (Smartphone) or the tablets to the browsing on websites or specialized pages for their hobbies and searchers to participate in opinion forums, microblogging practice to express their conceptions or

membership in social networks such as Facebook. That is why there are numerous measures to enrich this sector, including the Second World Conference on Population Aging held in Madrid in April 2002, where the UN and WHO advocated an intersectoral approach to address this new demographic and social phenomenon in the document entitled International Plan of Action on Aging and, from an international level, the "World Report on Aging and Health" published in 2015 by the World Health Organization, which stipulates a series of causes, measures on this new and existing old age.

In addition, projects are being created that directly benefit the third-age sector since they contain computer resources for the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of Alzheimer's patients, such as the MOBIS Project promoted by the Vodafone Spain Foundation and Carlos III Health Institute. Likewise, from the European Parliament, the EU also supports an international group on aging and intergenerational solidarity founded in 1982, where the challenges of aging for all generations are discussed in order to find just and sustainable solutions for all European citizens. This article is a product of the support and funding of Seneca Foundation (Personal Development Project 18889 / OC / 13 in Framework III PCTRM 2011-2014). In fact, it is interesting to promote all kinds of initiatives that concern this segment of the population, for their personal development in a phase of life that is not "apparently" so professionally productive. Although this is not objective, how many retirees can continue to practice their profession until some illness prevents them, especially those who have their own business or have been or are autonomous.

There are programs for participation and training of the third age in ICTs. For example, the University for Adults receives a greater interest even when it is already *vox populi* that one type of activity in which they must be participative is the intellectual, because it brings benefits of quality of life and seeks mental lucidity. For cognitive stimulation, they also have all kinds of intellectual games and computer programs, besides playing Sudoku or filling in crosswords. In addition, training in ICTs is facilitated at national and regional level, since it is also programmed and taught with subsidies by municipalities, senior citizen associations, etc.

In addition, the institutions or public administrations offer social participation programs through the internet, for example, the possibility of making the declaration of the Income online.

The reflection on the aging of the western society due to the increase of longevity and the low fertility rates in the western societies arrives at the point of which we must indicate an adjective that reflects the desired way to carry out an ineluctable process: "Active aging". Given that it is impossible not to grow old and that it represents the process of aging that, thanks to the new scientific discoveries, lasts longer and over the years, it was decided to choose a type of social hope, since aging did not live passively, but we can see older individuals still active in the company.

"Active aging is the process of optimizing the opportunities of health, participation and safety in order to improve the quality of life with age" (www.who.int), which defines active aging as the World Health Organization. The need is to find ways to ensure a better quality of life for the elderly, whose presence in society is increasingly relevant. Aging of the population is in itself "a sign of the progress made by medicine but, at the same time, a sign of the need to rethink the relationship

between the fact of generations after, the aging of the population is experiencing this double nature of triumph and challenge (United Nations, 2002). Triumph in order to postpone the end of life, a challenge because these more years of life in expectation that we are offered must be of quality and should not affect the quality of life of other age groups of the population. It is not a coincidence that 2012 was the "European Year of Active Aging and Intergenerational Solidarity".

Solidarity between generations is another theme created very recently. From the last three decades of the last century, it has become an increasingly important social term, due to the unusual duration of the coexistence of several generations in the same period of time (Attias-Donfut, 1995). This promotes generational coexistence, the influence of one over the other and changes the way of transition between the old and the new generations. It also often draws attention to the diverse ways in which resources are allocated between generations in which they compete with one another.

The pyramid-shaped age structure (many young, some elderly individuals), where power came from above and one could think of the danger of a gerontocracy subjected to continuous replacement, since death in any case was the one that pushed the exit of the same generation naturally, has become rectangular. This structure is increasingly balancing the number of individuals at the base (children, teenagers) and the number of elderly people, also called "Active Third Age" (World Health Organization, 2002), who also continue to speak about themselves and avoid the use of the term old people as they consider it has a negative connotation. In fact, sociology of the family has always recently begun to address the so-called "new grandparents" (Romano, Cappadozzi, in Sgritta 2002). They are very active members of the third age who, with the change in the morphology of the family, become important elements for the very existence of the contemporary family and actors in the market, not because of the varying age in which one becomes a grandfather, but because they survive in this stage of life or condition for a very long time.

Another aspect that we raise is related to the consequences of the massive propagation of new communication technologies in contemporary society. There are many definitions that are given to the society in which we live in relation to what scholars have identified in its distinctive form. We doubt that many definitions are characterized by common reference to the needs and dynamics of communication: communication society, information society, knowledge society, network society, and so on.

In fact, communication is the most important element, but it is also an element of constant updating throughout the history of mankind. The most significant emerging elements of society are closely linked to the changes that have affected that ability, perhaps the result of a need for the species that better than any other living human seems to have developed the ability to communicate. But the last few centuries and, more importantly, the last decades have witnessed acceleration in the production of media, languages, support for communication among human beings, much more clearly. This way, they have shown how communication and its dynamics have become a key resource and, in relation to them, will establish new mechanisms for their inclusion, exclusion, conflicts, solidarity, and provide a wide set for social stakeholders being distinctive of a specific space-time (Tomlinson, 2007). On this idea, the sociologist Castells also warns about the social impact of the use of ICTs

and especially of the internet as a consequence of the so-called technological fissure among social strata: "While everything and everyone on the planet felt the effects of this new social structure, global network and territories including some people, however, are excluding others, so that there is an induction of a geography of social, economic and technological inequality "(Castells, 2011, p.18).

The transition to the new media, the Internet and its multiple devices have created a society characterized by connectivity, but also a society that takes for granted the opportunity and the ability to access the technologies that weave the communication network that characterizes it. Unfortunately, the access threshold certainly varies in relation to economic possibilities, but also in relation to the age group of membership. And this point is the one we specifically want to deal with.

The risk we are now taking, in fact, is to create a differentiation based on the generation that creates new forms of social exclusion. Exclusion is not only communication among individuals, whether the members of the family group or not, but rather a true form of exclusion from active participation in contemporary society. Technologies that often support active aging, especially in older people, are not totally physically independent, they are likely to create an insurmountable digital divide and exclude communication / participation in a large proportion of the world's population. In fact, if we take for granted a greater specification of the World Health Concept on the meaning of the adjective, the word "active" refers to continued participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, not only the capacity of being physically active or participating in the workforce" (www.who.int). We note that participation is problematic in the form of promise and threat. And if the problem of intergenerational solidarity has recently seen young people being disadvantaged with regard to older people to reduce the possibilities offered by the welfare state and the labor market itself, competition between investment in the creation of new jobs and the preservation of pensions becomes a battlefield in which young people seem to be the weaker elements, in participation in public life and in society old people are the ones having more difficulties, due to the existence of an unknown world due to the media that they do not know and that belong to that group of early age.

This system of global digital, diversified and flexible communication, capable of adapting to various contents, is a system that for the first time is not driven from the top, but varies from below, which make use of users (Castells, 2013).

It is clearer now, with new technologies, that experience is the one that shapes the media and not only the media are responsible for the form of experience (Silverstone, 1999). For the first time, it is clear how the experiences are by their concretion and how the media experiences are concrete along with the direct and real experiences. For these reasons, it is particularly important to identify the strategies for the integration of digital immigrants (in this case we refer to the third age) of the network society, those who arrived later to this place that is cyberspace, and who must learn the practices, languages, standards, but also unwritten conventions.

It is a necessity because access to technological resources and information prevents or reduces new forms of marginalization and ensures that the critical issues generated by the so-called "information deluge" (Levy, 2011) to which the digitization of information has given a significant momentum in recent years can

somehow be governed also by older citizens. Only this way we can have a positive view of cyberspace and what is now called "Network of Citizenship" or *NetworkedCitizenship* (Lovari, 2013), citizenship able to share knowledge, share, evaluate and find the information they need in that space and the ability to recreate a new type of conversation.

Where, then, do we find maps of tracks and atlases to move in the digital space? How can we hope to overcome the problem of the digital divide of the elderly, a question that is not only due to the variable age, but also due to the economic and cultural level of the person, the availability and the different degree of difficulty in managing the diverse devices (Richardson, Weave and Zorn, 2005). Perhaps it is in this same field of new technologies, in cyberspace, in these digital places where you can imagine building and improving solidarity among generations. The current society is also a grouping of an individualistic nature in which individuals grow distant and different from each other, following very personal paths. The network and the experience of the network, it is possible that it reconnects, compares, make these people used to acting in an individualized way known to each other and thus increase collective intelligence (Levy, 1999) and connective intelligence (De Kerckove, 1997) in an original integration between natives and digital immigrants. Not only for the production of software packages designed to facilitate access such as the ELDI project (www.e-inclusionawards.eu) but also a way of uniting people, to focus on the development of relationships among different social stakeholders to achieve a new form of linkage and social trust.

4.1 Intergenerational prospect of cooperation between the elderly and young people

The abyss of values of each generation is evident, since each generation has had to adapt to the cultural and social coordinates (economic, professional and family-related difficulties and demands), as it is popularly said, "they are children of their time ". As a prospective, we are inspired by the fact that social intergenerational initiatives such as the shared housing program between young people and the elderly are being carried out in several Spanish cities where there is an exchange of stay in the old man's flat in exchange for the young man's company (www.sindinero.org). There are also educational programs such as the retiree program with convicts to teach them how to use the internet (Ortega Madrid, 2013, p.1) privately funded by the La Caixa Social work. These retirees are grouped by the Association of Volunteers of Informatics of Elderly of the Community of Madrid (VIACEMA). Thus, as a result of the research in the previous documentation, we propose three types of proactive actions, those where the third age can contribute to the young people and the one where young people can help the third age.

4.1.1. Proposal on the Third Age for Youth.

We are in favor of such initiatives where the third age share with the young. This type of program also develops the self-esteem of the third age and leaves room for them to exercise some social authority even at a stage of life where they are emotionally perceived to be more vulnerable as they have more physical illnesses or

less autonomy, corporal agility, restraints of the senses (such as sight or hearing) but at a time where the journey of emotional experiences and experiences of life are richer. The fact that they participate in social life in an active way, still feeling useful and helping others, allows them to exercise the emotional and social intelligence that Daniel Goleman enunciates in all its socio-emotional aspects of knowing how to treat, have empathy and solidarity with others.

The situation of these social agents are in an age in which they usually suffer social isolation because their sons and daughters are busy in their jobs and worries, their grandchildren generationally sometimes feel too much different and do not share much time and also begin to suffer the loss of friends being their age or are afraid of suffering from illness or being alone. It would be a way to have an important reason to live, which in the background, let us not lose sight of what it is to love. This would make sense in part to their lives.

Romano Guardini states that it is the most difficult emotional stage of life and must be focused as a culmination (Guardini, 1983). One would think that adolescence has been more difficult if one has gone wrong, but it is not like this.

Longevity studies in a sample of international cultures surprisingly show that one of the variables of longevity (in addition to feeding, stimulation by hobbies, etc.) is found in those cultures with more attachment and emotional support from the family where the elderly often show longevity because the bonds or social-emotional linkages are more solid.

There are positive initiatives in Spain on this subject, such as the Spanish Association for the scientific study of healthy aging (www.longevidad.org) and there is talk of "active aging".

Unfortunately we also receive news that these generations of grandparents in Spain suffer some anxiety because the parents leave in their hands the responsibility to move forward and care for the small children because of professional dedication, the time of separation, the economic crisis, debts, etc. Grandparents can help on time, but they should not be abused, because they no longer have the same energy and patience as they had with their children. Now, this is a bad use of the role of grandparents, good use is necessary, it is irreplaceable because they give an example of life to their grandchildren, values that do not need any explanation because the grandchildren imitate them through the mirror cells, an unconditional and tender love nourished with feelings of years, and give a testimony of life and love that somehow marks the path that the grandchildren should take at the end of life. That the elderly face this stage well and that there is active aging is very important. Grandparents are an essential emotional, affective and vital referent in the social family fabric.

For all these reasons, we go further in this dissertation and think that we could draw much more from the experience of adults. This kind of broad ability is what I call "experiential learning." It means learning not regulated by the educational institutions and left in the hands of the providence, the parents, the family, the friends, etc. However, we consider it necessary for the adaptation to social life and the survival demands of each age as it is learning to live life, strength and emotional resilience (which means human capacity to flexibly assume boundary situations and overcome them), experience of being parents and professionals, which also entails licit and human values). This type of ability we defend, which is an added value if the

third age transfers it, as regarded in some cultures where the older, considered to be "wiser", more experienced in life learning, rule. This could be called "social management of knowledge" or it could be introduced naturally within value-based education systems (value based system) that are in vogue in other countries.

Interaction resources (social networks, virtual platforms) should be encouraged and created through forums where they could exercise not only mentoring (accompaniment of the young novice in the principles in a job) but also coaching (training and guidance throughout the professional practice) by adults with the youngest and especially with the unemployed (who have time to recycle and train).

We think that, in this sense, the platforms allowed by the internet and the social networks that allow this virtual social situation, precisely this social interaction is presented in an advantageous way for an elderly population that perhaps its strong point is not physical mobility or the energies to move and follow a tight schedule, since navigation allows forums, videoconferences, chats where you do not need to be present but they can generate commitment and participation and cooperative activities. And we think that the multiplication of these energies and this wisdom can be an advantage if they can collaborate in companies advising through the intranets, such as for example the intranets in hospitals to collaborate with younger doctors or with university young people who start their professional career through the Practicum or in their first four years of professional practice (mentoring) or during their professional career, advising and guiding (coaching).

4.1.2. Proposal on Youngsters for Seniors.

If technological development has shown over time to be responsible not only for the existence of problems of the digital divide, but also for lack of communication among generations, we could think of constructive and positive prospective that, thanks to the supervision of young experts, the virtual space can become a means to rebuild an intergenerational meeting place. With the end of television as a privileged means of communication, shared media enjoyment is completed. The computer, the tablet, the mobile phones individualize enjoyment. Contents themselves, and therefore interests and tastes, distance people more from each other. Of course, the gap that opens thus between the young and the old is insurmountable.

4.1.3. Proposal on the Third Age for young people. Digital narration and active aging.

However, if we think about how generations were related in the past, we will probably find a resource in the new media. It may seem paradoxical that one can find in the most recent channel media the recovery of a piece of the past lost for a long time. What has been lost is mainly the culture that had traditionally been transmitted orally, through stories, legends, myths from various places that were eternalized through repetition (Ong, 1982). The recovery of orality carried out first by the radio and then by television has never allowed many voices to find so much space. If the two vehicles were ubiquitous and very easy to use, access was very selective. Web 2.0 and its devices are now the places where stories can be easily collected, processed, arranged and enjoyed massively (Hartley and Ong, 2013). It

can also be the opportunity to interact and participate socially. In fact, participatory writing allows the reconstruction of important parts of social history but, above all, the traits of strong identity and belonging in a highly individualized world that takes into account only the reference of the present.

Older people could regain their traditional role through the new technologies: transmit the long-term (historical) memory and hold the different generations together.

The dynamics of the new media, in fact, refer to the dynamics of the community. It is not a coincidence that we talk about virtual communities. Not by chance have they gained terms of value, such as reputation, trust and identity.

In this sense, the elders could be involved in a storytelling project to keep the collective, local, national and international memory that allows a reinterpretation (re-reading) of the concept of identity, confidence in the long past history to ensure trust among generations and care for reputation, which, especially in the past, was an aspect that guaranteed acceptance in the community.

Narration (according to Bruner, 2003, Bruner, 1986, Jedlowski, 2000, Demetrio, 1996, Bertaux, 2010, Ricoeur 1983) becomes for the storyteller not only a passion and renewal of meaning, a creative and imaginative act, but also a place for the discussion of individual life trajectories.

In this regard, we sometimes find initiatives to collect audiovisual documentation narrated by third-age witnesses. An example is the American Jewish director Steven Spielberg, who has taken an initiative for years through a collection of documentaries so as not to lose the historical testimony of thousands of Jews who passed the Holocaust. Another example is the VIP project, a series of documentaries (since 2012) filmed by the Spanish filmmaker Jesus Solera, collecting the testimony of third-age citizens who remember what they did in historical days in Italy, trying to collect what Unamuno called testimony by witnesses of the "intrahistory".

5. CONCLUSIONS

We propose two ways that could be the method to compile and archive stories: on the one hand, the simple story by the individual, on the other hand, participatory writing, with a sum of memories, details, attached anecdotes, texts and metatexts on certain historical or existential moments.

It would be a kind of collective authorship that originates from the contributions of the memories of the individual participants from several countries, and aims to bring together, through the new technologies, an intergenerational form of communication that was lost. In addition to the richness and importance of intergenerational communication, this work could also have great relevance in the complicated construction of a European identity, which begins with confronting the stories of those who have contributed to it and which might be available in several countries.

We believe that the promotion of social laws, financing of projects allowing the realization of this value of solidarity could be the way to take advantage of the knowledge society that we have today; we have the human resources and we have the means through the new technologies. What we lack is to make sense of the joint construction, each one with their effort, of the Common Good; an issue that was

very clear to our ancestors when they hunted together a mammoth and now we have to recover as a basic social value.

We can conclude that it is the best moment, thanks to the ICTs, to favor intergenerational communication and to take advantage of the performance of the knowledge society in which we are immersed. It is enough that each segment of this population gradually becomes aware and learns in practice to value this communication exchange.

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