

Case Study University of Graz

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A) General Part

General	
Case Study Title	The Austrian Expert Group Learning in Later Life – creating a successful dialogue between practitioners and researchers
DIALOGUE thematic group	Learning and Guidance
Date of the case study	March 2012
Contact Information	
Name of the institution	University of Graz Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz
Location/country	Graz, Austria
Size of the organisation/ Number of academic/research and non-academic/administrative staff	University of Graz: 30,000 students; 3,800 staff (incl. 2,600 research/teaching staff)
Website	www.uni-graz.at
Abstract	
Key words	Expert group; research-led development work; quality; networking
Please provide a short abstract of the case study	<p>This case study illustrates the formation, activities/working methods and output to date of the Austrian Expert Group on Learning in Later Life. This expert group was established in 2008 (based on previous project work)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to offer a forum for an institutionalised dialogue between educational practice and educational research in consultation with public administration/policy development and • to produce concrete results for the further development of existing concepts in the area and give concrete recommendations for priorities in the fields of practice, research and policy development.

B) Specific Part

The following part depends on each thematic group, outlining strengths and weaknesses of the chosen situations.

1. Context:

Please present the general background (“landscape of experience”) of the activity and in which institutions, organisations, units or sectors the case took place.

The Austrian Expert Group Learning in Later Life – a new forum for dialogue between research and practice

The Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz and its research-led developmental approach

The Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz is responsible for the research-based development and testing of innovative programmes and learning settings for general interest programmes at university level, thus contributing with its activities and programmes to fulfilling the goal of the University of Graz to be a partner in lifelong learning for people of all ages interested in (academic) knowledge, learning and education. Furthermore, the Center is responsible for setting up an information center and counselling service on university continuing education; for developing programmes to further competence and increase professionalism of educators/facilitators working in university continuing education; and for building up and maintaining regional, national and European partnerships for programme development, cooperation projects and networks.

Learning in Later Life in a university context as a new field of educational activity started in the Center in the year 2005. From the beginning, this work was supposed to be “research-led”, which meant working closely with educational researchers. In 2006, the Center started the project “Development of a Concept for a ‘University of the Third Age’ as well as Testing and Evaluating of Pilot Modules”, supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2005-2007). The project working group included researchers.

Research-based (research-led) development work is done for two reasons: for the **improvement of the quality of provision**; and for **sustainability in the sense of gaining new insight**, understanding and knowledge resulting from everyday practice combined with reflection with researchers. The knowledge of researchers is also important to get a translational perspective of lifelong learning. That means transferring research results into practice. Research-based development work at the Center is implemented at the levels programme development and delivery; quality development as a principle in the professional development of the Center’s own staff (“reflective practitioner”) and for tutors/facilitators working with the staff of the Center.

It is necessary to **create new networks** to enable a dialogue between practice and research across institutional boundaries. The Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz has always been active in networking at regional, national and international level. One of the new networks in which the Center has had an active, founding role, is the **Austrian Expert Group Learning in Later Life**.

Formation of the Expert Group

In 2007, a working group (interdisciplinary, across sectors) supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection published the foundation document “Weiter Bildung im Alter. Positionen und Perspektiven” [Continuing Education in Later Life. Positions and Perspectives]. This publication was very much welcomed by experts/professionals working in the field of Learning in Later Life and it became clear that when the document was finally published, the task of this working group was accomplished. However, there was a definite need for further dialogue across sectors to make progress in practice, research and policy development. At this stage, the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz was encouraged by members of this working group to set up a new forum under the leadership of the Center to continue the dialogue between research and practice in consultation with the public administration.

On 4 March 2008, the first meeting took place. On the agenda was, firstly, to discuss developments at national and institutional level since the last meeting of the previous project group on “Weiter Bildung im Alter” (based on reports by participants); secondly, to define “areas for action: research, pilot projects, networking, events” (also based on contributions by participants); and thirdly, to discuss the future of the group itself (what would be the purpose and goal of such a group and its name; who should take part; what the first work programme would be). The group decided to establish itself as a working group and to be called the “Austrian Expert Group Learning in Later Life”. The Director of the Center for Continuing Education was appointed as coordinator. As for the work plan 2008, it was decided that, on behalf of this group, the coordinator of the Expert Group would prepare a project proposal to the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection to develop guidelines and priorities for learning in later life in Austria for the period up to the year 2020.

So in 2008, the group included the following 11 members:

Research:

- Associate Professor for Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Vienna and Director of the Age(ing) Research Group;
- Associate Professor for Pedagogy at the Department of Education Science and Development and Academic Director of the university course “Interdisciplinary Gerontology”
- University Assistant, Department of Educational Science at the University of Graz
- Research Associate at the Centre for Social Affairs and Generations at the Academy of Lower Austria

Practice:

- Federal Institute for Adult Education (further education of adult educators)
- Academic Coordinator for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning at the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz
- Pastoral care for senior citizens of the Archdiocese Vienna
- Austrian Red Cross – health and social services
- Director of the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz

Consultation:

- Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection; policy development
- Head of the Department of Adult Education and Public Libraries of the Regional Government of Styria

The very innovative approach is the inclusion of governmental consultants to ensure that the results of the network are integrated into political decision processes.

However, the profiles of the individual group members show that “researchers” in adult education often are also working as adult educators in the field and “practitioners” have a strong affiliation towards research.

Activities and working methods/processes

The project proposal to develop guidelines and priorities for learning in later life in Austria for the period up to the year 2020 was submitted to the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, which in turn provided the funding of the project.

The development of the guide “Learning and Education in later life. Guidelines and Priorities 2020” (2008 – March 2011)

This joint work of the Expert Group resulted in the final product “Learning and Education in later life. Guidelines and Priorities 2020”, published in spring 2011. The book contains articles on important themes in the areas of lifelong learning and learning in later life: definitions and terminology; themes such as quality development, guidance and counselling, didactics and methods of teaching and learning; professionalisation; social inclusion, equality and participation. An annotated bibliography is also included. Most important, though, the book offers principles for the development of learning in later life and also proposes concrete demands to public authorities. The production of this joint product/publication involved: the **implementation of professional project management**; the formation of interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral sub-groups with clearly defined tasks to carry out; project meetings, including one meeting with an international expert; and an extended expert workshop (with 9 additional experts from different sectors).

The “Forum Learning in Later Life” (2010-2012)

Feedback from the field showed that there is a need for continuous dialogue and the development of professional knowledge across sectors in the field, and that there is a need for a discourse accompanying projects in the field. The coordinator of the Expert Group applied for the funding of two events entitled “FORUM FOR EDUCATION IN LATER LIFE”. These are planned to continue the dialogue between research, practice and policy development through input from research to practice; they will also show the work done in projects in the field to demonstrate how the priorities could be successfully implemented. This project is funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection for a period of two years with two events at national level. The two events should attract researchers/experts for learning in later life, professionals working in adult education, in social work, and culture. The first event took place in November 2011 (a one-day-programme). The day offered the presentation of new research results (Bildungsinteressen und Bildungsbedarfe in der Nacherwerbsphase by Professor Schmidt-Hertha, Germany), the presentation of good practice projects (International - Intergenerational Mentoring; Aktiv miteinander Altern“; Projekt „Echt Lesig!“) and discussion (where do we go from here in practice, research, public policy – need and priority areas for further dialogue). Participants represented practice, research and public administration. Was there a dialogue between research and practice? Practitioners’ feedback was that working together for one day helped them to better understand their practice. And researchers’ feedback was that the good practice examples inspired them for their research.

Publications

Members of the Expert Group share the standpoint that joint publications of researchers and practitioners provide a good opportunity for reflection. This has been shown above in the description of the production and publication of “Learning and Education in later life. Guidelines and Priorities

2020". Joint publications are, however, not restricted to the Expert Group. In 2011, Waxenegger, Kolland and Ludescher published an article on "University Continuing Education across the Lifespan" and in 2008, within the framework of the EU project ADD LIFE – Adding quality to life through inter-generational learning", a Tool Kit was produced which included several articles by Expert Group members.

References:

- "Lernen und Bildung im späteren Lebensalter. Leitlinien und Prioritäten 2020" [Learning and Education in Later Life. Guidelines and Priorities] of the Austrian Expert Group on Learning in Later Life (researchers and practitioners) in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection. Graz 2011;
- Waxenegger, A./Kolland, F./Ludescher, M. (2011): „Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung im Lebenslauf“ (2011). [University Continuing Education across the Lifespan] In: Niedermaier, G. (Hrsg.), Aktuelle Trends in der beruflichen Aus- und Weiterbildung. Impulse, Perspektiven und Reflexionen (Schriftenreihe für Berufs- und Betriebspädagogik, Bd. 5), S. 339-353;
- Waxenegger, A. on behalf of the ADD LIFE consortium (Ed.) (2008): The ADD LIFE European Tool Kit for Developing Inter-generational Learning in Higher Education, download: <http://add-life.uni-graz.at/>.

2. What are the objectives and purposes of the concrete action?

The objectives and purposes of forming the Austrian Expert Group Learning in Later Life was to strengthen the dialogue between educational practice and research in the field, thus also strengthening the field in general and having a concrete impact on policy. The dialogue between research and practice is also oriented towards the development of new research topics with high social impact factor.

3. How does this activity combine insights from research and practical hands-on experience?

See point 5 below

4. Does the institution/sector/unit provide instruments (e.g. ICT or human resources) for the implementation of the concrete action? Which tools were applied?

Participation in the Expert Group was co-financed by the experts' own institutions.

5. Best practice/ Bad practice:

What kind of results were obtained? What do you consider to be the innovative or interesting part of this concrete action?

What are the barriers (potential and effective) to the full implementation of this action and what are its benefits?

In which sense can this action be useful for DIALOGUE?

Lessons learned

How and where did an exchange of research and practice take place? The following dimensions can be identified:

- Formation and composition of the group (mix of researchers and practitioners from different institutions, professional fields and different generations; in consultation with public administration)
- Collaborative discussion and working out themes and recommendations
- Joint publication (formation of teams of authors including researchers and practitioners)
- Content: recommendations referred to LLL-practice as well as to research (such as need for more studies on conceptions of age and ageing).

It needs a specific framework and/or a common goal and/or product (such as a publication) to make a collaboration fruitful for both sides. What is also required is enough time to find common ground: transfer of knowledge is not a one-way communication; it is – on the contrary – an on-going “process of negotiating meaning” between different actors.

Good project management along with a “sensitive and strict” facilitator is also needed; he/she has to balance divergent interests and actors, and see that discussions remain result-oriented.

Did the work of the group have any impact beyond the learning in the group and the impact on individual group members’ day-to-day-business? The publication was widely spread in Austria and received good feedback; to our knowledge it was also used in different institutional settings. The results of the group work had an immediate impact on writing the Austrian National Strategy on Lifelong Learning – for the first time Austria has a national strategy for LLL and it included an “Action Line 9 – Improvement in quality of life in retirement”.

6. Are researchers and practitioners directly linked in this activity?

- If yes, how are they linked and what are the communication and interaction processes?
- If they do not communicate directly, how are findings from research connected to practical activities and vice versa?

Researchers and practitioners are members of the Austrian Expert Group Learning in Later Life (see above).

7. Which elements would you identify as easily transferable to other institutions in different regional and national contexts?

The formation of an interdisciplinary and intersectoral expert group (network) is transferable on the

basis of a well-structured organisation of the network.

8. Recommendations for dissemination:

Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for other ULLL managers and practitioners – these may include risks as well as benefits.

Please formulate some recommendations for the dissemination on the basis of the case study addressed to the working group and other partners.

See point 5 (above)

9. Additional information. E.g. bibliography, website, publications, reports

Websites:

<http://www.uni-graz.at/zfw/>

www.uni-graz.at/vita-activa

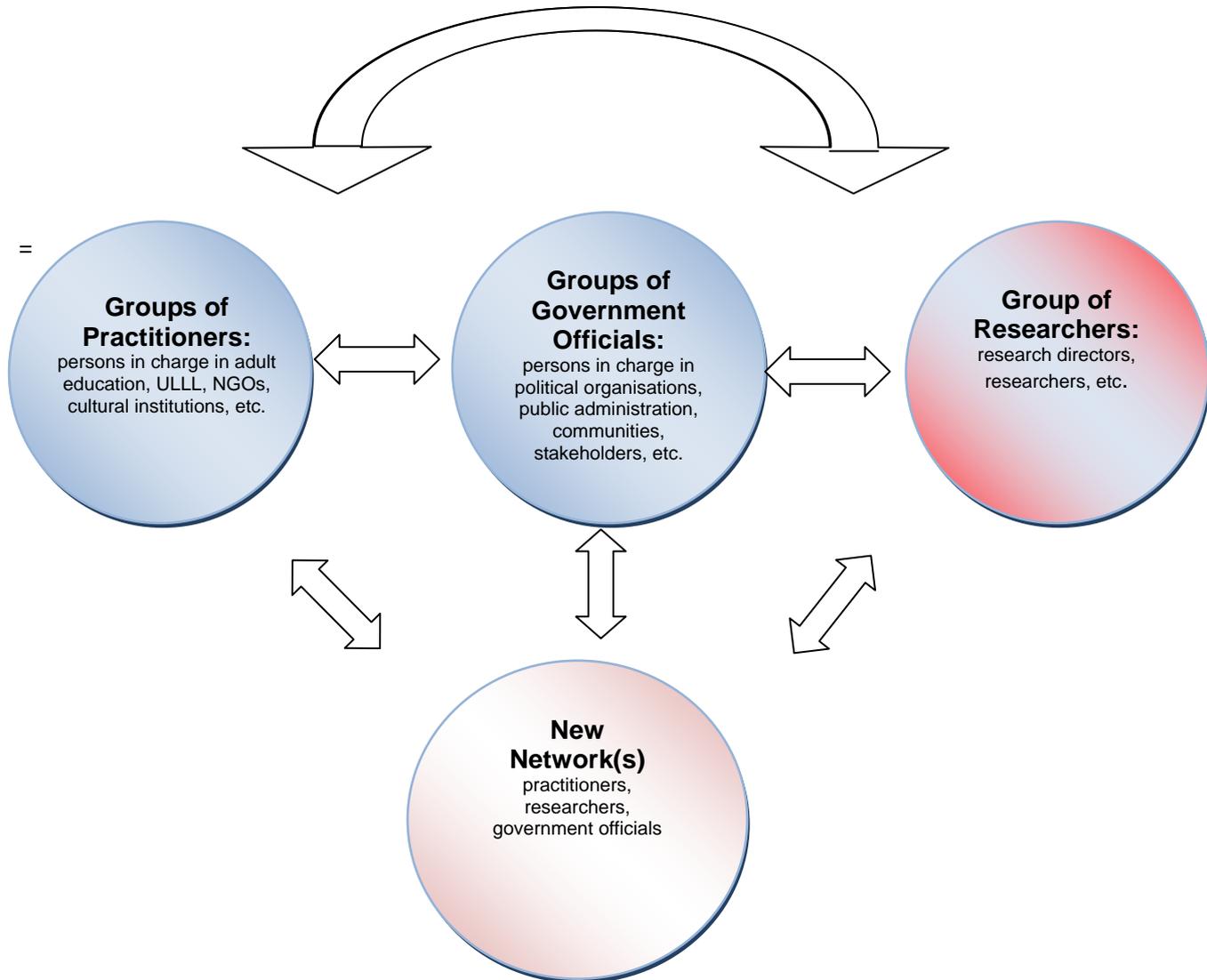
<http://add-life.uni-graz.at/>

http://www.uni-graz.at/lernen_bildung_alter_2020.pdf

We are intending to put your case study on the website.

Please tick here if you do **not** wish to see your case study published on the project's website

ANNEX I



How it is possible to realize a DIALOGUE?

- 1. By creating new networks beyond research and practice (steering groups composed of researchers, practitioners and policy developers/public administrators, ...)**
- 2. Process orientation: including finding a “common language” accepting “difference” (concept of “otherness”)**