



**DANUBE  
SENIORS' UNIVERSITIES  
DASUN**

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## Concepts for Academic Continuing Education Program for Seniors as a Bridge between Science and Citizens

### **Introduction**

The current conception for an academic program for continuing education of old European citizens has been developed in the project “DASUN-Danube universities for old people” framework. It is considered to meet the living conditions in Bulgaria, and particularly in Ruse district.

The main distant objective of the initiative is to ensure the strengthening of the role of third age people in the process of civil dialogue in all levels, exchange of ideas and knowledge between the generations, nations and cultures, aiming at improving the regional and local level social environment in the Danube countries by organizing qualified continuing education.

The main close objective of the project is the development of academic program conceptions for continuing education of old people as a bridge between science and civil society. The education is expected:

- to be a new world which matches contemporary science and new technologies achievements with personal experience, abilities and specific qualifications of the old people.
- to create cooperation conditions between the generations by exchange of ideas, designing of common strategies, etc. aiming at learning, preserving and popularizing of the cultural and historical heritage of Ruse region and of the rest of the Danube countries;
- to develop active social dialogue competences for society development within the European community;

Unlike in many other countries like Germany, Slovenia, Republic of Serbia, Czech Republic, Romania, Norway, etc. there is no university in Bulgaria that provides education for old people.

The people over 50 years of age are the group that has mostly contributed to the democratic transition in Bulgaria and is mostly affected by it.

But they still have their experience and keep their business and academic community contacts which can be used very successfully in the Danube region development.

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The project contributes to the building of bridges between universities and NGOs, exemplarily in three Danube countries, and fosters the idea of LLL and active ageing for older adults in the Danube region.

The aims of the project in details are:



**Pensioners who were members of the University of Rousse**

- ✓ Developing university based education programmes for the target group “older adults” and making it accessible to the public in co-operation with education and culture associations.
- ✓ Defining (through analyses of the organisations, teachers and representatives of the target group) and implementing conditions that foster quality - LLL offers for older adults in the partner universities in the Danube region.
- ✓ Giving older adults the opportunity to be further educated, to deepen their competences and implement them in new, meaningful tasks.
- ✓ Initiating and documenting the exchange of examples of good practice among the institutions of senior education.
- ✓ Building a basis for future co-operations and a network of educational institutions and NGOs in the Danube region.

### **Sponsors**

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### **Partners:**

**Universities and Nongovernment organizations from Germany,  
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#### **Germany:**

**Zentrum für Allgemeine  
Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung  
(ZAWiW) of Ulm University**



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**Ulm University**



**Romania:**

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**National Foundation for Human Aging  
dr Laza Lazarevic  
University of the Third Age**



**Bulgaria:**

**The State University of Library  
Studies and Information Technologies  
(SULSIT)**



**Association of university libraries**



**Bulgaria:**

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**The Pensioners‘ Union 2004, Rousse  
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### **SCIENCES USED AS A BASE IN THIS CONCEPTION**

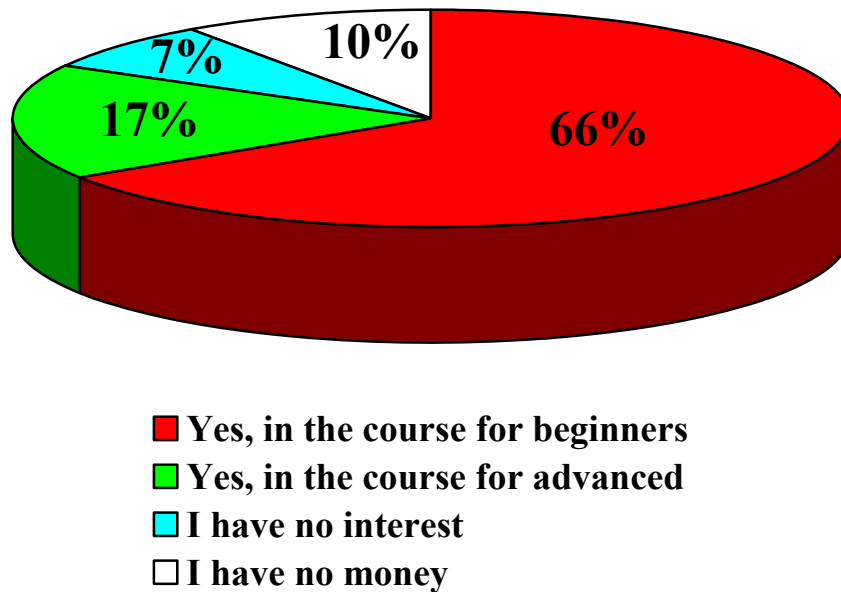
The sciences that are used as a base in the training of old people cannot be counted but we can summarize them from the needs of the old people in Ruse region point of view.

A research instrument (questionnaire) was developed with the methodological help of ZAWIW team that will study the old people needs and the necessity of getting specific knowledge and abilities.

The study took place on 19.03.2011 with the participation of 41 people.



93% of the seniors are interested in forming and development of skills in computer and Internet usage (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1**

Most of the seniors would like to participate in the training connected with :

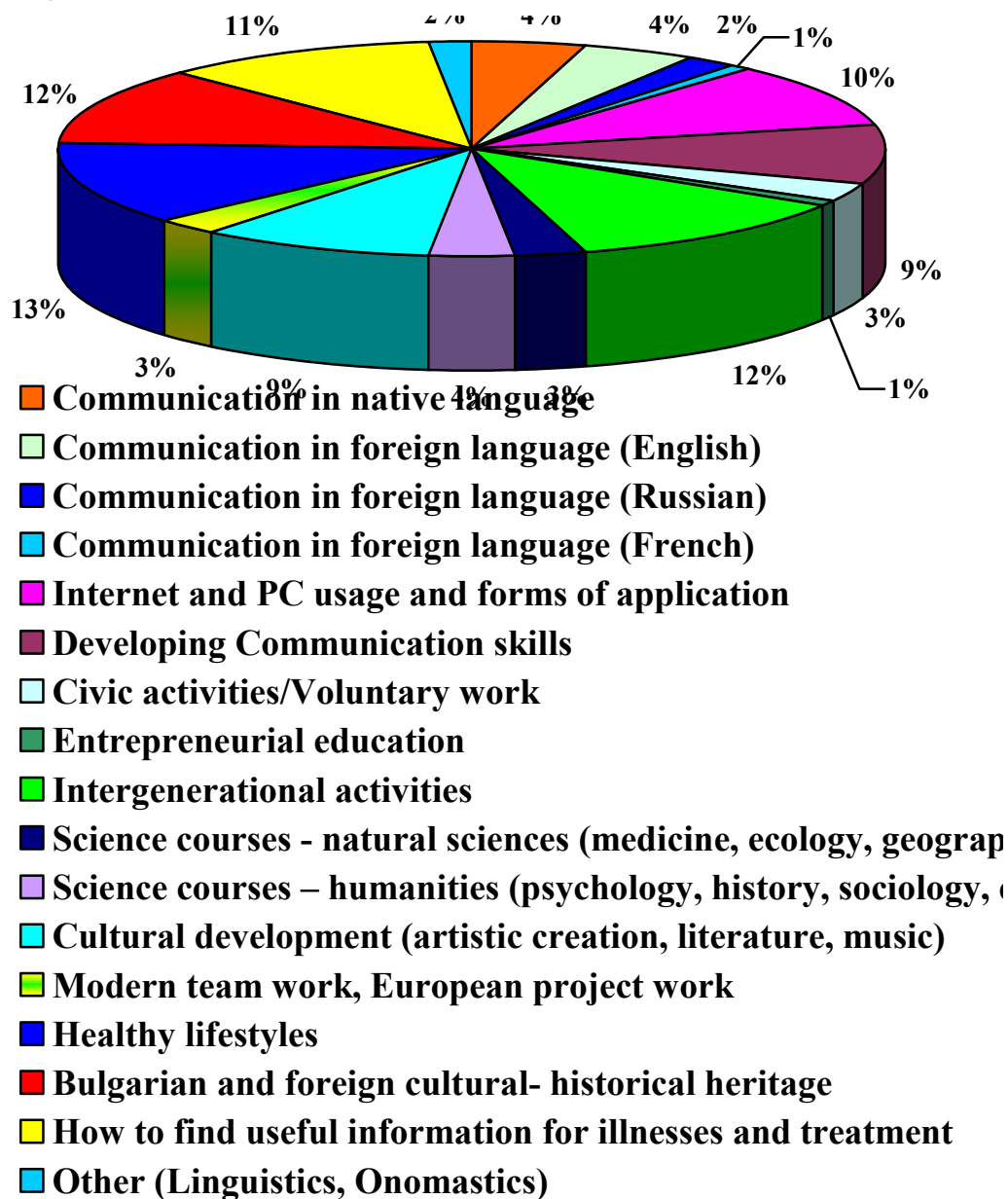
- Healthy lifestyles (13%);
- Bulgarian and foreign cultural-historical heritage (12%);
- Intergenerational activities (12%);
- Finding useful information for illnesses and treatment (11%);
- PC and Internet usage (10%).
- Cultural development (Art creation, Literature, Music) (9%);
- Developing communication skills (9%);
- Science courses in Psychology, History, Sociology, Economy (4%).

The seniors show interest in languages, especially in Bulgarian language (4%) and in English language (4%). There is interest also in learning Russian (2%) or French (1%).

Some of the seniors are also interested in Civic activities / Voluntary work (3%), science courses on Medicine, Ecology, Geography (3%), Modern team work, Project work (3%).



It is necessary to mention that only 1% of the seniors are interested in entrepreneurial education (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2**

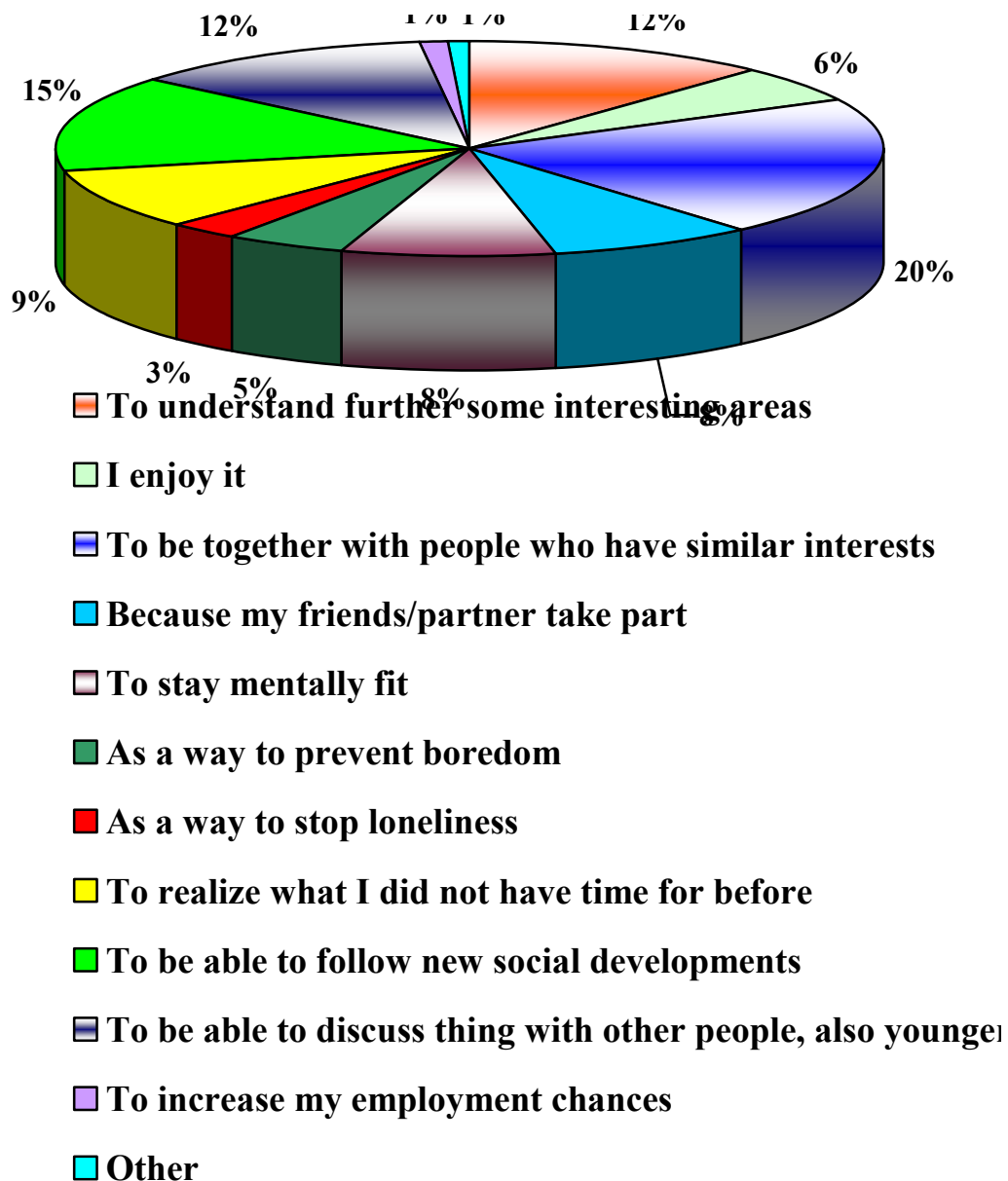
The most important expectations of the respondents from the continuing education are (Fig. 3):

- to be together with people who have similar interests (20%);
- to be able to follow new social developments (15%);

- to understand further some interesting areas (12%);
- to be able to discuss things with other people, also younger ones (12%).

The other group of answers include:

- to realize what I did not have time for before (9%);
- to be because my friends/partner take part (8%);
- to stay mentally fit (8%).



**Figure 3**

For the organization of the Academic day for retired people in Ruse region were used the following sciences.

**Group A.** Geragogics, Andragogics, Ethnologic, Physical Culture and Sport, Methods of Instruction in Physical Activities and Sport, Psychology, Sociology, Pedagogy, etc. The groups is defined by the need of knowledge and the will to prove healthy lifestyle and to stay mentally fit.

The main educational purpose is studying the old people characteristics, find a way to improve their living standard and create good practices for solving specific health or psychological problems.

**Group B.** Architecture, Ethnology, Folklore, Anthropology, History, Art, etc. The group is defined by:

- ✓ Its interest towards Bulgarian and foreign cultural and historical heritage and towards the personal cultural development in the field of art, literature, music;
- ✓ Its will for social communication;
- ✓ Its will for studying about new knowledge areas;
- ✓ Its knowledge and abilities in presenting traditions and customs.

The educational purpose is to study and make popular the Bulgarian and the foreign cultural and historical heritage and on that base to become aware of our national and European identity and to create cooperation with other organizations for retired people in other countries.

**Group C:** Social pedagogy, Age pedagogy, Psychology, Sociology, etc. That group is formed on the necessity of the old people to communicate with the young ones, on their desires for finding methods and means for giving out specific knowledge and abilities in a professional field, as well as traditions, customs, life experience.

The main educational purpose is studying the age characteristics and forming a community of old and young people for exchange of knowledge and experience in different areas.

**Group D:** Computer sciences (Computer organization, Computer systems and internet, Multimedia systems and technologies in education), Geragogics, Social pedagogy, etc. That group is defined by the necessity and the will of the old people to communicate with young ones that have similar interests, to acquire communication abilities, to be informed about the new social processes, to find and exchange useful information about diseases and their treatment, to use the computer for creating music, etc. in the framework of the contemporary computer and communication technologies.

The main educational purpose based on that group of sciences is forming a community which communicates actively using the new techniques and technologies.

Other sciences that are very interesting for the old people in Ruse region are European legislation for old people, Lobbying and effective lobbying practices, Computer graphics, etc., which was stated in talks.

The following training groups were formed:

**Group A. Healthy Lifestyle.**

**Group B. Bulgarian and foreign cultural-historical heritage. Travelling from the past to tomorrow.**

**Group C. Solidarity between generations - a message to the future.**

**Group D. Computer and Internet usage.**

The training of the first three groups was on 14 June, 2011, the training of the last one took place every Saturday in hall 2.101.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE ACADEMY DAY**





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## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACADEMIC DAY**

The official guests were Eng. Orlin Lazarov, Vice Mayor of the Region of Rousse, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Borislav Angelov, Vice Rector of the University of Rousse, Dr. Rudenko Yordanov, President of the Bulgarian Red Cross. Eng. Orlin Lazarov opened the Academic Day with words that for the first time in Bulgaria pensioners' organization took part in an international European project. The guests wished more new European educational projects for seniors.



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Assoc. Prof. Emiliya Velikova presented the project DASUN which was created by Carmen Stadelhofer, Zentrum für Allgemeine Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung (ZAWiW) of Ulm University.





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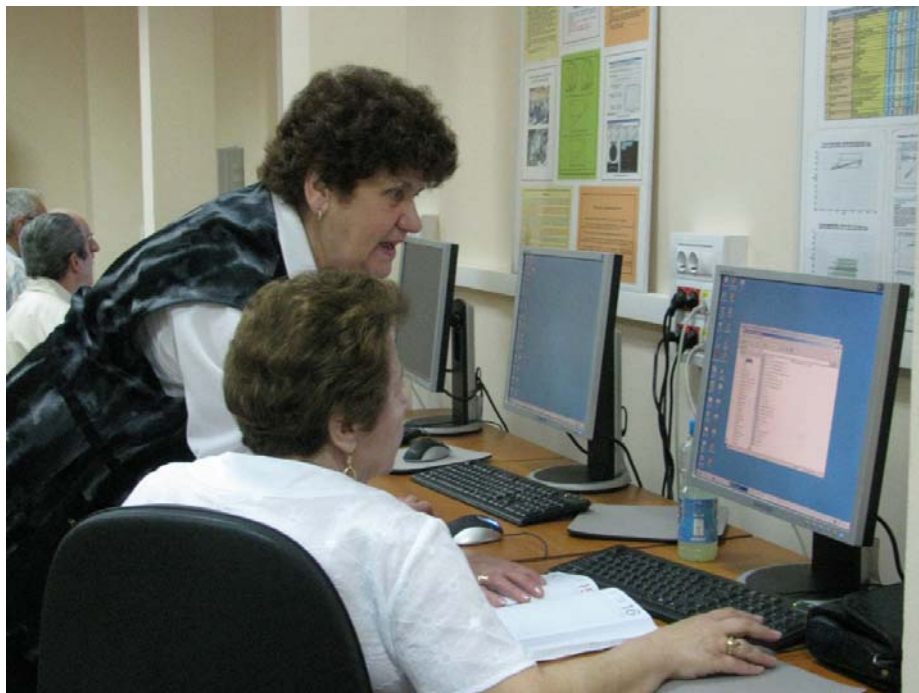


The training in the Group D started with a lecture of Prof. P.Petrov in Geragogics, especially in models, principles, forms and methods of training of seniors, motivation for learning, influence of some factors on the effectiveness of learning, etc.

The other lectures and practices were organized by students from the course „Mathematics and Informatics” (future Secondary school teachers), by professors and former professors of the University of Rousse.

The achieved result is a community of retired seniors in Rousse district that:

- ✓ Exchanges organizational information, news, interesting facts, etc. using E-mails, Internet, Skype;
- ✓ Describing interesting events using Word and Power Point presentations.
- ✓





One of the most important characteristics of the continuing education of the third age seniors is forming a civil society by creating possibilities for:

- ✓ Presenting the new knowledge and abilities in the learning process from the learner's personal experience point of view;
- ✓ Future implementation of the new knowledge for solving socially important problems.

This was the reason that the participants in the Academic Day have been invited to prepare:

Group A - recipe for a healthy lifestyle;

Group B – pictures or other materials of a cultural-historical place or event which impressed the participants and they wanted to present to others or culinary wares, home made clothes, souvenirs, etc. which present the Bulgarian or foreign cultural-historical heritage.

Group C – examples of good practices.

In **Group A. Healthy Lifestyle**, Dr Konstantin Kolev, member of the Bulgarian Red Cross and Dr Rudenko Yordanov, President of the Bulgarian Red Cross presented Geragotics, and especially its aging processes impact mechanisms on the abilities of the seniors to learn and live well, psychological processes and scientific methods for

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its measuring, values system development. The connection between the physical and psychological health got special attention. Important methods for healthy lifestyle were presented. Many of the participants were members of Drujba Club, Bulgarian Red Cross, Bulgarian Red Cross - Youth, Tourists Club, Nadezhda Club, “Aleko Konstantinov” Secondary School, Sport Club – veterans. To support their position that the mountain keeps the human body and spirit healthy, they have put on each table a bunch of fresh mountain flowers. E.Georgieva, R.Koleva, etc presented their recipes for healthy lifestyle.



R.Koleva said about her sport group „We take pictures of our achievements, write essays about active aging, try to be useful for the society for example take care of grave-memorials of sacred seniors for Rousse like Grandma Tonka and Panayot Hitov.

Conclusion: the participation of the seniors in community sport events make them pride and satisfied from the well done useful activity and they do not feel rejected, useless and unnecessary.

The main conclusion for the participants in the following discussion was: do not leave your spirit inactive, do not stay alone, move and communicate!





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**In Group B. Group B. Bulgarian and foreign cultural-historical heritage. Travelling from the past to tomorrow,** Dr Deyan Dragoev, archeologist in the Regional historical museum-Rousse gave a lecture on the legislation of finding, preserving and popularizing the archeological findings in Bulgaria. He presented the liaison between the archeological findings of the late ancient fortress “Kaletó” in the area of Svalenik village, Rousse region from the end of VI till the beginning of the

VII century and the current customs and traditions. The methods for defining the age of archeological artifacts turned out to be very interesting to the learners.

These scientific data were used as a base for presenting participants personal experience. Customs, connected with reaping, Day of Enyo and some others were shown. Some women from Batishnica village presented their unique national costumes, sewn 200 years ago and explained the techniques for working-out the different elements. Specific food prepared for different holidays and many more were also shown.

The group mentor made a discussion which brought out the following conclusions:

Every significant historical moment gives its reflection on the customs of the population. These customs have to be popularized from the older seniors among the younger ones not to get lost, because losing them we lose our Bulgarian identity.

Seeking the historical roots of some customs or seeking the connections between the archeological memorials and the traditions in the Danube region are quite interesting research areas for the third age people.





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✓



**Group C. Solidarity between generations - a message to the future**, had young and old participants. Mr. S. Stoyanov gave a lecture on the historical roots of the relationships between the different generations, scientific research on the age physical and psychological characteristics as a prerequisite for forming the relations between them. Pupils from the Mathematical High School sang a topic-related song for all the participants. Young members of Bulgarian Red Cross showed life-saving methods for old people. The discussion got the following conclusions:

Both young and seniors have something to learn and to be helpful to each other.

The conflict between the generations was ignored by accepting the new, which means that you are also changing yourself and that needs special effort.

The Academic Day ended with reporting and summarizing the sections' results.

Groups for seniors with similar interests, that unified knowledge in different sciences with the personal experience of the seniors were formed and they gave the opportunity everyone to participate in them.

A community was created where a lot of activities are carried out and there is an exchange of knowledge and ideas between the generations.

The communications between the seniors in the groups will be further facilitated based on the contemporary computer and information technologies.





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## **EVALUATION**

Evaluation of the whole Academic Day: 66% of the participants found it interesting and inspiring and 34% - liked it, 0% - did not find it all that interesting and inspiring, no any other opinions.

Evaluation of the lecture in different groups A, B, C: 68% of the participants found it interesting and inspiring and 32% - liked it, 0% - did not find it all that interesting and inspiring, no any other opinions.

Evaluation of the discussion in different groups A, B, C: 65% of the participants found it interesting and inspiring and 22% - liked it, 13% - did not find it all that interesting and inspiring, no any other opinions.

Evaluation of the exhibition of foreign and Bulgarian places and events: 48% of the participants found it interesting and inspiring and 48% - liked it, 4% - did not find it all that interesting and inspiring, no any other opinions.

Evaluation of the exhibition of traditional costume and food: 49% of the participants found it interesting and inspiring and 38% - liked it, 10% - did not find it all that interesting and inspiring, 3% other opinions (not remarked) .

The seniors' expectations were: 82% fully satisfied, 15% partially satisfied, 3% not satisfied at all. The reasons were not informed.

Evaluations of the themes – 79% excellent, 21% not opinion.

Other interesting themes for the seniors were: Information and communication technologies, tolerance, law for pensioners, lobbying, foreign languages,

There are not any new ideas about organization of Academic Days but 78% would like to take part in continuing education for seniors in the future.

## **ANALYSIS**

1. The University of Rousse and UP'2004-Rousse have created a team who can carry out continuing education.

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2. There are a lot of seniors who want to enlist for continuing education. They are very well organized by the “Union of retired seniors 2004” that has more than 7000 members in the Rousse region.
3. University of Rousse has qualified working and retired professors who can teach a wide range of natural, engineering and humanity sciences. Developing an appropriate curriculum and learning programmes is a task that can be implemented in reality.
4. University of Rousse has rooms for the education. Smaller municipality centers can use school rooms and library for that as it was in the past.
5. It is quite important to find a way for the learners to pay a small fee and the necessary material and financial resources to be supported by the community.
6. The experiment of establishing a center for continuing education of seniors from Rousse region, supported and managed by University of Rousse, can try to find support by public and NGO programmes. (Ministry Council Programme, Human Resources Development Agency, Ministry of Education and Science).
7. University of Rousse Academic Day may become a model for organizing continuing education for seniors in other education centers.
- 8.** University of Rousse supports the ideas and the activities of the “DASUN” project and joins the conclusion that continuing education of seniors is necessary.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS**

### **Strengths**

- ✓ good professional qualification of the target group – seniors.
- ✓ a team for joint activities between the only university in the region and the seniors.
- ✓ opportunities to use advanced computer and communication equipment.
- ✓ a team of qualified lecturers.

### **Weaknesses**

- ✓ lack of state policy and attempt for training of seniors.
- ✓ lack of traditions in training of seniors.
- ✓ lack of relations between students and businesses (users of this type of students);

### **Threats**

- ✓ significant lagging of this target group behind the advanced development of equipment and technologies.
- ✓ deepening of the clash due to the inability of this target group to adapt to the modern world of technology.
- ✓ inability to use the competences of this target group despite the existing shortage of qualified labour.

### **Opportunities**

- ✓ providing access of the target group to various operational programs (national, European, etc.).
- ✓ creating administrative capacity in Ruse University for conducting continuing education of seniors.
- ✓ attracting NGOs of seniors for the purpose of education.
- ✓ developing sectoral regional strategy for the development of continuing education of seniors



