

THE CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF UNIVERSITY PROGRAMMES FOR SENIORS IN SOUTHERN AND MEDITERRANEAN EUROPE: THE CASE OF PORTUGAL (*)

Introduction

To begin with I should like to thank the Organization of the *International Symposium on University Programmes for Seniors*, on the topic *University Programmes for Seniors in the Construction of a European Framework for Higher Learning*, in the person of Dr. Carmen Orte Socias, for having invited me to participate in such a promising scientific event. I am also grateful to Dr. Mariano Sánchez Martínez, from the University of Granada, the chairman of this round table on *The Current Status and Future Prospects of University Programmes for Seniors in Southern and Mediterranean Europe*, for having encouraged me to share with you the Portuguese state of affairs in this domain, although the Portuguese case should be taken as very peculiar, if not exceptional.

Due to the fact that traditional Portuguese universities (public or private) do not yet have any specific university programmes for senior citizens or, more exactly, in Dr. Mariano Sánchez's words, for people from 50 years of age onwards, I have been asked to give you my opinion as to why traditional Portuguese universities have not yet considered this population as a public to be taken into account as far as their mission is concerned, to tell you if any traditional Portuguese university is already thinking of doing anything in this realm and to share with you what I think of the role which the European/international networks within the *European Higher Education Area* may play to promote the creation of university programmes for senior citizens at the traditional Portuguese universities.

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I feel I must admit that I have already reached the above-mentioned borderline age and that my educational experience in terms of student and teacher leads me to be very critical concerning the educational model which should be used with the senior population. In fact, I wonder if the problem only concerns me or if I am merely voicing a feeling shared by different people according to which the educational approach more suitable for senior citizens must effectively be different. I do not believe this feeling is unfounded. It is certainly the result of my age and long experience as a teacher.

A recent historical overview of the situation in Portugal in an attempt to find an explanation for the non-existence of university programmes for the third age in our country

As a Portuguese university professor, I regret having to say before this audience that there are no university programmes for the third age at our public or private traditional universities. A few Portuguese universities are already sensitive to the fact that, in order to know more and more about the elderly – a population which is increasing in number and which deserves particular attention –, and to be able to meet requirements, it is important to offer gerontological programmes aimed at training experts in different areas, namely connected with health, ethics, the rights of the elderly, social aspects, sexuality, nutrition, etc. In this respect, I have just read in the *Jornal de Notícias* (dated April 16, 2003) – the newspaper which is the most widely read in Portugal and which now offers every Wednesday a supplement called “Sénior” –, that two months ago, in Porto, an institution called *Instituto de Formação Sénior – Academia de Idosos* was created, whose president is a psychiatrist and whose aim is to offer courses in areas such as health, arts and design, technologies, law, economics and finance for the expected population, as well as technical courses on gerontology for training staff aimed at looking after older people and advanced studies on gerontology for the directors of institutions concerned with the elderly. Once more, this academy is a private initiative and is constituted, according to the information available in the above-mentioned newspaper, by a young team who plan to promote innovative forms of dealing with the elderly. Nevertheless, it is true that not only the traditional universities but also other institutions concerned with older people have not yet realised that it is also crucial to create scientifically based educational programmes for that population. The traditional universities may be receptive to protocols with the Universities of the Third Age (U3A)¹ but they do not yet see or

¹ As for the abbreviation U3A [University/Universities of the Third Age], see LEMIEUX, A.; BOUTIN, G.; SÁNCHEZ, M.; RIENDEAU, J. – *The faculties of education in the traditional universities and the third*

they may even ignore that, as traditional universities, their mission in terms of the education of senior citizens must be totally different. In other words, they should not only confine themselves to establishing protocols with the U3A or to collaborating with them. According to Lemieux², the traditional universities should take upon themselves training, research and intervention in the realm of a scientifically based education of the third age (see gerontagogy), and the U3A should instead deal mainly with cultural programmes.

However, the situation has not stood still and, if we go back to the mid 1970s, two distinct Portuguese realities may be outlined: one concerned with the creation, in 1976, in Lisbon, of the first U3A – the *Universidade Internacional para a Terceira Idade* –, following undoubtedly the French example³, since then other U3A have been created, mainly in the 1990s and already at the beginning of this century; and another reality, which is very peculiar to Portugal and which concerns the general low educational level of the Portuguese population, a situation inherited from the Portuguese regime which came to an end with the April Revolution of 1974.

When we look at the figures which represent the educational levels of our population at that period of our History, we are obliged to admit that we were faced with a tremendous inheritance in terms of illiteracy. Illiteracy understood as the antonym of the term literacy as it was used in the 1970s⁴, i.e., when “[l]iteracy [...] [was] considered simply the ability to read and write”⁵ and not in the sense of the literacy of nowadays, i.e., as the “estado ou condição de quem não apenas sabe ler e escrever, mas cultiva e exerce as práticas sociais que usam a escrita” [“the state or condition of someone who not only knows how to read and write, but who cultivates and exercises the social practices which use writing”]⁶. According to a report, dated February 1999, of the Centro de Investigação de Políticas do Ensino Superior [Research Centre for Higher Education Policies] (CIPES), the population who

age universities: A model of partnership. Unpublished, 2003, 9 pp. (p. 2). [This text has been referred to and quoted with kind permission of A. Lemieux.]

² Cf. exchange of ideas on gerontagogy between A. Lemieux and the author by e-mail (April 2003), and LEMIEUX, A. – *La gérontagogie: Une nouvelle réalité*, Montréal, Éditions Nouvelles, 2001.

³ See LEMIEUX; BOUTIN; SÁNCHEZ; RIENDEAU – *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴ OECD/PISA – *Measuring student knowledge and skills. The PISA 2000. Assessment of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy*, 2000, p. 15. Available at <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/docs/assess.htm>, visited on the 19.03.2002.

⁵ OECD/PISA – *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁶ SOARES, M. – *Letramento. Um tema em três gêneros*, Belo Horizonte, Autêntica Editora, 2.^a edição, 4.^a reimpressão, 2001 (1.^a ed.: 1998), p. 47.

attended higher education in 1974, the year of the Revolution, was about 6 to 7% of the Portuguese population aged between 18 and 24 years⁷. In the mid 1990s, according to the same source, the percentage was already close to 40% of the population aged 20-24 years⁸. I can add that, according to the Instituto Nacional de Estatística [National Statistical Institute] (INE)⁹, the resident population in Portugal in 1981 was 9,833,014: 26.35% of the whole population could neither read nor write; 2.64% of the whole population (were attending or) had completed higher education; about 21% of the whole population (were attending or) had completed from 5 to 12 years of schooling, and 47.62% of the whole population (were attending or) had completed primary school (consisting of 4 years of education)¹⁰.

This scenario may help to show that those in charge of the Portuguese educational policies after the Revolution of 1974 had to prioritise. They had to intervene, as early as possible, in the population that in their opinion deserved special attention in terms of the future of the country because they were certainly aware that any society needs literate people and qualified workers. In other words, they had to begin with the primary and secondary educational levels in order to prepare both a literate or more educated population as well as youngsters who could enter universities or other higher education institutions and receive a degree.

Moreover, in the early 1970s, the number of elderly people in Portugal was not so high as it became in the late 1990s and in 2001. In 1972 and in 1998, we had respectively 34 and 90.3 elderly people per 100 youngsters with less than 14 years of age. In 2001, the percentage of elderly (16.4%) overtook the percentage of the

⁷ CIPES – *Previsão da evolução do número de alunos e das necessidades de financiamento. Ensino Superior – 1995 a 2005*. Research work carried out by the Centro de Investigação de Políticas do Ensino Superior (CIPES) da Fundação das Universidades Portuguesas. February 1999. Mimeography, 60 pp. (p. 2).

⁸ *Id.*, *ibid.*

⁹ I thank the Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE), D. R. Norte, and the Núcleo de Difusão Electrónica de Informação (NDEI) for having provided me with data concerning the educational level of the resident population in Portugal in 1981, 1991 and 2001.

¹⁰ I should like to add that, according to the INE data, in 1991, 15.26 % of the whole resident population in Portugal (9,867,131) could neither read nor write, 0.79 % of the whole resident population could read and write but did not possess any educational level, the percentage of illiteracy corresponded to 9.0 % of the whole resident population and that 4.91 % of the whole resident population were attending or possessed incomplete or complete higher education degrees, including the Portuguese “Mestrado” (Master degree) and the Doctoral degree. In 2001, according to the INE, 12.47 % of the whole resident population in Portugal (10,356,117) did not possess any educational level, the percentage of illiteracy corresponded to 11.0 % of the whole resident population, and 10.75% of the whole resident population were attending or possessed incomplete or complete higher education degrees, including the Portuguese “Mestrado” (Master degree) and the Doctoral degree.

population aged from 0 to 14 years (16%)¹¹. These figures may therefore explain why those responsible for education policies in Portugal did not see the importance of or were not so sensitive to the creation of university programmes for the third age.

The situation of Portugal today

The demographic trend and its repercussion in the traditional universities

The proliferation of traditional private universities in the 1980s in Portugal together with the increase of offer from the public universities and other kinds of higher education institutions helped to change the higher education situation as far as their traditional public is concerned. In fact, the situation changed so much that in 1997/1998 the offer of the private universities already exceeded the real needs if we take into account the number of university applicants and the offer of the public *plus* the private universities¹². We can even add that from 1993-1994 to 1998-1999, the number of places at universities increased by more than 10,000 and the number of applicants decreased by more than 5,000¹³. I am not going to enter into details but if we take as references 1995 and 2005, the predictions point to a decrease of about 23.8% of the population aged from 20 to 24 years¹⁴.

We are obliged to admit that the public which was considered the traditional university public has begun to decrease and that those in charge of the university policies are expected to promote other kinds of university initiatives in order to avoid any undesirable instability. Quality has become the focus of attention with its effects on quantity¹⁵, but much more is expected from higher education policies. We cannot forget that the increase in the number of university and higher education undergraduate courses has also caused the increase in the number of faculty and administrative staff and if these active agents may be considered excessive in the near future, universities are forced to take immediate measures to prepare themselves in order to diversify their offers. Post-graduate courses and lifelong education programmes are certainly a *must* and they are already an offer at the university but we should also consider very seriously the creation of university programmes for senior students. And the university programmes for this population cannot be confused with the U3A courses.

¹¹ Cf. data available at <http://luisjacob.planetaclix.pt/maisdados.htm>, visited on the 24/02/2003.

¹² CIPES – *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹³ *Id.*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Id.*, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Id.*, p. 4.

The Portuguese Universities of the Third Age

A brief note on the term "university"

Before a brief description of the U3A situation in Portugal, I should like to share with you my opinion about the term "university". I know that there are people who disapprove of the fact that the term "university" has been adopted to describe the third age (cultural) institutions. In the early 1970s, I may accept that the use of the term may have caused a certain discomfort in some circles. Today, I feel that when the talk is about the Universities of the Third Age, people take in the whole noun-phrase which is the common name attributed to those institutions and this, in my opinion, leads them not to establish a direct connection with traditional universities. Indeed, their specific missions constitute the key to avoid any ambiguity. Do the traditional universities offer university programmes whose content and quality are substantially and scientifically different from the U3A programmes? If the answer is affirmative, as I hope it is, then the ambiguity which may be caused by the term "university" does not exist and is even irrelevant. If there is any ambiguity, it only lies on a superficial level, it does not go beyond the acoustic/visual image of the word; in other words, the sense of the word – its essence in my opinion – is not affected. Therefore, both institutions may exist in parallel proposing, however, different programmes: the U3A would offer cultural programmes and the traditional universities would offer more scientific ones. This does not mean however that there are not other designations such as cultural academies, institutes or associations which are more suited to the cultural programmes proposed by what are usually called U3A. In fact, they are already adopted in our country. I believe that time and the fact of being more conscious of the aims of these institutions will help their promoters to find the most suitable designation.

As for terminology, much could be said. In this text, I have written about the term "wisdom" (see below); but, as a linguist for example, I could add that the way many non-linguists use the linguistic terminology deserves deep discussion. The same can also be said when the human and social sciences use some terms which originated in the exact sciences and, perhaps, the other way round. Is everybody using the terms they employ correctly? Therefore, I am much more concerned with public opinion of traditional universities. Are we accomplishing our mission? Are we doing our best so that our universities can be proud of us? Are our universities doing their best so that we may feel proud of them? Are they contributing, as expected, to the necessary increase of the educational and research level, as well as qualification for work of our societies? Now, thinking of the students – the main reason, in my way of thinking, for the existence of the universities –, are the traditional universities relying on their students' contributions to the creation of the European Higher Education Area in this millenium? Are the traditional universities

doing their best to create independent and critical spirits, i.e., a scientifically trained population who will be able to meet the different situations of the daily life thanks to the intellectual flexibility which they are expected to acquire or at least to be sensitive to during their time at the university? Are the universities structuring the students' minds so that they will be able to translate information into knowledge inside and beyond the university walls? These are, effectively, some aspects which should be object of our concerns. The essence must constitute our concern and not the "cosmetic" aspects.

The case of the Universities of the Third Age in Portugal

There are now around 50 U3A in Portugal; they have a population of about 7900 students and cover almost the whole country, namely the North and the Southern coastal area besides Lisbon and Porto. The first one, created in Lisbon, dates back to the year 1976. Other ones were created afterwards and mainly during the 1990s, a decade which saw a significant increase in the number of U3A. That is to say, most of them were created in the late 1990s. Their creation continues and several others have appeared this century. They were created by the civil society and are not, therefore, run by the state. They do not belong to the regular school system. Neither do they belong to traditional universities, though a small number have protocols with them. It means that they follow the basic principles of informal learning.

By law, dated 1982, the Portuguese U3A are not allowed either to evaluate or to certify their students, although the students may receive symbolic certificates at the end in certain cases. I should add that I was told very clearly, when I was collecting data on the U3A, that the U3A students do not wish to be evaluated; they had already been evaluated through their lives and did not need to be evaluated any more. Thus their programmes consist of free courses on topics mainly in the realm of humanities, sociology, foreign languages, creative reading and writing, health, and (plastic) arts. Some of them may also offer courses on ICTs and invite people to give conferences. They also offer activities such as gymnastics, choral singing, music, drama, swimming and handicrafts. In fact, their students are motivated as much by the social aspect of being attending university as by the educational one. Visits to museums and exhibitions and cultural travelling programmes aimed to discover their country or other countries may also be part of their offers. Moreover, a few of them regularly publish journals or other kind of publications. The U3A structure is very dependent on the population who attend them and this aspect has to be seen as a very important feature. In other words, their projects depend on the characteristics of the regions to which they belong.

There are U3A whose students are graduates and others whose students may only possess the primary educational level (4 years of schooling). Between these

two educational references, we may naturally find different educational levels. We cannot forget that the educational level of Portuguese elderly people is in general low and that some of these institutions, which are not only called U3A but also cultural academies, associations or institutes, are linked to other associations, as well as to parish centers, to institutions of social solidarity and to the Santa Casa da Misericórdia and are supported by the Segurança Social (Social Security), Câmaras Municipais (City Councils), the Church and private contributions. Therefore, not all of them are autonomous. As for teachers, they may have professionals or volunteers or a combination of both¹⁶.

In certain U3A we may even find people who are at the same time students and teachers. Teachers at the Portuguese U3A are not required to receive or to possess any specialised pedagogical training for the third age but, unfortunately, it is also true that there are no training courses in Portugal to prepare third age teachers. I believe that the description I have just given – perhaps with the exception of the low level of education in Portugal and its implications – corresponds to what could be found in other countries in the realm of the U3A¹⁷.

In 1998, the Portuguese Federation of the Universities, Academies and Associations for the Third Age – Federação Portuguesa das Universidades, Academias e Associações para a Terceira Idade (FEDUATI) – was created and today includes 10 U3A. This initiative shows again the vitality of these institutions¹⁸.

It is important to consider the qualitative difference between the U3A offer and the offer which is expected from the university programmes for senior students. Their learning models should in fact be distinct and their purposes should be different too. Nevertheless, I cannot help saying that, in a country like Portugal, the U3A do play a very important role. I do not mean naturally those U3A whose students already possess higher levels of education and whose directors either ignore the existence of a gerontagogical approach or are not at all interested in following that trend because they do not wish to create instability in their institutions and because

¹⁶ On the topic of Portuguese U3A, see JACOB, L. – *Caracterização das U&AS portuguesas*. Presentation given at the *II Encontro Nacional de Universidades e Academias Sêniores*, Almeirim – Santarém, 20 March 2003.

¹⁷ Cf. LEMIEUX; BOUTIN; SÁNCHEZ; RIENDEAU – *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸ Some of the information obtained to write on the U3A came from a report entitled *Caracterização das UTI's* (Luís Jacob, Technical Director of the Universidade Sénior de Almeirim), distributed at the *II Encontro Nacional de Universidades e Academias Sêniores*, organized by the Universidade Sénior de Almeirim, Almeirim - Santarém, 20th March 2003. Other data and material have been obtained by means of the personal contacts I established with Mrs. Teresa Mota, a representative of the organization of the Universidade Autodidacta e da Terceira Idade do Porto, and with Mr. Luís Jacob, Technical Director of the Universidade Sénior de Almeirim. To both of them, I am naturally very grateful.

– we have to admit it – it is too hard for them to interfere with the *status quo*. I am especially thinking of the U3A which play a very important role in terms of intellectual activity if we consider that they have a population who possesses low educational levels and who may find in some of these institutions the ideal meeting point to acquire knowledge and to share experiences of life.

This population does not effectively possess the instruction which we believe – rightly or wrongly – is required to follow university programmes for senior students which, in my opinion, should be based on a gerontagogical (competential) model of education¹⁹; consequently they find in the U3A or similar institutions the appropriate climate to broaden their knowledge and to meet their immediate needs.

Recent retirements

In recent months we have been witnessing a very important social change in Portugal. People aged about 50 years have been retiring en masse. In fact, this population was intellectually active and a good percentage of them had a certain academic educational level.

A possible target public for the university programmes for senior students

Why not think of the just mentioned population as the target public for the university programmes for the senior citizens? Some of them may be motivated by the social/cultural aspect of attending free courses of the kind offered by the U3A, but others may probably be more motivated to be faced with other kind of challenges as, for example, to question their knowledge, to take advantage of their way of thinking, reasoning, memorising and perceiving and to learn how to see their objects of knowledge differently using their cognitive skills as well as their emotional potential. Indeed, they may be more interested in a process which takes their knowledge as the subject in order to enter another kind of learning adventure which will not lead them to science but to wisdom²⁰.

I believe that this public who has just retired could be the target public for the university programmes for senior citizens because they already present a different cognitive profile, another kind of cognitive potential – which they have developed through education and training during their lives – which is worth considering because they may take advantage of it to acquire a certain distance from their

¹⁹ LEMIEUX, A.; SÁNCHEZ, M. – *La gérontologie versus la gerontagogie*, in LEMIEUX, A. – *La gerontagogie: Une nouvelle réalité*, pp. 73-92 (p. 92).

²⁰ Ideas based upon the exchange of ideas on gerontagogy between A. Lemieux and the author by e-mail (April 2003). In this respect, see also MARCHAND, H. – *Temas de desenvolvimento psicológico do adulto e do idoso*, Coimbra, Quarteto Editora, 2001.

cognitive activities and to see reality from different perspectives according to the circumstances and contexts. That is to say, this public could be receptive to follow a learning model which leads them to another attitude towards life, i.e., to a model which prepares them to acquire a wise attitude towards life, in a word, to get close to wisdom. In Lemieux's words quoted by Dumoulin and Lebrun²¹: "Après la pensée formelle, qui caractérise la fin de l'adolescence et l'âge adulte, le fonctionnement intellectuel se transforme en ce que Rybash appelle la pensée post-formelle, ou dialectique. Celle-ci est capable de tenir compte d'un plus grand nombre de facteurs entourant un problème: elle ne fonctionne pas qu'avec la seule logique, mais tient compte du contexte...". Following the ideas of Rybash, Hoyer and Roodin²², Lemieux²³ insists on this point and writes: "Ce style de pensée [«style post-formel de pensée»²⁴] dépasse la logique pour atteindre une pensée dialectique caractérisée par le principe de contradiction de toute réalité et le principe de la relativité de toute connaissance [...]". This may be the first step to becoming what Sternberg refers to as "wise people", i.e., "The wise person is characterized by a metacognitive stance. Wise people know what they know and what they do not know as well as the limits of what can be known and what cannot be."²⁵ Following the ideas of Sternberg, the uniqueness which appears to characterize wisdom, i.e. sagacity, "involves more than just cognitive skills. It [sagacity] involves as much an attitude toward knowledge as knowledge itself."²⁶ Therefore, we could add that "Wisdom lies not in what a person knows, but rather in how the person uses the knowledge he or she has."²⁷

²¹ DUMOULIN, L. ; LEBRUN, P. – *Baby-boomers la retraite s'en vient!*, in "Réseau Hiver 2003. Magazine de l'Université du Québec", p. 6/17. Available at http://www.uqubec.ca/bap/bap/mag_reseau/mag2003_01/dossier2003_01.html, visited on the 25.02.2003.

²² RYBASH, J. M.; HOYER, W. J.; ROODIN, P. A. – *Adult cognition and aging: Developmental changes in processing, knowing and thinking*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1986, p. 56. Referred to by LEMIEUX, A. – *La gérontagogie et les programmes universitaires pour les personnes du troisième âge. Perspective pour les Facultés d'Éducation*. Lecture presented at the *International Conference on Elder University Programs: Education, Research, Social Reengagement and Collaboration Networks*, organized by the University of Granada, Granada, 17-18 December 1999. Mimeography, 53 pp. (p.39). Also referred to by LEMIEUX; BOUTIN; SÁNCHEZ; RIENDEAU – *op. cit.*, p. 6.

²³ LEMIEUX – *La gérontagogie et les programmes universitaires...*, p. 39.

²⁴ RYBASH; HOYER; ROODIN – *op. cit.*, p. 38, referred to by LEMIEUX – *La gérontagogie et les programmes universitaires...*, p. 39.

²⁵ STERNBERG, R. J. – *Wisdom and its relations to intelligence and creativity*, in STERNBERG, R. J. (ed.), *Wisdom. Its nature, origins, and development*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 142-159 (p. 157).

²⁶ *Id.*, *ibid.*

²⁷ STERNBERG, R. J. – *Understanding wisdom*, in STERNBERG (ed.) – *op. cit.*, pp. 3-9 (p. 6).

It is perhaps relevant to write some words on the word “wisdom” because I do not think that it is always properly used when the topic concerns the education of the older people. The increase in the number of elderly people in our societies in the last years and the projection predictions for the next years/decades have led to several governmental and non-governmental, world/international, national and local events/initiatives of different amplitudes. “Wisdom” is, in fact, one of the words which is commonly heard on those occasions. “To live with wisdom” was exactly the title of a one-day meeting which took place on the 10th of April 2003 in Porto organized by local entities and with the presence of the Director of one of the U3A of Porto. It is no wonder that everybody thinks that s/he is able to say something concerned with wisdom. Moreover, as happens in different circumstances, there are words that have to be included in the speeches even if people only possess what I could call a *figurative* mastering of those words²⁸. Different readings are attributed to the term “wisdom”, some of them are very close to the common sense feeling of it, and others have nothing to do with the notion of wisdom which really interests us in this context and to which I have just called your attention. Therefore, I find that the following quotation from Lemieux, Boutin, Sánchez and Riendeau may help to show the theoretical framework suitable to the concept of wisdom which interests us in the realm of the gerontology: “Wisdom, a notion that the university had transformed to Sciences in their Theology and Philosophy faculties, finally finds its true identity in action in the Education faculties. Theory and practice rediscover the unity they had lost during the development of exact sciences at the beginning of the Renaissance period. (Lemieux & Sánchez, 2000)²⁹.”³⁰.

The university programmes for senior students vs. the University of the Third Age “programmes”

What I have said so far leads us to think that the learning model we have to use in order to guarantee this kind of attitude towards the world cannot be the learning model which aims to convey information and where the teacher plays the main role, i.e., a scientific-technological model. The model to propose here would

²⁸ Cf. GINSBURG, H.; OPPER, S. – *Piaget’s theory of intellectual development*, Englewood Cliffs – New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2.nd edition, 1979, p. 160; SINCLAIR-DE ZWART, H. – *Acquisition du langage et développement de la pensée. Sous-systèmes linguistiques et opérations concrètes*, Paris, Dunod, 1967, pp. 130, 165.

²⁹ LEMIEUX, A.; SÁNCHEZ, M. – *Gerontology beyond words: A reality*, in “Educational Gerontology”, 26(5), 2000, pp. 475-498. Referred to by LEMIEUX; BOUTIN; SÁNCHEZ; RIENDEAU – *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁰ LEMIEUX; BOUTIN; SÁNCHEZ; RIENDEAU – *op. cit.*, p. 6.

be a competential model of education³¹ based on the concept of “actualisation de soi”³², i.e., by means of “la réactualisation des connaissances pour une meilleure gestion de [l]a vie personnelle et sociale.”³³, and aimed to the problematisation of knowledge depending on the contexts. According to Lemieux and Sánchez³⁴: “C’est l’approche dite compétentielle dans laquelle s’insère la gérontagogie [...]. [“Ce terme fut utilisé par Lessa (1978)³⁵ et par Bolton (1978)³⁶ pour définir la science appliquée qui a pour objet l’intervention éducative auprès de sujets âgés et qui est à la frontière entre l’éducation et la gérontologie [...].”³⁷.] Dans ce modèle compétentiel, il ne s’agit pas de formation initiale ou de recyclage des connaissances, mais de métacognition, c’est-à-dire de la connaissance du fonctionnement de la pensée [...].” This model does not depend upon science, it is instead “orienté vers l’acquisition de la Sagesse.”³⁸. As far as the programmes to be developed in the realm of the gerontagogical (competential) model and which include educational, cultural and social aspects are concerned, “le principe d’intégration ou de coordination de l’ensemble de cours choisis, est la formation et l’éducation de la personne âgée à l’acquisition de la Sagesse pour une meilleure gestion de sa vie personnelle et sociale.”³⁹. This gerontagogical process of knowledge aims to instill in older people “une connaissance réflexive des phénomènes étudiés et non une accumulation de connaissances pures et simples.”⁴⁰. We therefore have to be aware that this kind of approach requires specially trained professors. In the words of Lemieux, Boutin, Sánchez and Riendeau⁴¹: “No one can contest that this epistemological element [“«metacognition» [...] the possibility of a person to be able to reflect on the mechanism of his own reflection.” (*id.*, p. 7)] in a program destined for the elderly derives from the competence of professors in the educational faculties.” This way of considering the role of the professors means that they must

³¹ LEMIEUX; SÁNCHEZ – *La gérontologie versus la gérontagogie...*, pp. 85 and ff.

³² *Id.*, p. 85.

³³ *Id.*, *ibid.*

³⁴ LEMIEUX; SÁNCHEZ – *La gérontologie versus la gérontagogie...*, p. 92.

³⁵ LESSA, A. – *Introduction au Forum I. Écologie et vieillissement*, Centre International de Gérontologie Sociale, 1978. Referred to by LEMIEUX; SÁNCHEZ – *La gérontologie versus la gérontagogie...*, p. 90.

³⁶ BOLTON, C. R. – *Alternative instructional strategies for older learners. Introduction to educational gerontology*, Washington D.C., Hemisphere Publishing Corp., 1978. Referred to by LEMIEUX; SÁNCHEZ – *La gérontologie versus la gérontagogie...*, p. 90.

³⁷ LEMIEUX; SÁNCHEZ – *La gérontologie versus la gérontagogie...*, p. 90.

³⁸ *Id.*, p. 92.

³⁹ *Id.*, p. 91.

⁴⁰ *Id.*, *ibid.*

⁴¹ LEMIEUX; BOUTIN; SÁNCHEZ; RIENDEAU – *op. cit.*, p. 7.

be aware that they need a special preparation to work with this kind of approach. In other words, professors who wish to work with a “competential approach, within which lies the gerontagogy [...]”⁴² must also be aware of their mental functions, of their creativity, of their emotions and of their motivations⁴³ in order to be prepared to “highlight the conscience that the elderly has of his mental functions, of his creativity, of his emotions and of his motivations [...]”⁴⁴. Moreover, according to a personal comment from Lemieux⁴⁵, “il faut orienter et faire faire le travail par les pairs. Le professeur n’étant là que comme guide et personne ressource pour aiguiller les gens vers la solution.” Profiting from my analogical way of thinking which may already be taken as a characteristic of the senior intellectual activity, I dare to add that the role of this kind of professor joins the idea of the facilitator referred to by Lee⁴⁶ when he describes group learning, and Landow’s reference to the “entrenador” when the topic is about the redefinition of the role of the learner/professor as far as the hypertext technological potential is concerned⁴⁷. Although we must be aware of the fact that we are faced with distinct learning situations (the university programmes for senior students and the hypertextual environment), it is my opinion that it is worthwhile quoting Landow’s words on this topic because the expected reconfiguration of the professor is somehow comparable: “El hipertexto didáctico redefine el papel del enseñante transfiriendo parte de su poder y autoridad al estudiante. Esta tecnología tiene el potencial para hacer que el enseñante sea más un entrenador que un conferenciante, que sea más un compañero mayor y con más experiencia que un líder reconocido.”⁴⁸.

Finally, the professors should also attend courses⁴⁹ which would help them to realise that, among other competences, they need to acquire knowledge of

⁴² *Id.*, p. 6.

⁴³ *Id.*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Quotation taken from one of A. Lemieux’s e-mails on gerontagogy addressed to the author (April 2003).

⁴⁶ LEE, V. – *An experiment with group learning in diversity*. Paper presented at the 2nd International Symposium of Students and Professors. University and its Students 2001. The contribution of the university to the unification of Europe in the new millenium. Charles University in Prague, Prague 12-15 September 2001. Mimeography, 16 pp. (p. 10).

⁴⁷ See LANDOW, G. P. – *Hipertexto. La convergencia de la teoría crítica contemporánea y la tecnología*, Barcelona, Ediciones Paidós Ibérica, S.A., 1995, p. 157. Translation by Patrick Ducher from the original English title: *Hypertext. The convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

⁴⁸ *Id.*, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ LEMIEUX; SÁNCHEZ – *La gérontologie versus la gérontagogie...*, pp. 91-92.

themselves before they are put in charge of courses for the third age where some of the main aims should be “la connaissance de soi, [...] le fonctionnement en groupe et enfin [...] la découverte de valeurs de vie.”⁵⁰

It is important that those in charge of the university policies become aware that senior citizens are also able to learn but that the appropriate models for their learning process are not similar to those aimed to a scientific formation, i.e., aimed to prepare people to solve problems. The university programmes for this group of students should instead aim to prepare people to find problems, to question, to problematise: an attitude which is intimately connected with wisdom and not with science. From the research point of view, it is possible to add that wisdom should become object of the scientific research undertaken by the faculty professionals who are interested in collaborating in these programmes in order to improve the necessary knowledge and know-how required by this kind of learning process⁵¹.

This educational approach differs drastically in qualitative and scientific terms from the normal U3A offers. The U3A offer free courses which do not follow any structure and which are not intended to follow any scientifically based educational model suited to the population who attend them. They are consequently not concerned with senior students' post-formal thought which allows them to take advantage of their metacognitive skills, ability to question and dialectical attitude towards the situations.

It must be emphasized that the Portuguese U3A population is very heterogeneous in educational terms (from people with 4 years of schooling to graduates) and this aspect may constitute a handicap when a certain educational model is to be implemented. We have then to conclude that the two models (university programmes for senior citizens based upon scientifically suitable educational models aimed to attain a university certification and the U3A classical “cafeteria style” with a very important cultural/social component) should coexist accomplishing distinct purposes.

Tomorrow: in search of a password

After the Portuguese overview I have just presented motivated by the absence of university programmes for the third age at the traditional Portuguese universities, the moment has arrived to write on the possible impact of the European Higher Education Area on the promotion of those programmes in Portugal.

⁵⁰ LEMIEUX – *La gérontagogie et les programmes universitaires...*, p. 36.

⁵¹ Ideas based upon the exchange of ideas on gerontagogy between A. Lemieux and the author by e-mail (April 2003).

In fact, we live in a multicultural and multilingual space where monolingual and monocultural situations are becoming more and more unusual and where, as far as languages are concerned, according to Haug⁵², those most penalized are both those who cannot speak English and those who only speak English. In other words, although it is not necessary to be truly bilingual or plurilingual, it is important to possess some functional language competences to circulate within the European area⁵³.

When the subject of discussion is the European Higher Education Area, mobility is one of the key-words. But mobility cannot be seen without considering the language of those who are involved in that process. That is to say, we could say that plurilingualism is mobility and, in this realm, traditional universities must play a very important role. We cannot exclusively rely on the new technologies experts and believe that e-learning is the solution. The new technologies experts are really crucial as far as the mastering of e-tools are concerned but they do not possess the necessary expertise to draw up, among other things, the contents of the language programmes. Universities, namely the linguists and the psycholinguists when the programmes are to be used by learners of different ages, should be called in as advisers to guarantee the quality of the contents to be proposed. Language is one of the possible examples. The same can be said as far other contents are concerned. Quality is therefore expected from experts in the different areas.

Multilingualism and multiculturalism cannot therefore constitute an obstacle to the creation of a European Higher Education Area with its important implications, for example, in terms of mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff. Multilingualism and multiculturalism should instead constitute a force of attraction. The richer an area is culturally and in language terms, the more it has to offer and to share leading hopefully to convergence and not to divergence of interests, although the preservation of identity and autonomy of the parts cannot be forgotten. This means that, for better or for worse, multilingualism and multiculturalism are aspects the European Higher Education Area cannot neglect or ignore.

⁵² HAUG, G. – *Linguistic aspects of the process of convergence at universities in Europe*. Presentation given at the *Berlin European Year of Languages 2001 Conference* (Workshop 1 – Universities and language policy in Europe, Session 4: The implementation of language policies). Freie Universität Berlin, 28-30 June 2001.

⁵³ Cf. LÜDI, G. – *The new role of languages and new forms of knowledge*. Presentation given at the *Berlin European Year of Languages 2001 Conference* (Workshop 1 – Universities and language policy in Europe, Session 1: The main issues of a university language policy). Freie Universität Berlin, 28-30 June 2001.

If we look at the programme of this symposium, we see that two moments are dedicated to the current status and future prospects of university programmes for senior students: one moment is concerned with Northern Europe and another one with Southern and Mediterranean Europe. We are then forced to conclude that the above-mentioned aspects deserve a special attention and are worth separate discussion in the European space. If the languages may constitute an obstacle to the creation of projects or university programmes for senior students covering the whole European area bearing especially in mind the student mobility and their exchange of ideas, then it is perhaps advisable to look at the cultural and language specificities of the European space and create international programmes with countries which share cultural and social affinities and whose populations speak languages which are closer: for example, on the one hand, the germanic languages and, on the other hand, the romance languages. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the possibility of combining both language groups is to be excluded. The European diversity of languages and cultures may, on the contrary, be seen as a promoter of new challenges. Flexibility is then another key-word to be taken into consideration in this context.

The European Higher Education Area is expected to be established by 2010, according to the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education who met in Prague in 2001, two years after the signature of the Bologna Declaration and three years after the Sorbonne Declaration. This area is mainly intended (see the document *Towards the European Higher Education Area. Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Prague on May 19th 2001*) to promote the cooperation implied by transnational education, mobility of people involved in it, European cooperation in quality assurance, European dimensions in higher education, attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area – a point which highlights the importance of creating bridges, not only concerned with student mobility, between Europe and other parts of the world instead of staying confined to the European area –, the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, the adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles and the establishment of a system of credits. The Ministers also outlined “lifelong learning strategies [...] to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life.” (see the above-mentioned document). In respect to mobility, it is worth including the following quotation taken from the aforementioned source: “[...] efforts to promote mobility must be continued to enable students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff to benefit from the richness of the European Higher Education Area including its democratic values, diversity of cultures and languages and the diversity of the higher education systems.”

The philosophy of this document reveals an openness, which easily allows the inclusion of an older student population, i.e., the population which is the subject of this symposium. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify some aspects, some of which are connected with the degrees and credits, and others with the framing of the university programmes for senior students in the general European higher education framework. As I defend the existence of university programmes for older people based upon a gerontagogical perspective, two situations are possible: one concerned with a degree in gerontagogical studies in general or in specific fields for people who want to be trained to teach this population (this course would correspond to any classical university curriculum with the same credits and aiming to obtain the normal academic degrees); and another situation concerned with university programmes for senior students following, in my way of thinking, a gerontagogical approach. The last situation is the one which may be more problematic in terms of its inclusion in the already existing European frameworks for higher education. The repercussions of its introduction may have both educational and political implications. It is then up to the different members of the European Union to do their best to create the desired programmes depending naturally both on the number of people in each country who wish to attend them and on the commitment of each country. The countries which may be already involved in this process have certainly much to share with those which are not yet involved.

The existence in the universities which belong to the European Higher Education Area of teachers who show interest in working both with the traditional university programmes and with the university programmes for senior citizens after receiving the suitable gerontagogical training seems to me a very reasonable solution because universities would not be obliged to have a special group of professionals to teach this new public. From the research point of view, it is also possible that this area may interest those who are already doing research, for example, in the realm of education and who also wish to undertake research from a gerontagogical point of view. It would also be desirable that researchers and teachers from different universities of the European space who share common interests in this domain could exchange ideas about their experiences on the cognitive, linguistic, cultural and social characteristics of the populations with which they are used to working, as well as on the learning and information processing styles of their (senior) students. Fundamental and applied research are indeed required because it is not possible to have proficient university professionals without the necessary scientific training.

Following this model it would not be necessary to take on extra teaching staff – because we would be relying both on professionals in each country and on professionals of the European area who wished to be involved in this project besides their work with the traditional university public – but also to create international

research and teaching networks with people sharing the same interests and disposed to exchange experiences.

Mobility based on this kind of synergy may be seen as very promising. I should like to emphasize that, although we are thinking in terms of the European area, our scientific background/training does not allow us to exclude the exchange of experiences with other experts from other parts of the world. Everybody knows that research has no borders and that it is very important to keep in touch with non-European scholars who share the same interests, who work in the same domains, and with whom the discussion of ideas is indispensable.

The existence in the European Higher Education Area of professors, researchers and administrative staff concerned with university programmes for senior students could therefore help to form different international networks aimed to exchange experiences not only scientifically but also from the administrative point of view, and to help those countries which do not yet possess any programmes – like Portugal – to implement their own programmes without having to begin at the very beginning, running the risk of repeating undesirable experiences. Moreover, the creation of an international degree organized with the collaboration of different experts from several countries would also be welcome and important for those countries interested in participating but which do not yet possess any experience.

E-learning is obviously not to be excluded in this context. But it has to be taken into consideration with the necessary contention. I dare to add that the university programmes for older people as well as any other university programmes cannot take the risk of becoming an industry. Teachers must not become resigned to this. They must be the supervisors of any learning initiative which uses the electronic environment⁵⁴.

If we compare senior students with regular students, I am of the opinion that the mobility of the former should be considered for shorter periods. Nevertheless, this is an aspect which goes together with many others concerned with the organization of international university programmes for this new public and which will deserve long moments of reflexion if we wish to include this population in the framework of the European Higher Education Area.

⁵⁴ Cf. SŁODZIAN, M. – *European Universities helping to promote multilingualism at a technological level*. Presentation given at the *Berlin European Year of Languages 2001 Conference* (Workshop 1 – Universities and language policy in Europe, Session 1: The main issues of a university language policy). Freie Universität Berlin, 28-30 June 2001.

Conclusion: a few brief notes

Although Portugal does not yet have university programmes for senior students at its traditional universities, the moment has arrived to think very seriously about this particular public due, among other social aspects, to the demographic trend we are witnessing.

The Pro-rector in charge of Lifelong Education at the University of Porto has already tried to render our university more sensitive towards the fact that the education of the older people requires specific educational models and that any offer which may be provided by the traditional universities must be qualitatively and scientifically different from the programmes which the Portuguese senior population may find in the U3A⁵⁵.

My department, the Department of Portuguese and Romance Studies – Departamento de Estudos Portugueses e Românicos (DEPER) – at the Faculty of Arts, after an informal talk I had with my colleagues, on the 9th of April 2003, on the role the traditional universities were expected to play as far as the education of senior citizens is concerned, is now very receptive to organizing an international conference which would include workshops on gerontagogy and on gerontagogical models of education in order to deepen our knowledge on this domain.

The next step would be the progressive creation, with the necessary collaboration of foreign experts not exclusively from Europe, of university programmes for senior citizens at our university. It is also my feeling that the participation of Portugal in international projects within the European Higher Education Area for this population will facilitate the exchange of experiences and of scientific knowledge helping us to achieve our purposes in a not too distant future. Let us hope that where there is a will there is a way.

It is however my belief that, although the process may take a bit longer, it is better to take sufficient time to produce scientifically based university programmes for senior students than to put on any kind of programme without the required educational approach, merely for the sake of showing society that the traditional universities have not forgotten the older members of society.

As a university professor, I cannot help finishing this text with the following quotation from André Lemieux, to whom I owe my acquaintance with the gerontagogical approach and with whom, through his talks, lectures and writings, I

⁵⁵ The main initiative which took place at the University of Porto, in April 23-24, 2001, was a workshop on *Introduction to Gerontagogy* with the participation of A. Lemieux, Professor at the University du Québec à Montréal, Canada, and of Mariano Sánchez Martínez, Professor at the University of Granada, Spain.

have learned to look differently – why not more wisely? – at certain concepts: “Ils [les universitaires] croient que les universités doivent avoir des programmes orientés vers la science (“problem-solving”). Ils n’ont pas encore compris qu’au 3ème âge on doit s’orienter vers des programmes axés sur la sagesse (“problem-finding”). Lorsque l’université traditionnelle aura compris que la sagesse est aussi objet de science, elle ouvrira ses portes aux personnes du 3’ème âge. Ce sera une révolution de la pensée universitaire.”⁵⁶ .

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Maria da Graça L. Castro Pinto

⁵⁶ Quotation taken from one of A. Lemieux’s e-mails on gerontagogy addressed to the author (April 2003).