

Prošireni sažetak s plenarnog izlaganja

## LEARNING WITHOUT BORDERS: INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

**Emese Schiller**

ELTE PPK Institute of Research on Adult Education and Knowledge Management, Hungary  
schiller.emese@ppk.elte.hu

The world is experiencing a significant increase in the elderly population, especially in developed countries (United Nations, 2024). This demographic shift is particularly noticeable in the European Union, including Central and Eastern European nations (Eurostat, 2024).

In response to these changes, intergenerational (IG) programs have emerged as a vital strategy to bridge the gap between different age groups by fostering meaningful learning experiences and promoting social cohesion through enhanced understanding and acceptance across generations (Trujillo-Torres et al., 2023). These programs often incorporate a variety of learning pathways, including formal, nonformal, and informal educational opportunities, to enrich teaching methods (Findsen & Formosa, 2012). Such initiatives support the concept of active ageing, which promotes the active inclusion of the elderly in society (WHO, 2002).

Effective IG learning initiatives generally feature several essential elements (Schiller, 2023; MacCallum et al., 2006). These programs typically involve at least two generations who may not have had prior close connections (Knight et al., 2018). Engagement is driven by a mutual interest and willingness to learn about each other's generations (Findsen & Formosa, 2012), with meaningful exchanges of information and experiences (Springrate et al., 2008). Cooperation is fundamental, fostering reciprocity and mutual benefits for both older and younger participants (Aemmi & Moonghai, 2017; Mosor et al., 2019).

In addition, IG initiatives aim to support universities' third mission and emphasize lifelong learning (Heffernan et al., 2022). Older and younger participants may collaborate in seminars that are part of the university curriculum (Pavluska, 2008) or in workshops and guided discussions aimed at enhancing diverse knowledge and skills related to their studies (Castro et al., 2014). These programs not only facilitate knowledge exchange but also enhance the social capital of all participants (Bjursell, 2015). A key benefit of university IG programs is helping generations overcome misconceptions about the elderly (Cheung et al., 2023; Tuohy et al., 2023). Additionally, these initiatives improve students' soft skills, particularly in communication (Vavřín & Halvorson, 2008). They also enhance social participation skills, including teamwork (Howell et al., 2020) and conflict resolution (Faria et al., 2010).

There are also international collaborations that help sustain IG initiatives at the cross-national level (Generations Working Together, 2023). Similarly, Erasmus+60, launched in 2022, has focused on promoting lifelong learning and inclusion for older adults. Nevertheless, this innovative project, involving a consortium representing eight European countries, specifically targets European citizens aged 60 and above—a demographic often neglected in Higher Education Institution activities. The project aims to enhance interconnected higher education systems across Europe. Consequently, Erasmus+60 has developed pilot courses across universities designed to create inclusive higher education systems with tailored offerings for older citizens (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 2022).

In the 2022/2023 academic year, a select group of partner universities, including ELTE (Hungary), the University of Split (Croatia), and Mendel University (Czech Republic), conducted IG interventions at their respective institutions. In the Fall semester of 2022, a total of 45 participants, comprising both older adults and university students, voluntarily joined the enriching IG activities (Kovács & Gulyás, 2023).

The pilot course was grounded in Project-based Learning (PjBL) (Kovács & Gulyás, 2023), where learners may engage in meaningful projects to create real-world products (Brundiers & Wiek, 2013). This approach includes phases such as initiating with a driving question, collaborative problem-solving, and producing publicly accessible outcomes (Helle et al., 2006). Furthermore, PjBL focuses on fostering ownership and creating artifacts to address real-world issues (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Additionally, co-management was also implemented during the pilot project (Kovács & Gulyás, 2023) to distribute responsibility and decision-making among participants and facilitators, emphasizing the connections between participants' needs (Cundill & Fabricius, 2010; Zulu, 2010).

To investigate participants' perspectives on the pilot project, a study was conducted to explore the IG learning experiences of university students and older adults across all participating institutions. The overall goal was to gain deeper insights into participants' reflections on their IG learning experiences, identify differences in these reflections from a generational viewpoint, and explore the variations influenced by different institutional settings. The results highlight differences in how various age groups perceive IG learning. Younger participants focused on improving their communication skills, whereas older adults emphasized how their views of younger generations were shaped. Essential enablers included project-based collaborative activities and effective communication. The investigation also highlighted several aspects that differed across the investigated institutions. These included the emphasis on social engagement for older adults, the autonomy to select topics and roles, and the focus on fostering creativity and cooperation. The study thus highlights the complex nature of IG learning and supports strategies based on project-based and co-management principles to promote inclusive IG practices across universities and age groups (Schiller et al, 2024).

In summary, IG collaboration in education highlights the strength of diverse age groups working together to enhance educational experiences and create a more inclusive academic environment, ultimately promoting learning without borders. These initiatives not only bridge generational gaps but also foster mutual understanding, enriching the educational journey for all participants (e.g., Castro et al., 2014; Leedahl, 2020; Cheung et al., 2023; Kovács & Gulyás, 2023).

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