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ACTIVE SENIORS' EDUCATION
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Active Senior Education without Barriers
2020-1-CZ01-KA204-078151

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"Working with Choirs of Senior Citizens"

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Pillars of the Methodology

The Aging Process

Old age is referred to as the period of the third age, with the first age meaning childhood and adolescence and the second age the period of adulthood. At present, we also encounter the designation of the fourth age, which results from the need to divide old age into two periods with regard to their different characteristics. The elderly, aged 60-74, usually do not yet suffer from serious diseases, are active, integrated into society and able to travel. This active part of old age is called the third age. The fourth age usually begins after the age of 75 in a period of deteriorating health.

Aging is a slow and smooth process, during which time changes occur in the body and the human psyche. Its course is uneven and very different individually. It is important for the senior to accept life as it is, without remorse for what did not happen or could have been different. This involves accepting one's own imperfections and coming to terms with one's shortcomings.

The physiological changes in old age are as follows:

- The skin can wrinkle, loses elasticity, dries due to reduced activity of the sweat and sebaceous glands, and does not retain fluids. Brown age spots (lentigo senilis) appear on the hands, shoulders and sometimes on the face, and hair can become gray and dim.
- The ears have difficulty perceiving high tones and are more sensitive to noise.
- Eyesight weakens, taking longer to adapt to light and darkness.
- The respiratory system tires more quickly, especially during exertion, as well as during singing.
- In some cases as a result of deteriorating vocal cords, a vibrato is formed during singing which is practically impossible to control.
- The body weight decreases and this results in an increased susceptibility to injuries, especially fractures, in old age. The skeleton can lack calcium, which increases the fragility of bones.
- The muscles weaken, and the bone mass decreases.
- Also typical is that the quality of the teeth deteriorates from wear and tear (abrasion) and can fall out ("so-called loss of dentition"). The tooth necks are hypersensitive, bare but not painful.
- In some cases, the activity of the heart, kidneys, liver, and lungs deteriorates. The activity of the endocrine glands is weakened and the activity of some glands is stopped (e. g. sexual).
- The function of the circulatory system deteriorates, calcified vessels lose their elasticity, and the number of cells in the brain decreases.
- The nervous system is less resistant to stressful situations.

The psychological aspects of old age and aging are closely related to biological aspects. The main psychological changes that occur in many people's old age are:

- Slower reactions due to impaired sensory perception (sight and hearing).
- The memory deteriorates. This is especially true with memory for new events, while distant experiences remain.



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- Intelligence declines due to a slow pace in time-limited tasks.

Development of Musical Skills

Music can contribute to the prevention of cognitive decline, being an ally in the challenges posed by an aging population. Music takes on a variety of functions. On the one hand, music influences individual functions, such as the way we feel. On the other hand, music helps assume social functions that end up playing the role of facilitating cooperation within groups (Clayton, 2009). Other authors (Peretz, 2006 and Wallin et al., 2000) claim that when music is present in dances, ceremonies, and religious rituals, it can promote cooperation, cohesion and identification with a group. The same authors also claim that music can be a facilitator to strengthen interpersonal ties. According to Schubert (2009), music takes on two fundamental functions. The first function regards the fact that music has the potential to produce pleasure in listeners; the second function regards the fact that music takes on emotional functions since it is common to all people, times, and places. Sloboda (1985) affirms that the main reason that people participate in musical activities is that music has the capacity to arouse deep emotions.

According to other authors (Gomes and Amaral - 2012) the use of music in geriatrics and gerontology is more and more frequent, since it has effects at the psychological, emotional, physical and social level. Music ends up influencing the self-esteem and socialization levels of the elderly. In that same article, the authors divide the advantages of music into two major groups. The first refers to music therapy as improving the quality of physical life and the second refers to music therapy as improving the psychological quality of life. Noordhoek and Jokl (2008) also claim that music helps to prevent memory loss, thus becoming a "self-expressive and relevant therapy as a model for prevention, rehabilitation, and intervention with the elderly".

Musical training has recently gained additional interest in education as the increasing neuroscientific research demonstrates the positive effects of musical activity on brain development. Musical activities performed by the elderly, especially those of an improvisatory character, may have effects on executive functioning through transfers between training, planning and inhibition functions, where different modalities of musical training have different effects.

The authors believe that social intervention in the field of gerontology should be focused on promoting ambitious cultural programs that create effective learning opportunities for the elderly. The perception is that the discovery of artistic activities, in particular musical activities, can also be an opportunity for the preservation and enrichment of the sociability of the elderly, and a stimulus for maintaining curiosity about new ways of living.

Significant for the Project, Active Senior Education without Barriers 2020-1-CZ01-KA204-078151 3, is the fact that was proven in the implementation of the music project activities, where the elderly were moved emotionally and identified with the various songs they were listening to. (Some elderly people after the activities told us why they were moved, and most of the time the assumption was that the song had a sentimental value to them. They associated some songs to specific events in their lives).

An important project that dealt with some of these issues was Active Senior Education without Barriers, 2020-1-CZ01-KA204-078151 3. The conclusions that emerged from the implementation of the activities of the music project showed that several of the seniors, project participants from other European countries, identified with various songs they listened to after moving to Portugal.



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The long-term goals of this project include systematic development of singing techniques while taking into account various physiological conditions of people in the age group 65+. Also among these goals are techniques such as a combination of chest and abdominal breathing and its benefits for general health, searching for an optimal vocal register, using head resonance as a tool for relaxation, an optimal setting of the singing apparatus, and developing a singing posture 'which does not hurt, as well as other techniques. Maintaining optimal physical condition is a lifelong topic. Continuous development or maintenance of a proper breathing method while singing, (vocal) training, and cultivating an active singing posture/sitting position, is directly related to one's physical condition. A well-trained singer makes sure his or her body receives quality oxygenation, often using all or most of the lung capacity, which, especially in the cold winter months, acts as a prevention of respiratory diseases.

Active Participation of Seniors

Active living changes in old age. Many people are indifferent, less emotionally involved and more focused. The enhancement of the intellect is relevant at every age. Gaining knowledge brought about by the development of society (for example, in studies of a subject, but also the absorption of new information from the press and literature), all contribute to increasing the intellectual condition of retired people. The preparation of seniors for active living can be characterized by the following points:

- enthusiasm and a desire to engage in various activities
- new interests and social ties
- volunteering as one of the activities
- a sense of usefulness
- a sense of increasing self-esteem
- gaining information about possible activities before retirement.

Even in old age, a person is able to acquire new knowledge. The pace of teaching elderly persons should be slower and individually adapted to age, health, abilities, and existing knowledge. Some very suitable places for teaching are universities and academies of the third age, academies of the third education, retirement clubs, the Union of Retirees in Slovakia and senior centers, which in addition to bringing new knowledge, bring social contacts, fulfillment of free time, and improve quality of life.

The category of social activities in leisure time includes, among other things, sports activities, (especially walking), swimming, hiking, dancing, cycling, recreational football and others. Some seniors decide to assist others by helping the dependent and working as volunteers. They help those in need at home with shopping, cooking, and caring for them (especially for immobile people). Distraction alone is especially important for seniors, e. g. listening to the radio, watching television, solving crossword puzzles, handicrafts and the like.

These activities will undoubtedly be enriched, not only by the musical involvement of seniors in the ongoing ASEB project (especially by developing musical skills within senior choirs), but participation will also support new socio-cultural relationships. Through active participation and participation in the e-learning course which will be created as one of the activities of the ASEB project and subsequently offered to the management of the University of the Third Age at the Catholic University in Ružomberok as a new study program for seniors, new information will also be gained as well as knowledge about music and other cultural and artistic sectors abroad (Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovakia).



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Among different musical activities, choral singing is one of the most popular and widespread hobbies among seniors. In Europe, there are 37 million choral singers, and participation in senior choirs is growing rapidly. As an example, the experience of Portugal can be cited, where most enrollments for activities at Portuguese universities for the elderly are in the field of music, and most often in choirs. The coupling of singing-related brain processes (vocal-motor, auditory, linguistic, cognitive, and emotional) with social interaction (singing together in a group) and goal directed learning (learning to sing and perform polyphonic song arrangements), make choral singing a particularly promising activity for promoting cognitive resources and psychological and social well-being in aging. Previous research on group singing has shown that it can improve mental health and emotional and social well-being in adults who have mental health conditions. Physiologically, singing has a positive impact on cardiorespiratory functions, and the emotional gains of singing are linked to the secretion of endocannabinoids, immunoglobulins, and cortisol. In older adults, regular participation in community-level choirs can reduce anxiety, depression, and loneliness, improve self-evaluated quality of life (QOL), physical health, interest in life and can increase general activity.

The education of seniors and the general development of andragogy in the Czech Republic has been particularly noticeable since 1989. All of this is in direct connection with the rising standard of living of the inhabitants of the former Eastern Bloc. Czech seniors also welcomed the opening of the Universities of the Third Age (U3V) at Czech public and private universities as well as the Academy of Arts and Culture of the Third Age (A3V), which specialize, as the name suggests, in the artistic development of seniors. Both types of education are currently a traditional platform for education and socialization. These Academies provide arts education tailored to the needs of specific seniors, who work systematically under the guidance of erudite teachers during their three-year studies.

In Slovakia, systematic education of seniors has been ongoing since 1990, when the first University of the Third Age was established with the participation of government representatives in the auditorium of Comenius University in Bratislava. Subsequently, other universities joined this initiative and other UTVs were opened in Martin, Nitra and Banská Bystrica. Slovakia currently has a total of 7,200 students out of a total number of 1 million pensioners, involved in continuing education at 16 UTVs, of which 85% are women. However, very few programs have been carried out in the field of music so far. The ones that have been established, present a more or less broad context, e.g. in Bratislava, the study program was called Theater and Music in Changing Times, in Trnava, the History of Art, and in Žilina, the music-oriented program was called Man and Music. At the University of the Third Age in Ružomberok which was established in 2006, only one music-oriented study program has taken place so far. Joining the ASEB project is therefore an excellent opportunity to get acquainted with a similar type of education abroad, and based on this cooperation, to create an original music course with a broader European focus.

Cooperation with Various National Specifics

In Portugal, cooperation at the national level is implemented through RUTIS activities. RUTIS (Association Network of Universities of the Third Age) is a Private Institution of Social Solidarity (IPSS) and Public Utility, created in 2005 to support the community and seniors nationally and internationally, with headquarters in Almeirim and an office in Porto (Academia RUTIS Porto). Annually, RUTIS organizes and promotes several events that encompass the various universities, where, for example, musical groups, theatre groups, academies, art, and dance galas are promoted. The main objectives of RUTIS are the promotion of active aging,



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and the enhancement of senior universities, these being the “social response” which aims to regularly create and boost cultural, educational and social activities for seniors over 50 years of age. Educational activities will be on an informal basis, without certification purposes and in the context of lifelong education. In addition to this cooperation, there are organized regional events with other choirs.

The system of arts education in the Czech Republic, which in 1989 added the education of seniors, is relatively unique on a global scale, mainly because it is accessible to all. State-subsidized study (costs per pupil is about 25,000 CZK / year), where seniors pay only a contribution to the operation of school facilities (about 3,000 CZK), is not just the prerogative of well-situated families, but includes everyone. The country's history of arts education dates back to the 19th century, when music schools were established in the territory of today's Czech Republic. The number of schools increased during the First Republic, i.e. after 1918, and then later, increased further. After World War II, a uniform type of school was introduced and in the 1960s a network of so-called folk art schools was created, which also provided leisure activities in the field of dance, art and the literary-dramatic. After 1989, the Education Act was amended and the "people" became the basic art schools as we know them today.

While objectively very costly for the state, it is the status of the school and the introduction of a unified Framework Educational Plan that are two of the reasons why this form of artistic education persists with student interest continuing to grow. There are around 500 basic art schools (ZUŠ) in the Czech Republic, which have 1,000 branches and over 250,000 pupils. Around 13,000 internal and approximately 1,100 external teachers work at ZUŠ. Many graduates go on to conservatories or art colleges, but most become enthusiastic amateurs and educated listeners / spectators, with a lifelong love of the arts.

Similar to children, seniors will also get acquainted with Czech choral and conducting schools, its classical vocal training, and a repertoire based on Czech, Moravian and Silesian folklore. In the future, cooperation with the ZUŠ chamber groups will not be excluded, for example, from participation in the traditional concert "The Whole Family Sings."

Universities of the Third Age (U3V) in the Czech Republic operate according to the so-called French model of senior education, which was introduced in 1973 in Toulouse. The French model is characterized by a close connection to the environment of the organizing university (colleges). U3V thus becomes a standard part of specialized university centers, institutes of further or lifelong education, and specific faculties. This is then reflected, for example, in the content of the study, which usually corresponds to the content focus of the parent university. The advantages of this model include in particular, the active participation of qualified university teachers in teaching or the possibility of using the spatial and technical potential of the university. The first Czech U3V was established in 1986 in Olomouc at Palacký University. Currently, the possibility of studying at a U3V is offered by most Czech public universities and some private universities. In Ostrava, U3V was founded at the University of Ostrava in 1991.

U3Vs in the Czech Republic have been associated since 1993, with the Association of Universities of the Third Age, which is a member of the AIUTA (International Association of the Universities of the Third Age), EFOS (European Federation of Older Students) and European Information Networks for U3Vs. U3Vs, which are part of the Association, can annually apply to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for funds that significantly contribute to covering costs and enable the minimization of seniors' fees to the level of a symbolic amount. In the



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academic year 2020/2021, 64,000 seniors studied at Czech registered (supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports) universities of the third age.

Senior clubs in Slovakia are mainly established by the two largest associations: the Union of Pensioners in Slovakia and the Association of Christian Seniors. The Union of Pensioners in Slovakia has been operating as a civic association since 1990, uniting approximately 75,000 members in 860 organizations. The organization helps to prepare citizens for life and work at retirement age, protecting the rights and legitimate demands of pensioners for fair and dignified pension provisions. The Union also monitors health and social care along with the development of living standards of pensioners and proposes appropriate measures. It also provides social, health and legal counseling to its members, assists in the implementation of lifelong learning and supports the cultural and social activities of seniors. Union's important activities also include publishing the magazine "Tretí vek." In the field of music, it sporadically organizes visits to theater and opera performances, but there is no systematic formation of a musical focus.

The Association of Christian Seniors has approximately 4,400 members in 70 clubs, usually operating in local parishes. The association aims to develop the spiritual and material good of the older generation and develops the civic, national, and Christian awareness of its members. The dignity of the elderly requires that their living standard covers the needs of life, including spiritual and cultural dimensions. Specific activities that these clubs organize for their members include religious meetings, visits to pilgrimage sites, and in many clubs, choirs. In small municipalities, cultural and educational facilities are often the only social centers of cultural and educational activity for adults, and therefore play a very important role in the process of enriching the lives of older people. They have the opportunity to provide space for the active satisfaction of cultural, educational, creative and recreational activities.

The tradition of choral singing in Slovakia had already been created during the totalitarian regime, and functioned as a natural building of spiritual values and also as a form of resistance against persecution of the Church. It was never organized, because the believers in the individual parishes felt the need to beautify the services by their own efforts, and the singing and speaking of the believers themselves were the most natural ways. The choirs were led by cantors, respectively, *regenschóri*, or amateur enthusiasts in collaboration with local priests. Their activity was voluntary and non-profit. Even today, this method of church work and organization prevails. When the musical leadership is taken over by graduates of church music from secondary vocational schools (conservatories) and universities (artistic and pedagogical), there are no specific procedures for hiring them and the possibilities and needs of each church are not taken into account.

Social Inclusion

The attitude of today's society towards old age and the elderly has been rather negative in the long term. Aging is understood as a period during which one can only decay, at best retaining some of what one has acquired before. Their experience and competencies are losing their significance, and hence, such a person is no longer considered a benefit to society. The value system of a society that emphasizes the preservation of the primarily biologically conditioned competencies of youth (youthful appearance, performance, etc.) puts older people at a great disadvantage. This tendency has long been supported by the media, which in various ways confirms the considerable importance of appearance and proclaimed freshness as the current norm. Social interaction changes in old age.



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Social changes in old age

Psychosocial aging significantly affects the seniors' ability to adapt to the changes that old age brings. This can include, retirement and related economic changes, a change of residence or the death of a life partner. Retirement, on the one hand, gives the retirees the opportunity to rest, sleep and take care of themselves and frees them from certain social pressures, reducing the number of people with whom they have maintained contact. On the other hand, retirement also gives space for new activities, voluntary services, and various hobbies. Incorrect or insufficient adaptation can manifest itself in feelings of inferiority, uselessness, and social isolation. Although seniors need less money for clothing, entertainment, and work or housing, their living costs are still rising, (for example, expensive medicines increase with diseases), and often cause problems for the elderly. Many people have to change residence in old age precisely for economic reasons. Their apartments are too large and expensive for them, and due to reduced mobility or mental health problems, they are unable to maintain a household or take care of themselves.

In old age, a very strong marital bond develops between spouses, which facilitates their aging and encourages each other. After the death of a partner, the experience can be a feeling of loss, emptiness, and abandonment. Many get used to living alone, but become dependent on other, younger members of the family. However, there are also those who will remarry. Widowhood leads to feelings of abandonment and increased personal insignificance. Women compensate for their feelings of loneliness by creating social communities, such as groups of other elderly women who meet regularly. Regular meetings with other members of the choir will help participants to deepen existing social relationships or make new contacts. In particular, joint participation in blended mobility will be of particular benefit, where new relationships will take on a broader international dimension. Performing together at a concert can also boost the self-confidence of seniors, which can stimulate creativity and the development of their artistic and social life.

The Senian period was defined by the ancient Greeks as a time of wisdom and a time in which the elder is revered and held in universal esteem. While these general rules are now giving way to various clichés and pseudo-values of a rapidly developing society, even this dynamic 21st century society is aware of the demographic disparity that is emerging. We are witnessing great advances in science and medicine, which are essential aspects of increasing the average age of the population. It is therefore the task of an advanced society to offer seniors the opportunity to actively develop their interests and spend their time productively. Arts education appears to be an excellent, low-cost option. Art academies of the third age, which are mostly subsidized by the budget of the city in which they operate, help their students to develop artistically and culturally, meet regularly, and integrate socially. In the Academy of Arts and Culture of the Third Age Ostrava, seniors are given instruction in the artistic disciplines of music, art, dance, literature and drama. It is through the artistic process of which they are a part, that the positive self-awareness and self-confidence of seniors is promoted.

If we look at the relationship between music and social inclusion, it is, in a broader sense, to create the conditions that will allow each individual, and particularly each senior, to have access to environments in which they can develop their musical education regardless of their economic means, social class, ethnicity, religion, linguistic and cultural heritage or sex.

Furthermore, the concept of informal learning and the creation of musical communities are increasingly approached in terms of music programs that develop outside of the formal system of teaching and are considered to be an extracurricular activity, specifically aimed at



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populations considered at risk. The following is a brief synthesis that summarizes the relationship between music and social inclusion in a setting of non-formal education within the Portuguese society:

- Music as a social practice is seen as a vehicle for the promotion of citizenship and social inclusion, the sense of belonging and the development of group identity. The doors are kept open for some musical experimentation.
- Musical projects that work with socially disadvantaged populations can promote new life perspectives.
- One of the typical characteristics of musical programs that take place outside the educational system, is the breakdown of the barrier between the so-called classical/formal music and popular musical cultures.

Music as a form of social integration and the full achievement of citizenship are two of the paths that we intend to achieve in our musical projects. Projects like the implementation of senior choirs will increase the network of knowledge and social relations, and consequently bring new resources to seniors. These resources can then act as mechanisms that reinforce the search for skills and competencies, hitherto lost or asleep in an imaginary reality, in which the exercise of citizenship should not be illusory. We are facing the possibility of reversing cycles and trajectories of a life linked to poverty, depression and dementia, in which new horizons and new concepts may be introduced. Consequently, what follows is the enjoyment of the exercise of the rights of citizenship as a pillar of a Democratic State.

Finally, since in this music project the participants involved come from different ethnicities, it is essential to stress the importance of Intercultural education, through which commitments are made within the professional and public bodies involved, enhancing the emergence of plurality within communities where cultural diversity is a reality.



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Phases of the Methodology

Description of the Organization which Forms the Senior Choir

The Senior University of Ferreira do Zêzere, established by the Improvements and Social Welfare Association of Pias, started its activity in April 2009 with 34 students. Currently, 50 students attend the Senior University, some of them foreigners who despite their retired status, live in our municipality. It has its headquarters at the Ferreira do Zêzere Collectives Center.

The purpose of the University of Ferreira do Zêzere is to promote knowledge and cultural, scientific and technical training in various areas of knowledge and social activity. In this context, the main goals are: ·

- promote non-formal education,
- encourage the participation and organization of seniors in cultural, teaching of citizenship, and leisure activities,
- develop interpersonal and social relationships between different generations,
- promote volunteering and solidarity.

The university intends to contribute more and more so that the students (seniors) feel motivated in an educational, social and cultural project, enjoying and sharing together the synergies resulting from an experience, that despite being based on different cultural origins not only enriches but even encourages sharing these synergies throughout life.

The University's Choir, "The Tuna", is not strictly a choir, since it currently enrolls both singers and instrumental players, including cavaquinho, guitars and recorder.

In the Czech Republic, a group of seniors, participants enrolled in the Academy of the Third Age, are already working with the established choir, Collegium Bonum. This project should result in long-term cooperation and integration into the choir even after the project ends. The whole project is under the patronage of the Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School in Ostrava. Attention is paid to the teaching of collective subjects in art schools, intergenerational concerts in cooperation with Academy participants and the ZUŠ seniors project "The Whole Family Plays", which includes grandparents with their grandchildren on one stage. Joint projects include the Ostrava Children's Choir and Collegium Bonum, multi-genre concerts of the senior band "Cajdák", pupils of the singing department of ZUŠ, and so on.

In Slovakia, the Andrej Church Choir is an autonomous vocal ensemble that acts as a Catholic parish choir in the town of Ružomberok. It always works under the supervision of the current conductor, who is the artistic director and at the same time the choir manager. For meetings and joint rehearsals, they use the choir room in the building of the Roman Catholic Parish Office in Ružomberok. Since 1970, the parish has provided them not only with space, but also with spiritual support and occasionally materials and financial assistance.



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Choral Activity during the Covid Pandemic

The current pandemic thwarted all the joint activities of many singers for more than a year. As members of the Slovak choir were among the most risky and endangered groups, meetings and rehearsals were completely canceled. The seniors of the Academy of the Third Age in Ostrava were meeting virtually during the lockdown, participating in online music theory and listening classes. The choir directors were taking turns conducting the on-line lessons, so at least the choir was kept in contact remotely. In Portugal during the pandemic, all activities which involved groups were forbidden. Meetings and rehearsals were completely cancelled. Individual activities such as instrumental and music theory lessons, started again on the April 1, 2021.

Requirements for Lecturers and Technical Requirements for the Course

The instructors of the course must not only be professionally prepared, but also have the social skills to work with senior age groups. Working with these groups requires a different approach, which is not only being more patient but also spending more time explaining the various subjects. The instructors must be trained in music theory and in singing. They should play a musical instrument and have pedagogical and social competencies enabling them to teach music. They must have knowledge of traditional musical repertoire which is specific and distinctive, especially in the area of spiritual music (church music).

Technical Requirements:

A piano, cavaquinho, ukulele, classical guitar, camera, laptop, CD player, speakers, portable speaker, Bluetooth or USB microphone, music software, software for audio and video editing, flipchart, and musical material (both scores and scores made available electronically).

Course Implementation

Implementation of the Course in Slovakia

In Slovakia, the course will take place in the familiar environment of the choir room at the Parish Office in Ružomberok. During the classes, the members of the choir will be informed about the project and will have material support available (such as sheet music, realization and playback of video recordings and guidelines regarding the context of the project's progress). At each rehearsal, the repertoire will include at least two songs from the upcoming "International Singer". At the beginning of the course, the singers will focus on Slovak songs, then switch to songs from the Czech repertoire and finally will sing from Portuguese offerings. When the music is sufficiently mastered, a video recording will be created, which will become an auxiliary study material for the other two participating choirs from the ASEB project.

In the event that the activities of seniors' groups at the Department of Music of the Faculty of Education (Catholic University of Ružomberok) are renewed in September, the coordinator can create separate sample recordings of songs with seniors for the study purposes of domestic and foreign choirs (depending on the society's health situation).

Implementation of the course in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the course will take place during the regular artistic season of the choir. Members of the "Collegium Bonum" and A3V attendees have already had the



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opportunity to take part in several joint rehearsals, so now the practices begin in full. At this time, the course has been taking place in the rehearsal room of the “Ostrava Children's Choir”, which is part of the E. Marhula Art School. The premises are sufficiently equipped both for rehearsals and for combining the choir and the instrumental ensemble. The space also allows for the creation of recordings, and for streams, taking into account the needs of the ASEB. The repertoire will be adapted to the final composition of the choir, including the songbook that is being created within the project.

Implementation of the Course in Portugal

Preparation for the Course:

After the choice of a lecturer, that individual will structure and prepare the content of the course, including study materials, assignments for seniors, and discussions boards. It will also be the lecturer's responsibility to prepare the classes, schedules/activities, and to print all the needed materials. The lecturer will also be in charge of communication with the seniors about which instrument(s) they should learn, and for preparing the classroom for lessons.

During the Course:

During the course, the lecturer must lead the lessons and rehearsals including individual lessons and teamwork. Throughout this phase, lecturers will also lead eLearning activities in a virtual classroom, comment on assignments and deal with the needs of specific seniors. Also during this phase, the students will learn selections from the songbook, which includes not only Portuguese songs but also Slovak and Czech songs. Progress will be monitored continuously and the results will be registered and commented on. There will be no quantitative grades; however, there will be qualitative ones.

At the End of the Course:

The course will end within the Week of Blended Mobility in the Czech Republic, where selected seniors will participate in the final presentation. They will perform their own songs, but also will be part of a global “international” choir which will also include the partner choirs.



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Description of the organization

A brief insight into history

Nowadays, being elderly is a reality quite different from other times. In addition to the average life expectancy increasing from year to year, seniors tend to be a healthier and more active generation. For this reason they have gained a new visibility in society which did not exist previously. According to WHO (the World Health Organization) the concept of active aging emerging in 2020, “aims to convey a more comprehensive message extending beyond health to socioeconomic, psychological and environmental aspects, integrated in a multidimensional model, thus defending the predominance of multiple factors that affect how individuals and populations age.” (Ribeiro & Paúl, 2011, cited by Almeida, 2016, p. 21).

Living beyond the age of 65 is now a more certain reality, and as such, there has been in recent decades a greater reflection on the role of the elderly and their integration in society, as well as issues related to their quality and way of life. It was necessary to find solutions so that this type of population does not lose quality of life in these additional years. It is in this context of active aging that the senior university was born. The emergence of senior universities was intended to provide an increase in the quality of life for the elderly, creating relationships that stimulate communication, learning, and creativity. This streamlines cultural, educational and social activities, thus changing the routine of the elderly.

Senior universities are non-profit institutions that form an adult education program worldwide, involving millions of people on 5 continents. In Portugal, RUTIS Senior Universities encompass more than 45,000 students, 300 entities and 5,500 volunteer teachers. The institution intends to promote active and healthy aging, as well as supporting the quality of life for the elderly and their inclusion and social participation in the activities of the institution. To this end, RUTIS promotes regular cultural, social, and educational activities. These generate learning in an informal environment, creating that which is fundamental to combat the isolation and social exclusion of the elderly population. It is a pole of information and dissemination of services, and resources. RUTIS also provides information regarding the rights and duties of the elderly, thus strengthening their social participation.

The President of the RUTIS Association, Luís Jacob, maintained a “struggle” with the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Security for some years in order to create a “legislative framework” for these institutions. This legislative framework was necessary, so that the efforts of these universities were valued and recognized as an effective social response to active aging. According to the President, the positive effects on elderly Portuguese people are transversal and improve their health. He said in an interview with Agência Lusa, in March 2013: “Students who go to the UCI consume about 20% less medication than other elderly people, and their level of depression is much lower”.

Founded by Professor Pierre Vellas, the first senior university emerged in Europe in 1973 at the University of Toulouse in France. In Portugal (1976), the first senior university was founded by Dr. Herberto Miranda in Lisbon and called the “International University of the Third Age” (UITI). Since then and to date, many similar institutions have emerged across the country, with various designations, such as: “Senior Universities”, “Universities of Self-Education and Senior Citizens”, and “Academies of Culture and Cooperation”, but all with the same purpose which is a healthy promotion of the culture and occupation of free time. RUTIS officially appeared in November 2005 and is a private institution of social solidarity, which provides



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support to the elderly community, acting both nationally and internationally. Thus, this institution represents all senior universities.

How does the Senior University Work?

As a rule, registration is done by filling out an application form. At the time of enrollment the annual insurance payment is made which must cover all students. Normally, the universities operate during working hours from Monday to Friday, although some universities may have certain activities after working hours. The monthly fees, the subjects offered, the syllabus and the activities developed vary and are defined by each institution, so it is advisable to consult the information provided by each of the universities in your geographical area. At this time, the average national monthly fee is 12 euros. The months of operation, as well as the breaks, vary from university to university. However, as a rule, the operation is between the months of September to June, with breaks at Christmas, the Carnival of Maderia, and Easter.

The disciplines (theoretical and practical) and activities that are developed may vary, but can cover the following areas and contents. These include languages, music, theater, plastic arts, sports, psychology, guided tours, exhibitions, and lectures, among other activities. Annually, RUTIS organizes and promotes several events that encompass the various universities, where for example, musical groups, theater groups, academies, and art and dance galas are promoted. All students and teachers who are part of a Senior University at RUTIS also have an identification card, valid for three academic years, which upon presentation gives the holder access to various institutions, museums, and hotel units with whom RUTIS has a partnership. In addition, with this card, they will have access to a set of discounts and benefits with different companies nationwide. So being a student allows for discounts and financial savings!

In conclusion, it can be said that senior universities arose to counter the pre-established idea and the stereotype that the elderly person does not have an active role in society. On the contrary, these institutions play a crucial role in the well-being and quality of life for the elderly. In this way, the negative image that society attributes to old age and the aging process changes, and on the other hand, from the individual point of view, it helps older persons to outline future projects and objectives. Thus, these universities promote an increase in the quality and dignity of life.

Andrej Church Choir in Ružomberok (Slovakia)

In 1894, Jozef Chládek founded a singing ensemble within the Catholic Circle in the town of Ružomberok, which first acted as an occasional church and funeral choir. Later the choir turned into a mixed ensemble, which under his leadership performed at parish occasions, and gave concert performances. The choir of the Catholic Circle had about 30 members in 1900. Since 1924, the number of singers has increased (at that point it had about 60 members) and it developed into one of the best choirs in Slovakia. Under the direction of conductor Jozef Dutka, the choir became stable as a musical ensemble, with regular rehearsals and public performances.

Despite its success, in 1937 the choir disbanded. Two years later it was reorganized at the initiative of some of its members. The patronage of the choir was taken over by the town of Ružomberok and the choir was given a new name: "The Choir of the Town of Ružomberok". The choir, even though it belonged to the city, had in its repertoire sacred compositions and arrangements of folk songs and performed both in religious services and at cultural and social



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celebrations. In 1942, the choir already had more than 100 members and also collaborated musically with other associations and organizations in the city.

In 1968, when the political and social situation eased slightly, new singers joined the choir and LSU teachers began to cooperate with the choir. Together they organized concerts performed at public city celebrations, and the choir even found a place for rehearsals in the Small Hall of the Cultural House of Ružomberok. Unfortunately, after only two years, the choir had to decide whether or not it would be just a city choir, which would only perform at worship services, or if it would be a choir without any financial and material security. The choir decided on the second, more demanding option. Thanks to Dean Jozef Debnár, the choir acquired two small rooms in the rectory in 1972, which it converted into one larger room, and furnished it with a piano and older furniture.

In 1974, a new stage of activity began for the choir. This was due to Štefan Olos, who in that year took the position of organist at the parish church in Ružomberok and at the same time began cooperating with the church choir, which in 1978 adopted the current name of the church, "Andrej Church Choir" (after the Parish of St. Andrew, patron saint of the parish). In addition to performing at Masses and other church festivities, activities expanded with the so-called June concerts, which began in 1975 and have continued to take place every year.

After 1989 (when great political and social changes took place), the choir began to perform at public and social festivities, besides at church events. In 1993, the choir and its conductor Š. Olos received an award from the city council for their activities. In 1994, the ensemble celebrated 100 years since its founding with a jubilee concert in the Great Hall of the House of Culture in Ružomberok. In 1996, due to the serious illness of its conductor Štefan Olos, Leopold Šida became the new conductor. In 2001, due to the serious illness of conductor L. Šida, as well as the low participation of choir members at rehearsals, the choir's activities were limited to singing at funerals.

In 2002, the late conductor Leopold Šida was replaced by Oľga Kuniaková, who led the choir until 2013. After that, the ensemble worked under the guidance of nuns and a graduate of church music at the Catholic University of Ružomberok, Veronika Balážecová. In 2018 she was replaced by the current conductor, graduate of church music at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, Janka Klimeková. Unfortunately, the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 disease disrupted church and choral activities for more than a year.

Selected Choirs in Ostrava (Czech Republic)

The "Collegium Bonum" mixed choir, was formed in 2010, and has performed almost 100 concerts in the Moravian-Silesian region, as well as in Poland, France and Croatia. The members of the choir come from different parts of Opava, Kravaňsko, Bílovec and Studénka and it is a member of the Union of Czech Choirs. Since March 2017, the conductor has been Jan Mičoch from Ostrava, who replaced the choir's founder Gabriela Onderková. The aim of this choral group is to gradually create a quality repertoire for various occasions and for the pleasure of the widest possible range of listeners. Hence, the repertoire of the choir consists of historical and contemporary sacred music, interesting arrangements of folk songs, ethno music and other musical delicacies. An integral part of the choir's activities is also to establish musical friendships with ensembles in the Czech Republic and abroad.

"Academy of Arts and Culture of the Third Age Ostrava" was opened in October 2018, when the three-year cycle began. The Academy provides persons of retirement age with professional



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studies in these artistic fields: music, art, dance and the literary-dramatic. Teaching takes place by arrangement with the lecturers, mostly in the morning or evening hours. Classes take place on the premises of the Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School. Various offerings are opened based on the demand from students. The Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School was established on 15th October 1907 under the name Music and Organ School of the School Society in Ostrava Mariánské Hory. Eduard Marhula, former student of Leoš Janáček, was its founder and first director. He was an organist, composer and important organizer of musical life in the Ostrava region.

Teaching was interrupted during the First World War. At the beginning of the 1930s, a music and pedagogical department was established, which prepared future professional musicians and teachers. In 1935, the school was moved to Moravian Ostrava, where it successfully developed its activities under the name Masaryk Institute of Music and Singing. A branch of this institute was opened in Mariánské Hory in 1949 and since the 1950/51 school year it has become an independent music school.

On 11th February 1994, the school was named after its founder, Eduard Marhula, and on 1st January 1995 it became an independent legal entity and a full member of the Association of the Elementary Art Schools of The Czech Republic. At the school, students are offered classes in the fields of music, dance, art, literature and dramatic arts. However, the field of music still predominates. Musical offerings are divided into several departments: keyboard instruments, string instruments, brass and percussion instruments, singing, music theory and composition. In addition to teaching solo playing, the school also emphasizes chamber and ensemble playing as evidenced by a number of successful and among the students, very popular chamber groups and ensembles of various specializations. These ensembles are regularly taking part in various competitions, shows, and festivals not only in our country, but also abroad. Among the most successful groups are the percussion ensemble "Bum Bum Band" and especially the "Ostrava Children's Choir". Great attention is paid to the youngest musicians in preparatory studies. As one of the few art schools in The Czech Republic, Composition and the Introduction to Composition are among the courses offered.

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the Portuguese participants consists of the coordinator of the association De Pias, lecturers, technicians, professors and volunteer students (who are seniors).

The "Andrej Church Choir" does not have a specific structure. Janka Klimeková is the artistic director as well as the conductor, and organ accompaniment is currently provided by organist and cantor, Peter Pekarčík. The mixed choir has about 25 members and their average age is 65; they normally meet twice a week in the choir room of the Roman Catholic Parish Office in Ružomberok for about 2 hours and the repertoire consists mainly of sacred works by Slovak and foreign composers. The singers perform mainly during services at major liturgical holidays (Christmas, Easter, and special feasts). They often participate in funerals, but occasionally participate at other cultural events organized by the city.

The artistic director of the "Collegium Bonum" mixed choir is Jan Mičoch, who works as an external conductor at the Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School. Conductress Eva Polášková will also work with the choir during the project. The Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School provides material and personnel support for both students of the Academy of Arts and Culture (sometimes referred to as the Academy of the Third Age) and the choir. The project is under



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the patronage of Pavla Kovalová, director of The Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School. The “Collegium Bonum” choir, strengthened by the Academy's participants, has approximately 30 members with an average age of 65 years old. They rehearse at least once a week in the choir rehearsal room of the Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School, with tutoring and instrumental accompaniments provided by teachers from the school. The repertoire is typical for a mixed choir, including arrangements of folk songs, classical compositions of various genres, spiritual literature, and ethnic compositions as well as other styles.

Putting the Organization into a Broader Context: The Position of the Organization in Society

The Institution of Pias is located in Ferreira do Zêzere in the center of Portugal, 120 Km from Lisbon, with a population around 10,000 inhabitants. As a private entity which provides a public service, the Institution has many competencies established in cooperation with the government. This private entity has developed many projects related to entrepreneurship, employment, training, and education for children and adults. For seniors, social inclusion, health quality, and active aging are among the projects along with local and national volunteering projects.

The Institution of Pias has over 60 employees, ten of whom are volunteers and different classes for citizens over 50 years of age are promoted and given by the volunteers. The most successful classes are in foreign languages, so the result is that the institution creates motivation for foreign people to share with elderly people their language, culture, and traditions. Additionally, the students also share their personal experiences with the volunteers. This kind of beneficial interaction can also be done with the children that are in the shelter.

The aims of the institution beyond other activities are:

- to develop cultural, educational and formative activities for all ages in addition to older adults;
- to promote intellectual, sports, and cultural activities, as well as social and communitarian integration;
- to promote knowledge, cultural, scientific and technical formation in diverse subjects and social relationships;
- to offer courses, seminars and other ways of study and work, as well as editing periodic and non-periodic publications;
- to stimulate the participation and organization of older adults in cultural and leisure activities;
- to spread local history, science, traditions, arts, and other cultural topics among older adults;
- to be a center of information and dissemination for the services, rights and duties of younger people and adults;
- to develop interpersonal and intergenerational relationships.

The “Andrej Church Choir” has a long tradition in Ružomberok and is perceived by the citizens of the town as its own. It was created as a vocal body within the Catholic Circle Society. During its development it not only had a parish focus, but at one time it was also supported by the town of Ružomberok. In the 1970s, it had the choice of whether to belong to the town of Ružomberok or to orient itself more ecclesiastically, but since its repertoire consisted mainly of sacred works and the town was strongly Catholic, the choir decided to orientate itself to be



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exclusively spiritual, despite the totalitarian regime which did not support it at the time. The “Andrej Church Choir” has a predominantly senior membership, which is sporadically rejuvenated. Nevertheless, it is considered a permanent and valuable part, not only of the spiritual events, but in the wider cultural and social happenings in the town of Ružomberok and the surrounding areas. The traditional June concerts in the Parish Church of St. Ondrej were the most obvious example of the importance of this choir to Ružomberok. Currently, these thematic concerts are not held every year but do happen for special anniversaries.

In the Czech Republic, although the collaboration of the “Academy”, the “Collegium Bonum” choir and the Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School is relatively new, it is based on a long tradition of music, music-pedagogy and choral singing. Both in the region of Moravia and Silesia and in the Czech Republic in general, we can talk about the so-called “Czech Choral School”, which has been built up since the time of Bedřich Smetana and his choir “Hlahol”, which has been singing almost continuously since 1860. A long line of Czech and Moravian choral conductors, voice teachers and supporters is credited with the fact that even the most remote Czech village still has choral singing and that the field of choral conducting can be studied at Czech universities. This choral tradition traces its roots back to L. Janáček, E. Marhula, L. Pivovarský, L. Mátl, M. Báčorek, M. Chromík, J. Klimeš and many others. Both Eduard Marhula Elementary Art School and the Academy of Arts and Culture of the Third Age Ostrava are built on the same musical-historical foundation.

Current activities of the organization focused on seniors

Currently, the most important projects and actions that take place regarding senior citizens **in Portugal** are:

The Senior University of Ferreira do Zêzere

This university consists of 50 senior students, 15 volunteer teachers and 15 disciplines. Among those subjects offered are ICT, Psychology, Art/Crafts, Citizenship, History, Portuguese, French, English, Dance, Music Group, Musical Instruments and Portuguese for Foreigners, a health program and physics for the community.

Domiciliary Care for the Elderly (41 individuals)

Domiciliary care consists of a caregiver visiting at a predetermined time each day and carrying out certain tasks, such as assisting with personal care or administering medication. Visiting care at home enables your loved one to remain in their own home when their care needs increase, but is not suitable for everyone.

Day Center (20 individuals)

The adult day care center enables seniors to socialize and enjoy planned activities in a group setting, while still receiving needed health services. At the same time, the adult day care center offers family caregivers respite from caregiving duties while knowing that their loved one is in a safe place.

Social Center (100 individuals)

The social center, in addition to providing a nutritious meal, offers social activities, a range of informative programs, creative arts, exercise, volunteer opportunities, community services,



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and other special events which are unique to individual centers. This center works once a week in each parish.

Active Aging Project (50 individuals)

In the year 2020, the Senior University of Ferreira do Zêzere was awarded a grant for a 3-year national project to work in the area of active aging with a budget of 317.433,60 €. The grant will be used for implementing several activities such as music, nutrition, self-safety workshops, seminars for seniors about aging phases, Portuguese compared to foreign culture, arts and crafts, dance and movement, cultural and heritage, cinema, intergenerational, volunteer/solidarity and remembrance activities.

The following musical activities take place **in the Czech Republic**:

- Intergenerational concerts within the cooperation of the Academy's students and ZUŠ pupils;
- A project called "The Whole Family Plays". This project will revolve around a musical event with grandparents and their grandchildren on one stage. It is a joint project of the "Ostrava Children's Choir" and "Collegium Bonum";
- Intergenerational concerts of the senior band "Cajdák" and pupils of the singing department of ZUŠ.

There are 6 faculties at the University of Ostrava and each of them provides education for seniors within U3V. The so-called Virtual University of the Third Age has been established at the Faculty of Science, offering semester courses in full-time, distance and combined forms learning. Combined forms courses are offered the most, which enable face-to-face activities supplemented by study via the Internet. This combination respects both the requirements for social contact between teachers and seniors, among seniors themselves, and respects the growing demands for the use of SMART technologies. Full-time teaching consists of lectures, seminars, workshops, and teaching in the field or in laboratories. Distance learning is then based on the study of materials and resources in a virtual classroom.

The materials have both an explanatory or presentational character and the character of activities for seniors. The aim is to support and motivate the active approach for seniors to study, to enable teamwork, to implement intergenerational dialogue (for example, seniors with students, and teachers). The study requires basic competencies using SMART technologies, communication tools, searching on the Internet, and especially knowledge of the specific environment of a virtual classroom based on a learning management system. Applicants are regularly and continuously trained in these competencies. This program involves "Collegium Bonum", multi-genre concerts of the senior band "Cajdák" and pupils of the singing department of ZUŠ.

Virtual U3V, although part of the Faculty of Science, is not thematically limited to science topics, but takes into account the interests, wishes and requirements of seniors. It is widely spread from social science disciplines, through humanities, language, culture, art, and social health, to technical and scientific disciplines.

The interest in studying far exceeds the possibilities of the faculty. Therefore, the faculty also offers distance learning courses, where all teaching is concentrated in a virtual classroom, meaning that lectures and seminars take place online. The main advantage is independence from current restrictions both on the part of the state or institution (e.g. Covid-19 pandemic)



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and on the part of seniors themselves, when their health condition (possibly health restrictions), will not allow them to attend full-time lessons. For these reasons, distance learning is becoming increasingly popular.

Unfortunately, organized musical activities for seniors do not take place **in Slovakia**. Of course, there are day centers that are so-called hospitals for the elderly, where older persons spend a limited part of the day under the supervision of experts who give them various smaller activities. These activities include listening to music or singing folk songs, which in the past were very popular, but a specific program focused on musical activities is absent. The most systematic programs in this area are offered by the Universities of the Third Age, which number 16 in Slovakia. They offer seniors regular, mostly three-year education courses in several areas, but have minimal musical content. One of the institutions considering the integration of seniors into lifelong learning is the Catholic University in Ružomberok, which consists of 4 faculties. There are three based in Ružomberok (Pedagogical, Philosophical and the Faculty of Health Care) and one operates in Košice (Theological). The University of the Third Age is guaranteed, secured and administered by the Rectorate of KU. Currently there are two study programs. The first is three years and has a theological character with a focus on learning about the Old Testament and the second is one year and is focused on technologies for seniors. The Faculty of Theology in Košice, in cooperation with the Rectorate of KU in Ružomberok, organizes independent education at the University of the Third Age in Košice and Prešov. It is a form of lifelong learning that allows participants to satisfy their interests in Catholic theology and philosophy. The study is carried out in the study program, "Philosophical and Theological Foundations".

Course Preparation

Detailed Description of the Target Group

The course in Portugal revolves around the existing activities of the University's choir, "The Tuna". This group has 20 members, including 18 females and 2 males aged from 65 to 82 years old with different backgrounds and different nationalities. The majority of the members are without previous musical experience. The main bond in the group is the will to belong and to share meaningful experiences in the context of musical learning and performing. A distinctive characteristic of this group is the use of traditional folk instruments to accompany the voices, namely, cavaquinhos, guitars and a recorder. The seniors' sociability and desire to participate in cultural exchanges makes them a perfect partner for this ASEB project.

The course in the Czech Republic emphasizes the joint activities of the mixed choir "Collegium Bonum", which is partly composed of music students from the Academy of Arts and Culture of the Third Age Ostrava. The average age of the members is approximately 65 years old and many of them have previous (amateur or professional) musical training. In general it can be stated that choral singers, across the age and social spectrum, are united by a desire to create together, to be a participant in the artistic process, and acknowledge a responsibility to achieve a common goal together. They have the knowledge that they are part of a whole that transcends them. That is the reason why many return to musical activities after a great number of years, begin studying a new instrument or are singing at the "Academy". They enjoy participation in the choir, which is another opportunity for these student-seniors to come together. The number of choir members is approximately 30. The final composition of the choir will be determined by the situation when there are no longer health restrictions. Since choral singing has a great tradition and reputation in Ostrava and its surroundings, senior singers are still applying for the opportunity to join the ASEB project.

The course in Slovakia is focused on a senior mixed choir, which has been working in more or less the same form for a long time. The average age of its members is around 65 years old, and many of them (the older ones) have been in the choir for several decades. The number of members fluctuates (around the number 25), but it is uncertain how many will return to singing after a break of more than a year. The social status of the Andrej Church Choir has long enjoyed respect and a good name, which is why it was approached to participate in the IO 1 activity within the international ASEB project.

Time allowance for the Course

All participating churches will be involved in the ASEB project for at least 2 hours per week. That is, 2 hours over 52 weeks making a total of 104 hours per year. Originally, the duration of the course was planned for a year and a half, but the pandemic situation and its measures, especially for seniors, created a one-year delay. It may be necessary to request an extension of this activity in order to fulfill its purpose.

Frequency of Individual Lessons

In Slovakia, the course will take place as part of regular rehearsals of the "Andrej Church Choir", that is, twice a week for approximately 2 hours. The course in the Czech Republic will take place mainly as part of regular choir rehearsals but at least 2 hours per week. In Portugal, the individual lessons are for instruments. The frequency of individual lessons is one hour per



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week, from the first of October to 31st of July. The total number of hours for individual instrumental lessons including the cavaquinho, is 36.

Entry requirements for the course participant

The participants for the course in Slovakia, members of the Andrej Church Choir, have been part of the choir for several years, so working with musical material is not a problem for them. If there are those among them who know how to use the Internet and have an e-mail address, they will be offered the opportunity to attend an e-learning course within the IO 4 activity, which is part of the ASEB project.

For course participants in the Czech Republic, a healthy voice, experience with choral singing or playing an instrument is welcome, but not a requirement. Active and regular participation in choir rehearsals and choir retreats is required. In the case of senior students, music theory basics are provided to facilitate working with musical material. Most singers use e-mail or MS teams for communication within the choir, as well as sending music, so it can be expected that they will welcome the e-learning platform as well.

The Portuguese partner doesn't have any requirements for the seniors. The only requirement is the will to participate and to enjoy the various offerings, since these informal music classes mainly have a social purpose.

Preparation and Distribution of Study Materials for Seniors

The preparation of the musical material in Slovakia will be provided by the Department of Music, (KU, Ružomberok) as a member of the ASEB project. In collaboration with the conductor of the Andrej Church Choir, the study materials will be distributed gradually depending on how they will be included in the rehearsal program. The program of each rehearsal will always include songs from the upcoming repertoire of the ASEB project (activity IO 3, first Slovak, then Czech and finally Portuguese songs). When studying repertoire in a foreign language, sample recordings will be used, especially of the Portuguese choir for the sake of pronunciation and for overall expression.

The preparation of the sheet music in the Czech Republic will be based on a plan drawn up by the choral conductors at the beginning of each artistic season. The conductors themselves will prepare the sheet music, which will also include pieces from the international songbook. The technical facilities of the choir rehearsal room or the music school can be used for graphic editing of the sheet music, its reproduction, or its conversion into electronic form. The building where the choir rehearsal room is located also includes an interactive whiteboard and a data projector, which can also be used to watch video recordings or streams.

In Portugal, the literature is given by the lecturers during the classes, and some information is given for students to search for on the internet. All of the uniforms and sheet music stands are given by the Senior University, and the material for the public presentations is given by the Municipality.

Form of Study

In Slovakia, IO 1 activity will be implemented primarily by full-time teaching within regular practices, as the average age of members of the Andrej Church Choir is relatively high. However, auxiliary materials can be placed on the website of the e-learning course, in such a



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way that computer technology is brought along with selected songs for the practices. Portuguese material in particular, will be played as sample material.

The form of study in the Czech Republic is full-time and within the framework of regular choir rehearsals. Simultaneously, an e-learning course will be created, which also assumes regular attendance at choir and appears to be only supplementary.

In Portugal, the course will be implemented by in-person teaching and also by eLearning. Supplementary materials will be placed on the web in a joint eLearning course, including videos.

Methodology of Training and Vocal Education

The teacher must take into account different aspects when preparing a lesson plan adapted to the needs of each group. The first step in defining the content of an online or face-to-face singing class is to get to know the seniors and understand what their needs are. This first contact is crucial, as it will determine what the teacher-student relationship will be like, as well as the successful functioning of future classes. The first class will also be decisive in the student's decision to continue or not. Some points that should be addressed in this first class are:

- the level of knowledge of the interested party in music theory; If he/she is able to read a score, and able to reproduce some notes, among other things;
- the level of knowledge in singing and technique;
- the expectations that he/she has regarding the classes. The intention in these classes is always as a hobby;
- the level of knowledge about music is not an issue;
- the musical styles they like best.

After all of these issues are solved, students can start with classes, but before that, there are some steps to follow. There are vocal warm-ups, breathing exercises, practice of vocal techniques, and study and interpretation of a song.

Each rehearsal of the Andrej Church Choir begins with a prayer, after which the singers start in the traditional way: humming with major and minor seconds up and down, followed by warm-ups with successive intervals of thirds, fifths, and sixths to the octave. The warm-up should not last too long, as some older singers tire quickly, which would make it difficult for them to sing and rehearse music. The conductor of the Slovak choir was forced to abandon almost a half-hour of quality vocal warm-ups with other choirs she led and to settle for warm-ups lasting 10 to a maximum of 15 minutes.

During the vocal warm-up, the singers are divided into voices: soprano, tenor and then alto, and bass. In some harmonic exercises, they all sing together. Another concession on the part of the conductor in her work with the senior choir was the dispensation of her demands for intonation purity. Older voices crack, many of the singers have developed poor technical habits, and despite the efforts made, it is practically impossible to unlearn those habits. In addition, several singers show typical old age annoyance, as well as impatience in repeatedly improving incorrect intonation problems.

The warm-up is followed by the rehearsal itself, which always begins with the most demanding song due to the endurance required to sing it. Then the conductor will include in



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the rehearsal some familiar, more or less well-known composition, which still needs to be rehearsed. Something new follows again, which is replaced by a more familiar composition, and in this way the rehearsal moves on. At the end, the conductor will include a favorite song so that the singers finish the rehearsal with a good feeling and look forward to the next meeting.

During her first contacts with the choir, the conductor of the Andrej Church Choir had the desire to have longer-lasting rehearsals, but she soon found out that seniors could not sing for very long. According to Janka Klimeková, "I just can't demand anymore and that's why it's always necessary to carefully consider what and how to rehearse, and how much time will need to be invested in rehearsing a given work". If she wanted to rehearse one composition very well, it would take several rehearsals and because of the necessity to sing for Masses, that kind of time spent rehearsing one work is not possible. At the very end of the rehearsal, the members of the choir quite often strengthen mutual relations by visiting. Whenever one of the choir members has a name day or birthday, they bring cakes, desserts, sandwiches and something to toast the others.

There is additional information from the Czech environment to diversify the above steps. The very methodology of rehearsal and voice training is based on the "Czech Choral School" and its representatives. Although some of the approaches seem outdated in modern pedagogical methods, the basics remain unchanged.

The framework consists of quality singing preparations, which also accentuates the correct singing posture or sitting. Breathing exercises and activation of the diaphragm are an integral part of the preparations, which also brings many health benefits (oxygenation, movement of the diaphragm having a secondary effect on the blood supply to the organs of the abdominal cavity, etc.). This is followed by articulation exercises and facial gymnastics. The vocal training itself includes the formation of the head tone, gradual warming up of the vocal cords, soft deployment of the tone, formation and vocal balance, cantilena exercises from the fifth, and full tone exercises with emphasis on diaphragmatic breathing. Individual exercises are chosen by the choir conductors to match the current condition of the choir members and their abilities, which change over time.

The rehearsal itself starts with an initial analysis of the piece, followed by a demonstration (usually sung by the conductors). The rehearsal continues with practicing in small groups (divided by the voices) and then rehearsing together. Just as with the youngest singers, it is always good to focus on one problem at the beginning of the rehearsal. Also with senior choirs it is good to choose this approach which is, first intonation, then rhythm, phrasing, and dynamics, etc.

Although the "Collegium Bonum" choir is an amateur group, the conductors do not want to completely resign themselves to targeted vocal education, which, with proper practice, should also serve as a prevention of respiratory and other diseases. Many choir members have been singing in choirs all of their lives. Many members have returned after a singing hiatus, and here, more than anywhere else, the rule of muscle memory applies since the vocal cords are a muscle. Building a repertoire requires a certain amount of patience, which is eventually rewarded by the experience of lively togetherness during the choir performances. As choir conductors, we rely on this fact implicitly.

Training Focused on the Development of Musical Skills (music theory and instrumental learning)



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Instrumental lessons and music theory are taught in the “Academy” within a pre-agreed framework. The project will involve participants from the three-year Academy course (2018-2021) and most likely also some participants from the Academy course (2021-2024), which is now opening.

The implementation of the course does not primarily involve playing an instrument, but it is possible that seniors will also participate instrumentally if they wish. It can be assumed that they will make use of the skills they have acquired during the three-year course at the “Academy”, which is currently culminating. However, the vocal skills, on which the whole project is based, remain central.

As the Andrej Church Choir is a permanent vocal ensemble with many years of experience, it is not necessary to organize special training for the development of musical activities. This could only happen if, after more than a year of rehearsals, a significant part of the “long time” members left the choir and an increase in new and inexperienced singers was seen. In this case, several special meetings would be held to explain the basics of music theory and basic singing techniques.

When working on the ASEB project, there was no assumption made that seniors, members of the Andrej Church Choir (Ružomberok), would use any musical instrument. This is related to the fact that in their activities they have long focused on the interpretation of classical church music. During singing, they often use organ accompaniment, but the singers themselves focus exclusively on the interpretation, and on the best possible singing. In the case of Czech and Portuguese songs, which will most likely be more temperamental and lighter in terms of genre, we can offer some seniors the possibility to play simple rhythmic instruments from Orff's instruments, provided by the Department of Music (tambourine, rattle, bells in case of a possible Christmas song, triangle, “ozembuch”, etc.).

If Portuguese seniors want to learn a specific song it must be chosen by the method that best suits the students and not a universal method as in conservatories. That often involves simplifying the structure of the music and explaining it by gestures, step by step, so that the seniors will imitate each gesture and memorize them. Then we can use memory media such as videos or numerical guidelines (tablatures).

The training of Portuguese seniors is focused on which activities seniors want to participate in. This may be just singing in the choir, or instead, learning an instrument. Instrumental and music theory lessons are taught in partnership with the “Academia Artística do Zêzere” within a pre-agreed framework.

Methodology for Cavaquinho/Ukulele Training

The cavaquinho is a traditional four-string instrument associated with folk music in Portugal. It is already played by some of the participants in the Portuguese senior group, and it is one of the goals of this project to introduce it to the Czech and Slovak lecturers and senior students, along with the ukulele, another four-string instrument that can be traced back to Portugal.

Both the cavaquinho and the ukulele are perfect instruments for people with no prior musical experience and they provide an excellent starting point for the development of instrumental playing skills. Due to the instruments' reduced size and complexity, cavaquinho/ukulele players can achieve fast results and fast rewards with minimum effort. As an example, drawing from the Portuguese folk music traditions, some songs can be played using only two chords. It is



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not uncommon for beginning cavaquinho/ukulele players to be able to accompany such songs at the end of a single lesson. This will result in the enthusiasm of the student and an increased will to keep learning.

By introducing the cavaquinho to the Czech and Slovak audiences, it will be possible to expand the use of the cavaquinho beyond Portuguese music and maybe find new contexts for it within these countries' musical traditions. At the very least, it will generate an interest and skill interchange that will help to shorten the distances between different musical cultures.

For students starting from zero from any nationality, we propose the following goal-oriented methodology:

- 1) Learning how to properly hold the instrument and be comfortable while playing it.
- 2) Learning the first basic simple chord shapes to be performed by the left hand. One of the first tasks should be to practice switching between these simple chord shapes that use only one or two fingers.
- 3) Introducing the role of the right hand (strumming) with basic rhythmic patterns, for example, quarter notes.
- 4) Connecting the two hands. Perform, at slow speeds the basic rhythmic patterns, while changing chord shapes every one or two bars.
- 5) Once that the previous task is mastered, a simple song should be introduced in which the student can apply the knowledge learned so far. This should be done at slow/moderate speeds.
- 6) When the student can already perform a song at a moderate speed, then the speed should be slowly increased to reach the original tempo of the song.
- 7) After the student can successfully accompany a simple folk song, slowly introduce new chords, new rhythmic patterns, as well as new songs where this information can all be applied.

Although the Czech and Slovak lecturers can begin the first contact with the cavaquinho for their seniors, the documents, materials and videos that will support cavaquinho/ukulele learning should be provided by the Portuguese lecturers and should be made available in the shared platform.

Requirements for Social Inclusion

The course in the Czech Republic will be fully accessible and transparent in all its aspects and information will be provided in a way that is understandable to all participants. There are no economic barriers and there are no tuition or enrollment fees. The Academy, and possibly the choir, will work under the auspices of ZUŠ and ÚMOb Mariánské Hory. No one is socially or informationally discriminated against. As shown by distance learning, seniors are quite able to use platforms for online learning (MS Teams and others) where the communication was seamless.



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For the Slovak partner, the course will take into account all of the needs of individual members, who will be regularly informed about the entire course, and progress, as well as results of the course. Participation in the activities is open to all members of the singing school, and despite the access stairs to the practice room in the parish office building, the barrier-free entrance is secured by an alternate entrance through the garage spaces of the building. The desire of church members to meet and use time meaningfully has always been stronger than a variety of health or other issues.

The main goal of the project in Portugal is social inclusion, so the Portuguese project partner will welcome into the classes anyone who wishes to attend them, taking into special consideration their comfort, integration and well-being.

Completion of the Course

According to the agreed upon conditions and instructions, at least 30 selected singers from the three countries will participate in the final workshop and subsequent concert. In this workshop the singers will prepare three songs (one from each country) that they will perform together in the final concert. Additionally, the seniors will engage in social activities with the purpose of promoting cultural interchange and an awareness for each of the countries' traditions.

Certification of the Course

All participants in this course will receive a certificate which will acknowledge their engagement in this course. The certificate in bilingual form (English and the relevant national language) will be prepared and signed by the University of Ostrava as the main partner of the project and the statutory representative.



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Requirements for Lecturers and Technical Requirements of the Course

Requirements for the Lecturer

The lecturers must be trained in music theory, and experienced in teaching music, particularly in the context of working with seniors. Sensibility working with seniors is highly recommended, as it is a work of patience, repetition and adaptation to the individual difficulties of each senior. Experience in conducting and performing is also a valuable asset, as it will help overcome seniors' doubts and anxieties. Finally, lecturers must have knowledge of the traditional musical repertoire of their country so that proper context can be conveyed to the seniors.

Technical Requirements

Study materials will be created by the lecturers of each country. In addition to music material (in printed and electronic form), a video camera, laptop, portable speaker, USB microphone, music software, software for audio and video editing, flipchart, and piano will also be suitable for the implementation of activities and its verification. The materials for the implementation of the project should also include audio files of the complete musical pieces as well as individual parts for practice. Also, regarding the string instruments, video files demonstrating the work of each instrument is considered a great help. An example can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBvKEcpgmY0>

Audio and video files don't need to be of a professional quality. They should just be a good example and reference for the musical performance.

Description of the Rehearsal Room

The classroom should not have desks, except for the conductor. Singing seniors should be grouped as a choir and seniors that play musical instruments (they may also sing) should be sitting in front of them. The room should be large enough for everyone to fit comfortably and have their own personal space. Speakers are required, to play the reference tracks. A PC, a data projector and a music staff board are also important requirements to provide context, background, address any difficulties and explain musical concepts. At least one spare ukulele and cavaquinho should also be present in the classroom.

Description of the Platform and its Use

The platform is available at <http://isev.osu.cz>. The site is authorized, so log in with a username and password is required. User accounts will be created for all project participants. In this shared platform we can find a general methodology, sheet music, and recordings accessible to all seniors and teachers of all partner countries.



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Course Implementation

Preparation of the lecturers

The preparation of the lecturers will aim at the following objectives:

- familiarity with the songs of each country, and also their stories and contexts;
- improvement or acquisition of cavaquinho and ukulele playing skills;
- testing and unification of a common teaching methodology for the choirs and instrumentalists.

This preparation will be achieved by means of a workshop in Portugal, organized and led by the Portuguese team but where every partner will make its contribution. The training activity in Portugal will offer answers questions about lecturer training and will provide space for debates about the concept of the project. The training activity in Portugal envisages mutual information on activities and procedures, exchange of experience and good practice. Furthermore, it will focus on national specifics and the search for common practices based on national specifics.

Repertoire Selection

The repertoire selection should reflect the specifics of each region and country. It should try to include an overall picture of the country's legacy and not merely focus on a single region or style. The selection of the pieces should also consider the performance difficulty, consider the number and complexity of the chords, as well as the number and complexity of the vocal lines. Simple songs/pieces should be favored. In the case of Portugal, the repertoire will include traditional folk songs from different regions like Minho, Beira and Alentejo.

The repertoire of the "Collegium Bonum" choir reflects the folklore specifics of the Czech Republic. The repertoire will be further modified depending on the work of the choir and the current abilities of its members.

The repertoire of the Slovak side of the ASEB project will consist of simple liturgical compositions by contemporary authors, or older spiritual compositions by Slovak composers reflecting the spiritual culture and heritage of Slovakia.

All the chosen songs as well as the context for each song will be present in the songbook.

Dialogue between Seniors

Just as in regular singing practice, the ASEB project will provide space for corrections and comments on particular singing or repertoire problems. Everyone will, of course, have the right to comment on a given topic. The stimulus for comments could be the recordings that were used as background for creating the e-learning course and these can also serve for monitoring. In addition to the classic dialogue at the full-time sessions, communication in a virtual classroom within an eLearning course is also expected. Choirmasters as well as seniors can bring new topics to the discussion. Additional topics can be discussed within the forum of the shared platform.



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Joint Learning on Blended Mobility

Cultural interchange and a familiarity with each of the countries' repertoires and specifics is one of the main goals of this project. As such, each country's choir will prepare some songs from the other participating countries across the duration of the project. In the final presentation, 10 participants of each country will get together to create an "international" 30-person choir that will jointly sing a song from each country. Although this final presentation focuses on only one song from each country, choirmasters are encouraged to teach more songs from the songbook during regular weekly gatherings.

The rehearsals of this "international" choir will take place during a week in the Czech Republic, in which these selected seniors also will have the opportunity to share their cultures and traditions and strengthen international ties to the participants from other countries. This week's highlight will be the final concert with the songs that have been learned and participants of the three countries singing together.

Final Presentation

The course will end with a concert, preferably with an audience, where seniors can demonstrate all the skills they have learned and also provide a good musical presentation for the community around them. In the concert each separate group will perform some songs of their country. After that, all the seniors together should perform one song of each country. This will be the best way to put their newly acquired skills to use, and is also a means to reflect the intrinsic value of this course and the international cooperation it implies.

Progress and Monitoring

Monitoring of gradual progress will be regularly tracked in a specific place prepared on the shared platform. This will include a brief summary of the classes as well as the occasional upload of some videos that document the progress of the seniors.



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Conclusion

As part of the comparison regarding the existence, focus, operation and work of the three participants in the ASEB project, it can be stated that the approach to choral singing for seniors is similar in the Czech Republic, Portugal and Slovakia. Despite the fact that each country has its own choral tradition on which it also builds the development of choral singing for seniors, they use very similar procedures in rehearsing selected compositions and importantly, seek to develop not only singing but also social, cultural and social life. Differences can be seen in the focus, respectively in the selection of the repertoire which manifested itself quite interestingly in the context of the ASEB project. The Czech repertoire is mainly focused on folk songs, the Slovak repertoire more on spiritual songs and the Portuguese also implement the special use of the cavaquinho and ukulele (these string instruments in traditional singing in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are little known and practically unused).

The system for musical development of seniors is best captured in Portugal. Seniors have the choice of attending a number of different courses, organized at senior universities and academies, which have been established gradually since 1976 and have been covered by the RUTIS organization since 2005. Of particular interest is the fact that most entries and registrations by seniors are activities in the field of music, especially in choirs.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, equivalent opportunities are offered at Universities of the Third Age, but they began to develop only after the fall of the totalitarian regime in 1989. Czech Academies of Art and Culture as well as Slovak Universities of the Third Age are already stable educational and social platforms. Based on the available materials, it can be stated that especially in the Czech Republic, the musical education of seniors is significant and builds on a long tradition which began to be organized in 1868 under the name of the Union of Czechoslovak Singing Associations. After several transformations, it operated until 1951, when its activities were banned. In 1969, its activities were followed by the Czech Choirs Association, which still works today and brings together non-professional choirs to support and promote Czech choral singing. Modern education of seniors within the university system is also successful, functional and beneficial in terms of music orientation.

Slovakia shared a common history with the Czechs from 1918 to 1992. After its independence, similarly to the Czech Republic, independent Universities of the Third Age were gradually established, which also offer a number of diverse study programs for seniors, but music-oriented courses for seniors have so far rarely been offered respectively in the context of wider art. In addition to UTV, there are also two large national organizations for seniors in Slovakia, but even these do not offer specific activities aimed at the development of musical knowledge (with the exception of occasional visits to opera performances). The choral activity of Slovak seniors is based on voluntariness and is practically autonomous. Singers operate mostly alongside parish clergy and usually participate in liturgical services.

As for the specific work with choirs of seniors from all three countries, despite the above-mentioned historically different starting points, a relationship in the methodology can be seen. Seniors all over the world face similar physiological, psychological and social challenges and therefore the approach to that group is specific and special. This fact should be taken into account by all of the conductors who work with choirs of seniors. Due to similar experiences of the choirmasters participating in the ASEB project, the second more narrowly focused version of the methodology of working with senior choirs will be a part of this project. As no document with a similar focus is known or available, such a methodology could be a welcome

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practical aid for a wider range of senior choir conductors in an international context. It is therefore more than certain that the cooperation on this particular project, as well as all of its outputs, will be more than necessary and useful.

Abbreviations:

A3V	Academy of Third Age (<i>Akademie tretího veku</i>)
AIUTA	International Association of the Universities of the Third Age
ASEB	Active Senior Educations without Barriers
CD	compact disc
CZK	czech crown (<i>česká koruna, mena</i>)
ČR	Czech Republic (<i>Česká republika</i>)
EFOS	European Federation of Older Students
UCI	Unidades de Cuidados Intermédios
IPSS	Private Institution of Social Solidarity (<i>Instituições Privadas de Solidariedade Social</i>)
IO	Intellectual Output
KU	Catholic University (<i>Katolícka univerzita</i>)
LŠU	Folk Art School (<i>Ludová škola umenia</i>)
QOL	quality of life
RUTIS	Association Network of Universities of the Third Age (<i>Associação Rede de Universidades da Terceira Idade</i>)
U3V	University of the Third Age (<i>Universita tretího veku</i>)
UITI	International University of the Third Age (<i>Universidade Internacional para a Terceira Idade</i>)
UTV	University of the Third Age (<i>Univerzita tretieho veku</i>)
ÚMOB	Ostrava City district Office (<i>Úrad městského obvodu</i>)
VŠMU	College of Performing Arts (<i>Vysoká škola múzických umení</i>)
WHO	World Health Organization
ZUŠ	The Elementary Art School (<i>Základná umelecká škola</i>)

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