

# Active Ageing and Empowerment of Migrant Elders

Brussel

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# The Project

- Increasing the autonomy and participation of elderly migrants in host society

# Why this project

- We developed a project for our elderly migrants to learn them to speak the host language
- To start the project, we were inspired by our elderly migrants (and also their families) who felt the need to participate in the cultural and social life of Mechelen, but couldn't even speak with their own grandchildren.

# Why this project

As integration of elderly migrants into the host society is commonly hindered by the level, or complete absence of knowledge of the local language, the project strives to educate the target audience in the oral basics of the local language, by means of language classes tailored to the individual needs and pace of the audience.

# Why this Project

- In general terms, we want to bring oral knowledge of local language to a level that allows basic interaction in day-to-day living situations, for example:
  - taking the bus
  - buying groceries
  - ordering medication in the local pharmacy
  - interacting with municipal services
  - going to a bank office for basic transaction

# The classes

- For a period of six months, they follow lessons twice a week.
- These weekly classes serve as an incubator for social contacts between the participants, who lead a fairly isolated existence.

# This project language training does focus on:

- Breaking the chains of social and cultural isolation.
- Targets the increasingly large population of elderly migrants.
- Achieving the maximum individual progress, taking into account the possibilities of every individual. Every step taken is considered a success on it's own.
- And it does not exclude people who are illiterate in their native language.

# Why language classes

- We know that our project is very controversial.
- Is it necessary that elderly people learn another language ?
- We asked the participants and they said yes.



# Active Aeging

- Being active is not only a physical thing but also a thing of the mind.
- Two times a week learning a language is a reason to get up in the morning.
- Many of our elderly migrants stayed at home the whole day, now they have to leave there houses.
- They want to come because the social contact is very important for them.

# Active Aeging

- One of the participants told me that she has a better contact with her grandson. When her grandson speaks with her about his school and his examinations she understand him. Now she also goes to school (she never went to school) and learn things. And the best of all, she can talk a little bit Dutch with her grandson (before, there were no able to talk to eachother). Only these small things gives her wings, she said.

# Why language classes

- For them it is more than learning dutch.
- It's about their:
  - independancy
  - proudness
  - selfconfidence
  - visiting their family on their own
  - communication with their grandchildren
  - understanding the value of money

# Empowerment

- Learning the host language allowed them to gain confidence in their abilities because they are no longer dependent on relatives or others.
- They are less afraid to go outside and take a walk.
- They are less afraid to talk with neighbours.

# Empowerment

- They now dare to show up for appointments without someone to translate.
- We are now able to make an appointment directly with them over the phone.
- And as one family testifies, their mother is now able to take the bus by herself to go visit them.

# Empowerment

- They are less afraid to go to hospital because they know, they can express themselves a little bit.
- When they have a problem they call their social assistant to make an appointment (before it was one of the family who called us)
- In general, they say that they experience more freedom.

# Empowerment

- In 2010 we started with 13 participants
- In 2011 we started with 35 participants.
  - A “sequel” group, made up of people that have already completed the beginners course
  - And a new beginners group
  - (the participants come from Morocco, Turkey, Congo, Russia, Armenia)
- Not one of the participants was forced to take part of the classes. They are free to come, but we see that they come every time.

# Empowerment

- The sequel group now asked to start with a ‘theme’ group.
- During wintertime when there is no class a few of them want to come together to talk (in Dutch) about things they are interested in: for example:
  - mobility, food, the cultural background of the different participants.
- We want also that they come in contact with the locals, but further research is needed.