

Associations of active ageing; a potential tool for local development

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Abstract

It presents a ongoing research on the potential role that "senior universities" can play as tools for the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage in some urban or rural areas, in Portugal. Senior citizen universities as active entities that promote the healthy active ageing of the population are associations with a very significant potential for the recovery of some cultural practices in the territories where the elderly population is dominant.

The cultural activities linked to the preservation of the heritage, namely traditional music groups and respective instruments and in general their contribution to healthy ageing communities can have an interesting role to support touristic activities. The creation of groups of students who are organized to participate in local and regional events promote the process of active aging and create a motivation that spreads in the surrounding communities.

Key words: Active ageing, Citizen participation, Senior University, Tangible and intangible heritage,

1. Introduction

This paper is the first approach of a research about the role that senior universities (SU) can play as instruments for promoting local development especially in the areas of valuation of heritage and tourism.

Such associations have been studied in their social role, directed to an age range increasing, but are not considered as active partners in local development.

In many regions the numbers of the people with more than 65 years old are really impressive, so they must be considered as part of the solution to increase local development.

Some of the elderly populations that currently live in rural areas have developed their productive activities in urban areas, having no direct relation with agriculture and, therefore, need to maintain different social activities and relationships.

They use their time in a different way from the population that always lived in rural areas and that even being old maintain subsistence agriculture activities, keep out of need or pleasure.

The more urbanised population has led to the creation of many nuclei of senior universities with multiple values.

The universities or academies of the elderly, are entities that promote the active and healthy ageing of the population, but till now they don't assume their role in the territorial valorisation of the community;

These are associations with a very significant potential for the recovery of some cultural practices in territories, especially where the elderly population is dominant.

Cultural activities linked to the preservation of heritage, namely traditional musical groups and respective instruments are one of the programs of the SU.

The creation of groups of students who organise to participate in local and regional events promote the process of active ageing and create a motivation that involves the communities.

The methodology adopted for this research focuses on the analysis of the impact at local development level, in a set of municipalities where there are senior universities, in areas of low density and permanent loss of population since the mid-50s of the last century.

The SU are characterised by the type of offer they present and the participation they have in community life.

2. Origin and Role of Senior Universities

The Senior Universities or Universities for the third age (U3A) appeared in France, firstly in the Faculty of Social Sciences of Toulouse in 1973 as a movement to promote university-like teaching linked and organised by some Universities.

The origin of this organisation model called "Modèle Vellas" has three objectives:

1. The training of seniors through the university;
2. Research in areas related to seniors, namely health, psychology, legal and the social field;
3. Training of employees and stakeholders working in the field of seniors training

The organisation of the activities was very similar to the traditional university pedagogy with master classes. ((AUTANB), Juin 2013)

Nowadays with the increasing numbers of SU and not all near universities, this view has been changing, and a more friendly approach is developed.

In England, in the University of Cambridge, in 1981, Peter Laslett developed the concept of "self-help" The self-organised learning groups on subjects that interested them and with volunteer teachers who are part of the group; They are not called students but members, this model is called Cambridge Model.

Many of the US are united in an international organisation "Association International de Universités de Troisième Age" (AIUTA) which shows the great importance and dissemination that this type of associations has had in the last decades around the world.

On the generic role that the US has in the territory, these may resemble the local intervention NGOs, as an emanation and representation of the community. (Cernea,1988).

Independently of the functioning model, all aim at the well-being of the elderly and their integration into society, promoting active ageing.

From the activities or courses given by the U.S., the areas related to culture, namely local culture, either local history itself or cultural manifestations such as traditional music, are regularly present.

The increase in the longevity of the population associated with the improvement of their physical condition allowed the development of recreational activities by this group, with age +50 years and functional retired or part-time workers.

3. Ageing of the population in Europe

The evolution of median age of the population in Europe is, according to with Eurostat increasing in the last decades, because of the decrease of birth rate and at the same time the increase of life expectancy(Fig.1).

In 2016 it was in Europe of 42.6 years, with some countries like Germany with 45.7 years and Portugal 44.4 years (Beira Baixa 50.3., Alto Alentejo 48.4 and Lezíria 45.6) (Eurostat,2017).

If it is analysed the importance of ageing people, Europe has a substantial population weight of +65 years (19.3%) and has been increasing, distributed very unequally between the countries (Pordata).

In Portugal, the situation is similar, 20.9% of the population are +65 years old but distributed very unequally in the territory. As it can be seen in fig. 2, only a small coastal strip has a younger population.

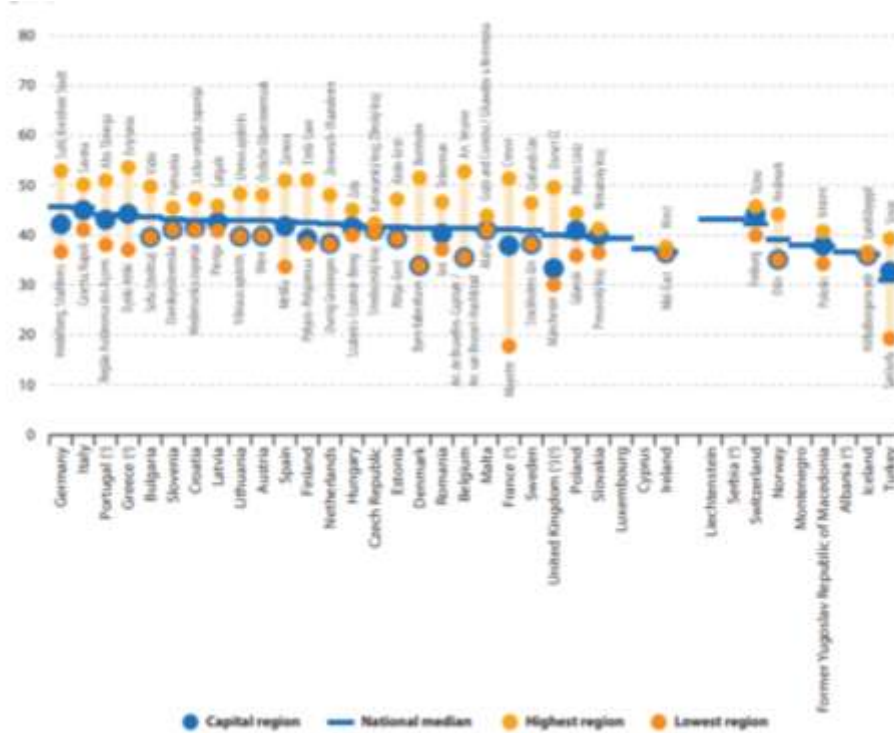


Figure 1: Median Age of Population, By NUTS 3 in Europe, 1 January 2016

Source: Eurostat

A significant part of this population can remain active, and in good physical and psychic conditions, this is the group that the active ageing programs are designed for, like the SUs.

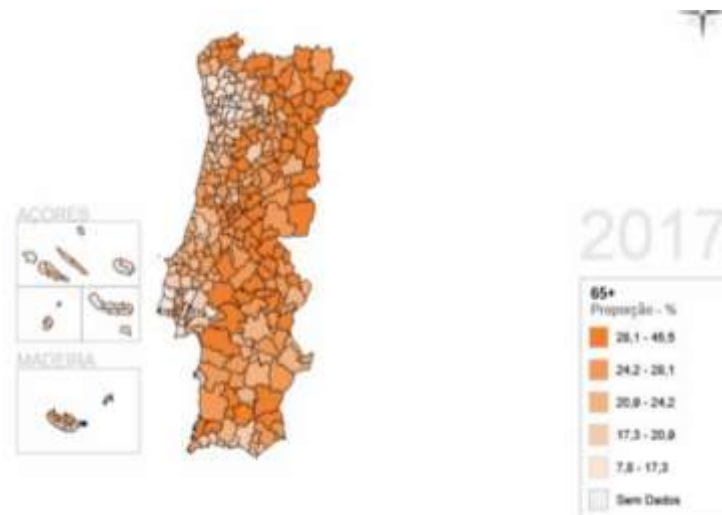


Figure 2: Percentage of the population with more than 65 years old

Source: Pordata

With this demographic characteristics, the population with more than 65 years must be looked at with a different approach. This population should be valued, within the area of this research project, for its numerical importance but above all for its capacity to evaluate local and regional heritage. And the areas where it is almost half of the entire population, and

there are no large urban agglomerations, can be considered an endogenous resource of great importance.

4. Senior Universities in Portugal

The movement of Senior Universities in Portugal began, in the 80s of the last century supported mainly by the social sector and local authorities concerned with the quality of life of the elderly population.

Based on the demographic data presented above, in Portugal, the movement of Senior Universities has a great potential for development.

According to with the legislation the Academies and Senior Universities (SU) are "as socio-educational responses that aim to create and streamline activities regularly in the social, cultural, knowledge, and social areas, from the age of 50, pursued by public or private entities, with or non-profit " in RCM 76/2016.

They are very well distributed in the territory, in 2015, they were in 171 municipalities, 60% of the 278 municipalities in the continent.

They are organised in 300 associations with + 45000 students and 5500 volunteer teachers. With groups of theatre and music; with music in 67% of the SU and theatre in 47% of them. (RUTIS, 2015).

The SU is organised according to both models, the French and the English models if they are more connected with universities or self-organised groups.

In the territory chosen as the first approach of this research where don't exist universities is the English model that is in use.

5. Municipalities and Senior universities

To study the potential of SU in the local development and the positive impact, was chose a group of six municipalities with rural characteristics (low density and without cities) on the banks of the Tagus River and with SU.

These municipalities belong to three different NUTS 3 and are in:

Beira Baixa – Idanha-a-Nova e Vila Velha de Rodão,
Alto Alentejo – Gavião e Nisa,
Lezíria do Tejo – Chamusca e Golegã

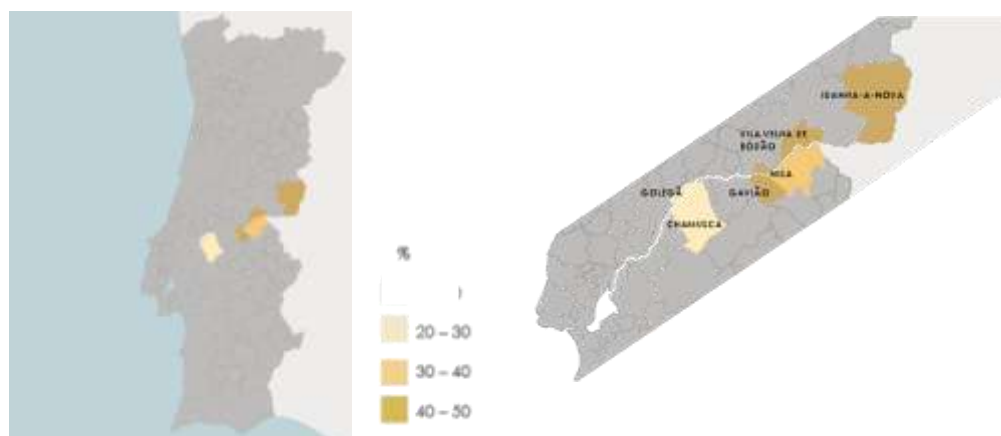


Figure 3: Municipality case studies and % of the population with +65years

Source: INE 2011

All of them have a population of over 65 years old, above the national average, Golegã as 25% till Vila Velha de Rodão with 44% (fig. 3) and a negative variation of the population between 2001-2011 (fig 4).

The more the municipalities are far from Lisbon, the more is the negative variation of the population. Golegã has only -4% of the variation of the population and Idanha-a-Nova in the border with Spain has -27%.

Municipality	Var. Pop. 2001-2017
Chamusca	-17%
Gavião	-28%
Golega	-4%
Idanha-a-Nova	-27%
Nisa	-26%
Vila Velha de Rodão	-21%

Figure 4: Variation of the total population in the municipality (2001-2011)

All the municipalities have at least one SU, some with the designation of Academia others with University in the name.

The first SU appeared in 2003 in Golegã, the municipality nearer Lisbon, and the last in Nisa in 2017. The number of students is very disparate (fig.5) and not directly related to the amount of total population of the municipality.

SU Designation	Municipality	nº students/ members	year of foundation
Universidade Sénior Da Carreira - Chamusca	Chamusca	68	2014
Universidade Sénior da União das Freguesias da Chamusca e Pinheiro Grande	Chamusca	100	2016
Universidade Senior do Gavião	Gavião	68	2008
Academia Sénior da Golegã	Golegã	102	2003
Universidade Senior de Idanha a Nova	Idanha-a-Nova	34	2015
Universidade Senior de Nisa	Nisa	294	2017
Academia Sénior de Vila Velha de Ródão	Vila Velha de Rodão	123	2015

Figure 5: SU characteristics

All the SU offer training in cultural areas linked to local heritage like musical instruments, coral, lace and embroidery, gastronomy, local history or theatre in addition to other topics more related to current needs such as information technology or foreign languages. The tourism activity is also considered and is important to keep some areas and functions with clients in dead days.

As for the form of organisation of the SUs (fig.6), they correspond more to the model of self-organisation, similar to the English model, but with the logistical support of the municipal or parish councils. Teachers either belong to the group itself or are made available by local power, such as a teacher to lead the choral groups.



Figure 6: Examples of SU logos
Source: sites of the SUs

The research is now trying to relate the offer with the characteristics of the population and make a more detailed analysis of the subjects.

When is compared to the offers of training music (coral or instruments) and theatre are common to all. The subject bullfighting and gastronomy are specific to a single SU.



Figure 7: Participation of the SU of Idanha-a-Nova in a public festivity of a village of the municipality

Many of the groups (musical, coral or theatre) organized around US activities actively participate in various cultural events in their communities and municipalities promoting shows that are seen by the entire population (fig.7).

6. Conclusions

The associations which promote the active and healthy ageing of the population have been multiplying, around the world and in Portugal, even in municipalities with substantial population losses, in this century.

From the analysis made, it can be concluded that the Senior Universities are valuing the local culture.

All make shows or participate in traditional public festivities that disseminate the cultural characteristics of each municipality.

The research will continue with a more detailed analysis of these associations in low-density areas, but it would be interesting to study the associations of some towns and cities to evaluate their potential to the local development.

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