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The SiforAGE Project – Social Innovation for Active and Healthy Ageing

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Abstract

This article describes the SiforAGE Project - an innovative approach to an aged Europe. The SiforAGE consortium is integrated by a wide range of stakeholders working together in order to promote an active and healthy ageing. ISCTE-IUL is one of the partners involved in this project and has been developing an important role in different work packages: i) Technology Experience cafés aiming to involve older people in the development of technological devices addressed to them (which had a general positive impact regarding the attitudes and intentions of older participants to use technologies); ii) conceptualization and development of an intervention program (imAGES) to fight ageism among children (the pilot program developed in Lisbon revealed the efficacy of this program); iii) analysis of the anti-age discrimination laws (AADL's) in five European countries (these laws are present in the European countries analyzed but it was identified a gap between legislation and its compliance); iv) organization of a call for prize on social innovation research on the ageing field (which was widely disseminated across several European countries). Through these several activities, the SiforAGE project constitutes a step forward towards the development of a more inclusive society, a society for all "ages".

Keywords: European Ageing; Ageism; Intervention Program; Technology addressed to older people; anti-age discrimination laws.

Introduction

The age structure of population in Europe is becoming older, mainly due to increasing life expectancy. In 2012, older people (aged 65 or over) constituted 17.9 % of the European population. The mean age of the European Union (EU)-28's population was 41.9 years on 2013 and this value increased, on average, by 0.3 years per year during the last 12 years (Eurostat, 2014). As ageing is an individual and a societal process, this demographic transformation will have an impact on several areas of society like health, social structure and markets.

One of the main problems that need to be addressed is ageism which can be defined as generalized negative attitudes and practices in relation to individuals based solely on their age (Nelson, 2002). Based on the data presented in the European Social Survey (ESS, 2008), Stuckelberger, Abrams and Chastonay (2012) showed that the pervasiveness of ageism as a form of prejudice is widely experienced across Europe: on average, 44% of ESS respondents perceived ageism as a very serious problem and most of them reported having experienced more unfair treatment because of their age (35%) than either because of their gender (25%) or ethnicity (17%). Besides, respondents stated that ageism was more often experienced as being ignored or patronized (39%) than directly insulted or abused (29%).

Ageism has 5 main characteristics which distinct it from other types of prejudice such as racism or sexism (Marques & Lima, 2010):

(1) Age constitutes a social category distinct from others like racism or sexism because is always changing. In fact, during the life course, individuals belong to different age groups which have different roles and social status. The prevalence of age stereotypes in society influences individual's perceptions regarding the group of older persons. By this way,

individuals tend to uncritically accept these ageist perspectives making what Golup, Filipowicz and Langer (2002) designate by “premature cognitive commitments”: unconditional acceptance of beliefs without reflecting about alternative perspectives regarding the information received.

(2) Society has a perception of superiority of young and middle-aged people in comparison with older people. This perception is also shared by the group of older people, revealing high exo-group favouritism regarding the younger groups (preference for individuals of other age groups). A different pattern is associated with other social categories which reveal endo- group favouritism (preference for individuals of our group) (Levy & Banaji, 2002).

(3) There is evidence that people have experienced more discriminatory treatment because of their age than either because of their gender or ethnicity (Stuckelberger, Abrams & Chastonay, 2012), highlighting that age is a main source of discrimination.

(4) Nowadays, racism and sexism are socially unaccepted and even punished. However, ageism is perceived as socially acceptable giving rise to depreciative expressions about older people and to humoristic references related with age characteristics.

(5) Finally, ageism is a topic much less studied in comparison with racism and sexism. This fact can be associated with the existence of this type of prejudice among the scientists themselves, who prefer to explore other topics unrelated with age.

The fight against ageism and the development of a more inclusive society implies a societal change of attitudes for a new vision of ageing, which will be one of the main challenges of Europe for the next years. Thus, society should promote enabling conditions in order to increase the autonomy, independence and social participation of older people, for them to be able to have an active role in their own process of ageing. These assumptions are in line with the concept of “active ageing” proposed by the World Health Organization

(WHO) (2002): *“The process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Active ageing applies to both individuals and population groups. It allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental wellbeing throughout the life course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance.”* The SiforAGE project proposes an extension of this concept, including the term “healthy ageing”. In this regard, “Active and Healthy Ageing (AHA)” embraces the underlying idea that an increased life expectancy should go together with better and healthier living conditions of older people during more years.

The SiforAGE Project

The SiforAGE project has the goal of strengthen the cooperation mechanisms and tools among the stakeholders working along the value of active and healthy ageing in order to promote a positive vision of ageing (www.siforage.eu). The goal is to bring together scientists, end-users, civil society, public administrations and companies in order to improve the competitiveness and growth of the EU regarding the promotion of research and innovative products for longer and healthier lives.

The SiforAGE consortium is composed by 20 different partners at EU and International level with complementary backgrounds and expertise in the ageing field: universities, civil society organizations, final users groups, think tanks, public administrations, technology research centers and companies. These partners work together under the concept of AHA in order to promote a new and positive vision of ageing and a more inclusive society.

According to the “Seventh Framework Programme”, the specific objectives addressed in this project are: (1) To develop the supporting tools and mechanisms for the Social Innovation Incubator on AHA; (2) To engage and empower society and civil society organizations in research on AHA; (3) To introduce evidence-based policymaking, through training activities with policymakers, to address future shaping research programmes and funding schemes; (4) To raise awareness among the scientific community on the importance of social responsibility and ethics in ageing research, and offer practical guidance on how to address them; (5) To analyze and improve the existing mechanisms for accessing the market of innovative products and solutions for older people; (6) To actively involve the wide range of stakeholders of the value chain and spread knowledge along the project duration.

Based on these objectives, 10 work packages were defined as important guidelines regarding the activities to be developed, respective deadlines and the expected role of each partner. Below, in table 1, we present a brief description of these work packages, respective main goals and number of tasks.

Table 1. *Brief description about the Work Packages of the SiforAGE Project*

Work Packages	Main Objectives	Number of Tasks
WP1 – Social innovation incubator on active and healthy ageing	To promote a social innovation incubator which will give a framework to the different type of stakeholders working in the field of active and healthy ageing (promoting social innovation and responsibility in research and increasing the coordination of stakeholders for a more active participation of society in research).	6
WP2 – Active participation of end-users in research activities	To promote opportunities addressed to older people to test, evaluate and give their opinion regarding assistive technologies, solutions and products offered in the market for them.	4
WP3 – What do we want from science and how we engage? (Society view)	To empower the society as a whole and the older citizens in particular, to actively participate in the definition of research needs and to improve the mechanisms to do so.	4
WP4 – Evidence based public policymaking	To improve the inclusion of innovation aspects in public policy making procedures on active and healthy ageing, and to identify the basis for evidence-based policymaking.	5
WP5 – Mutual learning activities with policymakers	To improve the participation of policymakers in the research process: ensure a higher impact of research in society and a better coordination with research policies.	3
WP6 – What we research and how we communicate	To analyze the approach used by scientists and research organizations to prioritise the topics and areas in which they carry out research.	4

scientific results (Research view)		
WP7 – Prize on Social Innovation Research	To launch a competitive prize of good experiences on active participation of society in research projects and with impact in aged society and their families and caregivers.	4
WP8 – Innovative services and business models for better lives	To analyze and improve the existing mechanisms for introduction to the market of innovative products and service solutions for older people.	4
WP9 – Actively involving and spreading knowledge towards stakeholders	To promote a wide dissemination of the SiforAGE project: the issues it addresses, its relevance and results. To promote active participation, dialogue and cooperation among different stakeholders: policymakers, researchers, civil society organizations.	6
WP10 – Project management	To ensure an appropriate management network and maintain communication with the Commission project officers in a regular basis. To monitor the project progress, ensuring the accomplishment of the goals proposed.	5

Within this project, ISCTE has been developing activities in several workpackages which aim to promote the quality of life of older people and a more inclusive society. More specifically, ISCTE has been mainly contributing to four work packages: WP 2 (the active participation of older people in the development of technology addressed to this age group); WP 3 (development and implementation of an intervention program to fight ageism among children); WP 4 (analyses of the anti-age discrimination legislation across different European countries and its compliance); WP 7 (organization and dissemination of a call for prize on social innovation research).

Active Participation of End-Users in Research Activities (WP2)

The WP 2 – “Active Participation of End-users in Research Activities” aims to promote opportunities addressed to older people to test, evaluate and give their opinion regarding assistive technologies, solutions and products offered in the market for them. In order to achieve this main goal, two activities will be organized: technology experience cafés and on-road technology experiences.

The technology experience cafés (TEC) aim to create a friendly and pleasant environment where older people have the opportunity to directly interact with researchers and developers of assistive technologies giving their feedback as direct users. Besides, indirect users (caregivers, health insurance, and policy makers) are also addressed by these activities as they are representatives from another entity that may influence on the acquisition and/or use of the data collected.

In line with the innovative approach (inclusion of older people as active participants) of the SIFORAGE project, these cafés represent a step-forward regarding the identification of the specific technological needs and opportunities of the target of older people in order to improve their autonomy, independence and quality of life.

The on-road technology experiences will allow older citizens to actively participate in the definition and characteristics of a concrete technology development. This technology will be presented in different EU countries in order to get the opinion and experience of the end-users about its usability, adaptability, user-friendliness, etc.

So far, three TEC were developed in France, Italy and Denmark (the results achieved in this last country are still being analyzed). A fourth TEC will be also organized in Germany. In the three TEC already developed, local networks played a fundamental role by mobilizing the end-users group for the TEC through several channels: dissemination of leaflets, press release, and article/flyer published through websites and social media.

The selection of the technologies used in the TEC was made based on the following criteria: availability, exploitability, usability, adaptability, transverse and duplication. In order to evaluate the results obtained in the TEC in both countries, a pre-post evaluation design was chosen: all participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire before and after attending the TEC. The goal was to evaluate the attitudes and motivations regarding the use of technology. These questionnaires were theoretically based on the Technology Acceptance

Model (TAM) introduced by Davis (1986) and later extended by Venkatesh and Davis (2000) according to which an individual's behavioral intention to use a system is determined by two beliefs: perceived usefulness, defined as the extent to which a person believes that using the system will enhance his or her performance; and perceived ease to use, defined as the extent to which a person believes that using the system will be free of effort.

Besides, a measure of the stereotypical perceptions (stereotype threat, stigma consciousness, stereotype content in general and specifically related with the use of technology by older people) and use of technology by older people was also included since these are identified as one of the main barriers to technology use by this age group. In fact, older people are stereotypically seen as not having the skills and competence required to use technology in a proper way. These stereotypical perceptions can have a negative influence regarding the acceptance and utilization of technology by older people (Broady, Chan & Caputi, 2010).

Regarding the results obtained in the two cases already analyzed (France and Italy), participants showed in the pre-evaluation a positive attitude towards technologies, affirming that they use technological devices in their daily live, namely different types of home appliances such as remote control, TV, microwave and the dishwasher. Besides, participants reported a frequent use of the desktop computer, the internet and the mobile phone. However, when considering the impact of the participation on TEC, different results were obtained in these two countries. In the French case, the analyses of the results revealed a significant positive effect of participation in TEC in the intention to use technologies, perceived usefulness and self-efficacy. In a general way, participants perceive the use of technologies as enjoyable and refer low levels of anxiety regarding its use. Nevertheless, this change of perceptions was not found in the results obtained in the TEC developed in Italy. In fact, in

this country participants' intentions to use technological devices in the future were already quite high before this experience.

Regarding the stereotypes of old age and technologies, participants in both cases experienced medium levels of stereotype threat regarding the use of technologies and they had low levels of perceived stigmatization due to their age. In the Italian case, there were no significant changes in these perceptions after the TEC and the French results only reflect a marginal significant impact on the decrease of the consciousness of being stigmatized.

Participation in the TEC was perceived as a very useful and positive experience both in the French and Italian cases.

The results obtained in the TEC developed in these two countries and in the Denmark and Germany cases, will allow the identification and analysis of the main barriers that older people have to the use of technology. Thus, TEC could constitute an important input to the (re)definition of the goals and strategies of the market of new technologies linked to ageing research and technology development.

ISCITE-IUL has been playing an important role in this work package as a scientific advisor, being responsible for the overall design of the survey, running the analyses and interpretation of the data and also contributing to writing the reports concerning the TEC's results.

What Do We Want from Science and How do we Engage (WP 3)

One of the main goals of the WP 3 – “What do we want from science and how do we engage” is the development of intervention programmes with children and young people in order to analyze potential cross-cultural similarities in the development of ageist attitudes of children and intergenerational experiences.

As mentioned above, the term “ageism” refers to generalized negative attitudes and practices in relation to individuals based only on their age (Nelson, 2002). There are several evidences showing that older people are special targets for this type of negative evaluations and that this type of prejudice is widespread across different fields in society and across different age groups, namely in children (Marques, 2011). Ageism has negative consequences for older people, affecting their mental (e.g. Levy, 1996) and physical capabilities (Whitbourne & Sneed, 2002) and even their will to live (Levy, Ashman & Dror, 2000).

In order to assess the pervasiveness of ageism among a sample of Portuguese children and adolescents, a needs assessment study was developed by ISCTE-IUL. The results obtained in this study showed that children as young as 6 years old share an ambivalent stereotypical representation of older people, perceiving this age group as more warm than competent (Vauclair et al., in prep.).

This “*doddering but dear stereotype*” can be interpreted in light of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM, Fiske et al, 2002), which holds that there are two underlying dimensions that organize stereotypical beliefs towards any social group in society: (1) competence, i.e., the degree to which a group is characterized as intelligent and capable, and (2) warmth, i.e., the degree to which a group is regarded as friendly and likeable.

Based on the results obtained in the needs assessment study and on the literature review, ISCTE-IUL developed an intervention program (Marques et al., in press) with the main goal of deconstructing the negative images and stereotypes usually associated with older people, by creating a more varied and positive representation of this age group among children and adolescents.

The sample of this study was composed by 55 students (mean age = 12.04 years old; standard deviation of 0.51), attending the 7th grade of a public school in Lisbon, who were randomly distributed by the intervention and control groups. Based on a quasi-experimental

design, both the intervention and the control group followed a similar procedure. However, while the intervention group focused on activities regarding ageing, the control group focused on a topic unrelated to ageing (environment). The goal was to assess whether any change in the stereotyping of older people was indeed due to the content of the anti-ageism intervention program, or due possible external/uncontrolled factors not directly related with the content of this program.

The imAGES – *Intervention program to prevent ageism in children/adolescents* – was constituted by a set of activities based on direct contact experiences (intergenerational activities) along with a socio-cognitive training component based on theoretical frameworks of prejudice reduction in Social Psychology. More specifically, two learning sessions were developed aiming to promote the discussion of positive and real examples of ageing, including activities based on the following theoretical variables: exposure to counter-stereotypical information (e.g. Garcia-Marques & Mackie, 1999); individualization; and perspective taking (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). The second part of this intervention program was based on a contact session aiming to promote the creation of affective ties with the out-group through the development of intergenerational activities between youngsters and older people. This intergenerational activity was developed based on Allport's (1954) optimal conditions: equal status between the groups in the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and support of authorities.

The activities developed by the control group followed the same structure but were related with environmental projects.

In order to assess the efficacy of this intervention program, a questionnaire was applied to both groups in three different stages of the intervention: before the intervention, after the two learning sessions and after the contact session.

The results obtained showed a significant change in the representation of ageing in the intervention group, thus showing a more positive perception of older people as both competent and warm. These results were obtained both after the two learning sessions and after the contact session. On the other hand, representations of ageing in the control group did not show a significant change (Figure 1).

The reliability and consistency of the results obtained in this pilot study developed in Lisbon revealed its effectiveness in reducing youngster's ageist views. Based on these positive results, ISCTE-IUL provided support for the adaptation and implementation of this program in other three European countries (Spain, Lithuania and Austria) and also in Brazil.

In this regard, ISCTE-IUL organized a workshop with the main goal of training the partners to autonomously develop the Intervention Program against ageism in schools or in other institutions for children and youngsters in their respective countries.

Besides, a brochure was developed by ISCTE-IUL in order to present and disseminate the goals and contents of the imAGES program in the different contexts where this program can be applied.

Until now, the imAGES program was already developed in the 3 European countries mentioned above and we expect to have access to all the respective results soon in order to analyze its efficacy in a broader and international context.

Evidence Based Public Policy Making (WP 4)

The main goal of the WP 4 ("Evidence-based public policy making") was to improve the inclusion of innovation aspects in public policy making procedures on active and healthy ageing, and the identification of the basis for evidence-based policymaking. In this regard, ISCTE-IUL was mainly involved in the evaluation of the implementation of the anti-age

discrimination laws (AADL's) in the actual practices in the European ageing domain. This analysis was developed based on two strategies: (1) documental analysis and (2) narrative interviews with key stakeholders. First of all, an analysis of the main documents and legislation regarding age-discrimination in a sample of European countries (Austria, France, Italy, Poland and Portugal) was performed. This analysis was heavily based on the respective country reports elaborated by the European Network of Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination Field. This network of legal experts constitutes an important support to the European Commission by providing independent information and advice on relevant developments in the Member States in the non-discrimination field.

The information obtained by the analysis of these documents, along with the information given by each of the SIFORAGE partners involved in this task, allowed an integrative perspective regarding the evolution of this legislation in each country.

The main findings obtained in the documental analysis revealed that AADL's are already implemented in the legislation of all the 5 countries analyzed. Most of these laws are related to the work field, prohibiting the discrimination based on age regarding the public and private employment. More specifically, these laws intend to promote equality regarding the access to job opportunities, career progression and salary increase to all employees independently of their age. By this way, these laws intend to prevent situations in which injustices occurs like, for example, the unfair dismissal based uniquely on employee's age.

Besides work, most of the countries under analyzes have also extended these anti age-discrimination legislation to cover other fields like social protection, social advantages, education, goods & services and housing.

Regarding the compliance of the AADL's there is a gap between legislation and the practical implementation of these laws. This lower level of compliance can possibly be related to the complexity of the legal framework, the low awareness and knowledge of

legislation addressing discrimination issues and the absence of a specialized body on this field. More specifically, the legal experts from the five countries highlight the importance of developing a coordinated work between different institutions of important areas of action in society like ONG's, social scientists, public administrations and trade unions.

In a second phase, interviews were conducted with public administration employees responsible for the implementation of selected programmes in three relevant areas in the ageing field (health, labor and transport) at three levels of analysis (local, regional and national). The goal was to evaluate their knowledge of ADDL's, perceived relevance of such laws and actual compliance of their practices with such laws. A total of 50 interviews were obtained from 5 countries (Austria, France, Italy, Poland and Portugal) through a coordinated work developed between the SiforAGE partners involved in this work package.

The results obtained (see Figure 2 below) revealed that the majority of the interviewed program planners shared perceptions that age discrimination is a widespread phenomenon, affecting older people in several areas of their life such as employment, transportation, health, social media and within the family (mostly in the format of abuse or negligence against older people). Besides, the interviewees highlighted the relevance of the AADL's in order to promote the fight against ageism regarding older people, representing a step forward towards social change.

When asked about the compliance of their programs with AADL's, the majority of the interviewees reported respecting this legislation by adopting different types of measures (e.g. inclusive age limits, actual efforts to fight ageism, positive discrimination by restricting the program to older people, special assistance to older people or ensuring equal access to everyone regardless of their age). However, some interviewees underline that these laws lack clarity reporting some difficulty in understanding how to implement the ADDL's in an integrated and effective way. In this respect, the interviewees and the European Network of

Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination Field share the same vision regarding the need of a coordinated work between different institutions of important areas of action in society in order to promote the implementation of the ADDL's.

In accordance with the results obtained, ISCTE-IUL suggested important guidelines as the major output of the work developed within WP 4: avoid complex legislation that makes it hard for actors in the practice domains to understand and apply; there should be an increased effort made by the governments to disseminate AADL's across society by promoting a coordinated work between different social actors (e.g. ONG's and public offices); it is important to create a body of experts similar to European Network of Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination Field but that accompanies and evaluates the actual implementation of AADL's in the field; and finally, it is fundamental that ageism is addressed in a broader way, in order to promote a wider social change of mentalities.

Prize on Social Innovation Research (WP 7)

The WP 7 – Prize on Social Innovation Research focuses on launching a competitive prize of good practices on active participation of society in research projects with impact in aged society and their families and caregivers in order to promote an inclusive society.

As leader of this work package, ISCTE-IUL developed actions to promote the dissemination of this call for prize, namely the elaboration of a poster and an application form (brochure). The poster appeals to the participation of applicants in three types of institutions: public administration, research institution or civil society organization. Besides, it refers the five priority areas which should be the focus of the submitted projects: Housing (solutions and innovations for agers that increase their autonomy and independence); Information and Communication Technologies (technological and digitalized solutions and innovations that improve agers' participation and inclusion in their community); Social participation

(administrative and management solutions that promote agers' participation and inclusion in their community); Urban planning (adapting cities, towns, and other urban infrastructures to agers' needs and limitations); Health and well-being (research results that contribute significantly to agers' health and well-being).

At a later stage, the submitted projects will be evaluated by three independent experts members of the Advisory Committee of SiforAGE project and, from these, three projects will be selected for the prize. The results of the call for prize will be presented in a public conference in Brussels, in the final consortium meeting of the project.

The Call for Prize represents an important tool in the dissemination of the values of the SiforAGE project, namely: the promotion of an active and healthy ageing, and the European Union competitiveness and growth through research and innovative products for more and better lives.

Conclusion

The SiforAGE project aims to raise awareness on the value of active and healthy ageing. The strategy of this project is based on the assumption that older people should adopt an active role in their ageing process and, consequently, have a direct participation in the development of goods and services addressed to them. Through participatory technology assessment sessions, WP 2 creates the opportunity to older people actively participate in the development of technological devices addressed to them under the slogan "Nothing for us without us".

The activities developed within the several work packages of the project share the common goal of empowering older people to develop or contribute in a significant way to their own solutions, increasing their autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency.

Moreover, society as a whole, should promote enabling conditions to increase the social and economic participation of older people as full right citizens. In this regard, WP 4 holds special relevance by promoting the establishment of channels to improve the inclusion of innovative aspects in public policymaking in the ageing field and also its compliance through a coordinated work between different social institutions in society (e.g. ONG's, social scientists).

The change of perspectives and attitudes about ageing in society should involve intergenerational contact between older people and the youngsters. In fact, the promising results obtained in the pilot intervention program "imAGES" (WP 3) developed in Lisbon encourage its application in other national contexts. Intergenerational programs constitute an opportunity to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences between members of different age groups, demystifying stereotypes and incrementing the perceived diversity of the group of older people.

The development of a more inclusive society should involve all the citizens through initiatives like the call for prize on social innovation developed in the WP 7. This call will allow the analysis and identification of good practices on social innovation in ageing research. The goal is to support the dissemination and transfer of the best practices to other communities.

The positive results obtained in the several activities developed within the SIFORAGE project revealed its relevance and contribution to the development of a more inclusive society, a society for "all ages".

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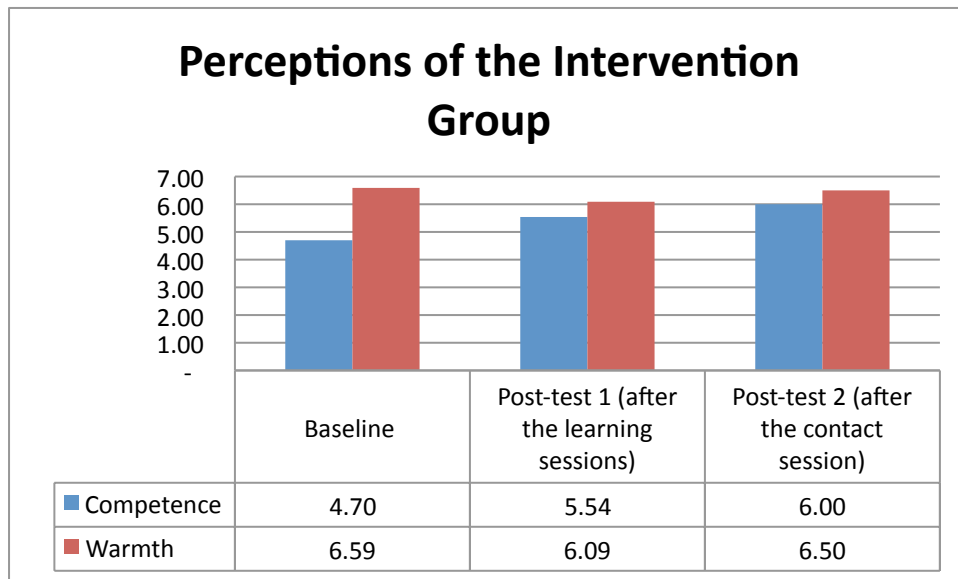
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*Figure 1*¹. Perceptions of the Dimensions of Competence and Warmth Regarding Older People for the Intervention Group. The values presented represent averages of response on a scale ranging from 0 to 7.

¹ The graphic presented in Figure 1 was retrieved from the manual “imAGES – Intervention program to prevent ageism in children and adolescents”.

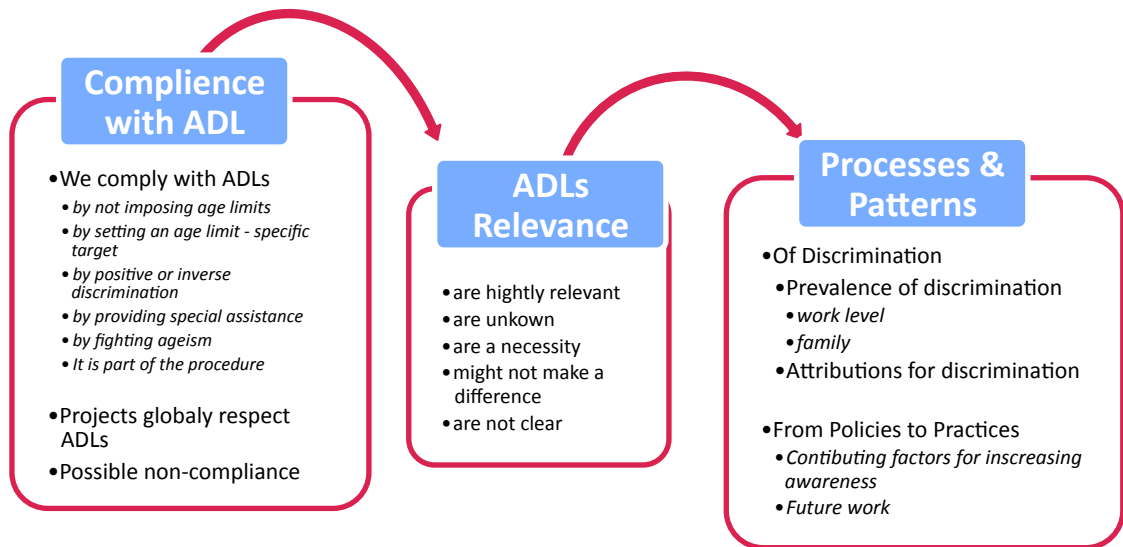


Figure 2. Graphic Summary of Interview Themes