



The senior universities students in Portugal and Brazil

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Abstract:

Given the growth in the number of senior universities in Portugal and Brazil, we think it is important to know the audience which frequents these institutions, their motivations, the health impact and whether there are significant differences between the two countries. The authors have created a survey that was applied in person in Portugal and the State of Goiás in Brazil. With this study, it was possible to trace the profile of the students who attend the Senior Universities (US or U3A) in Portugal and universities open to Seniors (UNATI) in Brazil. We also added a study on volunteer teachers in the Portuguese US. We now know that are essentially women, aged 60-75 years and of all social and educational levels. As for the motives are essentially the conviviality, get active and learn. No significant differences were found between the two countries, in groups and in the motivations, with exception to the marital status and the number of courses attended.

Keywords: *Senior University, non-formal education, lifelong learning, senior students, depression, U3A*

1. Introduction

With the current and progressive ageing of the population in the West, in Portugal over the past three decades and more recently in Brazil, the theme of Senior University (US) is of particular relevance due to the current ageing of the population, the emergence of active aging and the importance of lifelong learning, as well as the need to increase literacy in the elderly. The education for the elderly has been the subject of several investigations and are currently accepted two complementary theories: one that conceives education as a strategy of "social therapy", promoting and encouraging the social integration (and in this case the education is an instrument for the promotion and social integration), the second perspective understands that a better ageing

for those that keep the mind active through educational activities. In this vision, education is simultaneously a kind of mental gymnastics, which prevents the deterioration of cognitive abilities and an instrument for the acquisition of new knowledge.

Thus, the UA or U3A, are the "educational answers that seek to create and streamline regularly activities in the social, cultural areas of knowledge and conviviality, from 50 years of age, continued by public or private entities, whether for profit or not, " according to the Council of Ministers ' resolution 76/2016.

Between adult education and the education for the elderly, there are significant differences, as the objectives and motivation (more professional and qualifying for adults, more playful and pleasant for the elderly), the duration of the class or classes and the methods to be used. In this situation emerge the Senior Universities (US), which is a larger example of citizenship, education, social inclusion, volunteering, knowledge, learning and community development. It existed in July 2019 330 Senior Universities recorded in Portugal in RUTIS (Network Association of Universities of the Third Age), according to the website of CASES and close to 45,000 students and 7,000 volunteer teachers.

The Senior Universities emerged in 1972 in France as a specific educational movement for the seniors at the University of Toulouse, with Dr Pierre Vellas (doctor and researcher, 1930-2005). The model quickly grew and reached other countries that adapted to their reality. Currently, there are two great models of organisation of the US: the French model and the English model. The French model associates the US to formal universities, while the British model was developed based on volunteering, non-profit associations or self-organising groups. In addition to these two great models, there are several mixed models and with small variants.

In Portugal, the first US appeared in 1978 and 1985 in Lisbon. The Portuguese model of U3A is characterised by being created by entities legally constituted, public or non-profit; the teachers are volunteers; the US must have at least classes in four different areas during nine months per year and at least have 50 students.

Brazil is an example of a country that has adopted the French model, with some variants, because there are associations that offer activities for the elderly, mediated by volunteers.

The Social Service of Trading National Learning (SESC) was the first institution in the 60 to implement programmes aimed at seniors. In 1977, in the city of Campinas, São Paulo SESC inaugurated the first "School for senior citizens", in partnership with scientists at the University of Toulouse, taking as a reference a universal model of old age.

Torres and Carrião (2017) take up the history of Universities open to Seniors (UNATI) in Brazil, and mark, then, the SESC as empowering factor; in some

ways, these early programs sought a "self-identity without giving up scientific knowledge as an inspiration." (Lima .2001, p. 57).

In this way, social and pedagogical practices with elderly Brazilians have emerged and expanded in the decades of 80 and 90. Here the record that, contrary to Portugal, the UNATIs of Brazil are outreach programs of the universities. However, only in the year 1982 was born the first program for elderly linked to a higher education institution (HEI). The Center for the study of the Third Age (NETI) appeared at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, in the southern region of the country. In the same decade, in 1984, at the Federal University of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, was the core of Integrated studies and Support for seniors (NIAT).

In the northeastern region of Brazil, in 1988, emerged the University without Borders. Finally, in 1992, at the Catholic University of Goiás (UCG), today the Pontifical, the UNATI project started, always with the purpose of facilitating the continued acquisition of new knowledge, in a perspective of education for sensitivity and responsibility "as well as the practice of freedom, universal in your character, and essential to the complete democratization of learning, characterized by your flexibility and diversity of content, with activities, methodologies and purposes open to time and space." (Torres, 2017, 0.43). At present UNATI de Goiás has 172 students and 15 subjects.

Return to Portugal in April 2016 in the Protocol between RUTIS and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security one can read the following text illuminating the importance of US:

"The results of the action of the universities and Senior Academies are unquestionable as they provide welfare, both in strengthening the perspectives of social integration and participation in improving the conditions and quality of life of the people who attend them.

It can be seen that the frequency of these structures has an impact on changing lifestyles, providing benefits at various levels: increasing the knowledge acquired, particularly through the increase of the general culture and the lack of improvement continuous learning capacities, as well as the promotion of healthy lifestyles, through the practice of physical activity and balanced eating habits.

The added values are not only in the maintenance of intellectual and physical nature activities and acquisition of knowledge, but also the primary nature of socialisation and maintaining social contacts.

If, on the one hand, the stimulus to learning capacity and participation can contribute to society to distance

themselves from some of the stereotypes and negative images attributed to aging and old age, on the other hand, and from the individual point of view, help prospective projects and future goals, promoting, thus, the increase in life expectancy with quality and dignity ".

Jacob, 2017, said "Senior Universities regularly provide classes, lectures, events and cultural guides, thematic workshops, meetings, outreach and information sessions, surveys, voluntary and solidarity actions, performances, floral games, contests, seminars, intergenerational days and visits to museums, theatres and monuments to all seniors, regardless of their academic, economic or social level." Several scientific studies and academic, demonstrate and confirm that attending a senior University enhances the quality of life of its regulars, improves your general health, reduces feelings of depression and isolation, diminishes the consumption of medicines and increases social integration (see Jacob, 2009; Jesus, 2010; Pocinho, 2015 or 2016 Rebelo).

2. Portuguese Volunteers Teachers

The urgency of a study related to the volunteer teachers in the US was not only due to the dimension of this project but also because of the importance of the free service of more than 7,000 volunteer teachers which is a fundamental pillar for the functioning of more than 330 senior universities in Portugal. It is safe to say that without the work of these volunteers, the Portuguese senior universities would not exist.

We will use Jacob's (2019) studies on these teachers, that combine several statistical data and two research works on the characterisation and typification of the volunteering profile in the senior universities were contemplated. For this study, we consider volunteering as an activity that offers time and skills to perform a certain service or action.

From a summary analysis of these data we can conclude that most of the 7.000 volunteer teachers are women, with a college degree, the number of employed volunteers slightly exceeds the retired ones, and with varying ages with the particularity of 46.9% being under 50 and 53, 1% over 50 years old. The degree of satisfaction, full and great, is 85%, and only 2% said they were not satisfied with being a volunteer teacher, and the two main motivations are "helping others" and "teaching".

3. Materials and Methods

To meet the students do the senior universities and their motivations, the authors have created a survey with close-ended questions that they delivered personally to the students to fill out. In Portugal, the questionnaire was applied to 114 people from all over the country, in February and March 2018 and in Brazil, the 99 students of the state of Goiás, in February and March 2018. In the study on depression, the Geriatric Depression Scale of Yesavage was applied, the short version of 15 questions. This scale is used for the screening of depression, assessing cognitive and behavioural aspects typically affected by the depression of the elderly. This work is part of a more in-depth study about the US in Portugal in which will be online more than 1.000 senior students between February and May 2018 and whose results are similar to these.

3.1. Results of the student's characterisation

In table 1, we present a summary of the characterisation of Portuguese and Brazilian students.

Regarding the Portuguese students, the data collected by the authors does not differ much to the statistics in RUTIS' management program that had 17057 students registered on the 12th of January 2018, as well as age, educational level, gender and professional activity (RUTIS, 2018).

The big differences seen between Portuguese and Brazilian students were the marital status that was much more diverse in Brazilians, and the number of classes attended. The Portuguese students attend much more classes than the Brazilian students, for example, 21,7% of the Portuguese students attend 5 or more classes opposed to 0% of the Brazilians to the same number of classes. Regarding the educational level, the groups are very heterogeneous. The highlight goes to the students with the 5th and 7th grade and between the 10th and 12th grade in Portugal and high school or higher education in Brazil. In the case of personal monthly income, as well as the educational level, the groups are very heterogeneous. In Portugal, the highest percentages go to the income between 700 and 900 euros, almost double the average pension of the seniors in 2017, 364 euros (source: Prodata)

Table 1– characterisation of senior students in Portugal and in Goiás / Brazil

Data	Portugal	Goiás / Brazil
Participants	114	90
Gender	Female – 78.6% Male – 21.4%	Female – 85.6% Male – 14,4%
Age:	50-54 – 4.5% 55-59 – 3.5% 60-64 – 23.7% 65-69 – 20.1% 70-74 – 25.6% 75-79 – 17.6% 80-84 - 3% 85-90 – 2%	50-54 – 3.3% 55-59 – 3.3% 60-65 – 25.6% 65-69 – 23.3% 70-74 – 25.6% 75-79 – 16.7% 80-84 – 1.1% 85-90 – 1.1%
Professional situation	Retired – 90.5% Working – 9.5%	Retired – 87.5% Working – 12.5%
Marital status	Married – 62.9% Widowers – 21.2% Single – 8.8% Divorced – 6.2% United in fact – 0.9%	Married – 28.9% Widowers – 32.2% Single – 16.7% Divorced – 18.9% United in fact– 3.3%
Main places of residence	Coimbra, Aveiro, Viseu and Guarda districts– 54.9% Beja, Évora, Setúbal and Portalegre districts– 17.7% Viana do Castelo, Vila Real, Bragança and Braga districts – 11.5% Santarém, Leiria and Castelo Branco districts – 9.7% Other districss – 6.2%	Goiana – 88.9% Aparecida de Goiânia – 6.7% Senado Canedo – 3.3% Others – 1.1%
Days attending the US	1 day – 11.8% 2 days – 35.5% 3 days – 22.7% 4 days – 23.6% 5 days– 6.4%	1 day– 11.1% 2 days – 36.7% 3 days– 27.8% 4 days– 22.2% 5 days – 2.2%
Classes attended	1 – 5.9% 2 – 23.8% 3 – 23.8% 4 – 17.8% 5 – 15.8% More than 6 – 12.9%	1 – 31.1% 2 – 35.6% 3 – 31.1% 4 – 2.2% 5 – 0% More than 6 – 0%

In Goiás / Brazil the biggest group is the one with a minimum wage (954 reais in 2018 or 237 euros in Globe Economy) followed by 1,200 to 3,000 reais. 1 Euro corresponded to 4,58 reais in August 2019.

With these results, we can state that the US and UNATI reach the entire spectrum of seniors, especially women, that most attend the US more than 3 days and that they attend in average 3 to 4 classes.

4. Results of motivations

Another objective of the study was to know what motivated the students to attend these institutions and what they hoped to achieve by attending them. The results obtained are consistent with the existing literature. According to Frank (2009, p.67), “The main justification for going back to school is the need or desire to learn and improve your knowledge (40%), followed by the desire to keep active (13%).”

In our survey in Portugal the main motivations were, in order: keep active (76%); Learn and knowledge acquisition in general (52.6%) and meet new people/socialisation (51%).

In Goiás / Brazil the main motivations were, in order: keep active (70%); Learn and knowledge acquisition in general (66%) and meet new people/socialisation (65%).

So In Portugal and Brazil, the 3 major factors found was the same, and there are “keep active, learn and acquire new knowledge and meet new people and be busy. The biggest differences between countries are in “Follow the husband or wife” and “make trips and tours”. These items are more important to the Portuguese.

5. Results of health impact

As for the impact of attending the US on their lives, respondents indicated almost no "meaningless" points, with the greatest gains being in having an active life, improving their mental health, increasing their knowledge, better physical health and more self-esteem. On average, the positive impacts are more felt by the Brazilian students. We can see that the impact of attending US / UNATI on the health of the elderly is quite significant, as we can see in the following table.

Table 2 – Benefits in senior students in Portugal and in Goiás / Brazil

Question	Portugal	Goiás/Brazil
Concerning your general health condition, you think that:		
Improved:	61.3%	63.3%
Worsened:	0.9%	2.2%
It was the same:	37.7%	34.4%
Impact on mental health:		
It has improved a lot	51%	68%
Improved	40%	19%
No impact	9%	13%
Your consumption of medications towards anxiety, depression and sleeping issues after attending university:		
Increased:	11.1%	4.5%
Decreased:	22,2%	36.4%
It was the same:	66.7%	59.1%

Applying the Yesavage Geriatric Depression Scale in its short version of 15 questions it was possible to verify that the number of respondents with symptoms of mild depression or recorded depression are much lower than in the general elderly population, either in Portugal or in Brazil.

Table 3 – Depression of senior students in Portugal and Goiás / Brazil

	Portugal	Goiás / Brazil	Brazil*	Portugal**
Without depression	97%	91%	65.6%	57%
Mild depression	3%	6%	34.4%	43%
Severe depression	0%	3%		

* Sintomas 18epressivos em idosos: análise dos itens da Escala de Depressão Geriátrica (Depressive symptoms in the elderly: analysis of the items of the Geriatric Depression Scale) <http://www.redalyc.org/html/3070/307023889003/>, 2012

** Depressão em idosos: prevalência e fatores associados (Depression in elderly: prevalence and associated factors) <http://www.rpmgf.pt/ojs/index.php/rpmgf/article/view/10764/10500>, 2010

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study shows that the US and the UNATI, although they follow different models, in Portugal closer to the English model and in Brazil closer to the French model, they have similar publics and impacts. The audience is mainly female but very heterogeneous in educational level, income and age and the attendance have a real positive impact in the lives of its regulars students. The

motivations that lead the seniors to these institutions is the social gathering, keep active and learn more.

The impact of these organisations on health is very significant, with the vast majority of respondents feeling better, mentally and physically. After being in the US / UNATI, the consumption of anxiety medications has dropped significantly, and the levels of depression are very low.

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