

The role of intergenerational issues in post-pandemic programs for older adults: Between cross-regional digitization and local networking

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of an expert interview study with planning staff in several types of education providers that cater for older adults, such as senior citizen and adult education centers. The study includes 12 qualitative expert interviews conducted from 2021 to 2022, which were analysed using content analysis. The paper shows that the planners anticipate the pandemic will have serious and long-term consequences for their target groups. Four strategies were found: continuous innovation, cautious observation of the current situation, hope for a return to the old ways, and structural innovation. These are ordered along two dimensions (knowledge provision vs. encounter; paralysis vs. innovation). At first glance, intergenerational concepts seem to be pushed into the background. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that, for some planners, future considerations are strongly geared towards structurally anchoring forms of intergenerational encounter.

Questo articolo presenta i risultati di uno studio con il personale di progettazione in diversi tipi di realtà educative che si rivolgono agli anziani, tra cui centri di formazione per adulti e istituzioni accademiche. Lo studio comprende 12 interviste qualitative condotte tra il 2021 e il 2022, analizzate mediante l'analisi di contenuto. L'articolo mostra che i progettisti si aspettano che la pandemia abbia conseguenze gravi e a lungo termine per i loro gruppi target. Sono state individuate quattro strategie: innovazione continua, osservazione cauta della situazione corrente, speranza di un ritorno alle vecchie abitudini e innovazione strutturale. Queste strategie sono ordinate secondo due dimensioni (fornitura di conoscenze vs. incontro; paralisi vs. innovazione). A prima vista, i concetti intergenerazionali sembrano passare in secondo piano. Ad un esame più attento, tuttavia, si scopre che le considerazioni sul futuro per alcuni progettisti sono fortemente orientate verso forme di incontro intergenerazionale strutturalmente ancorate.

Keywords: older adult education; program planning; digitization; intergenerationality; professional action

Parole chiave: educazione degli anziani; pianificazione dei programmi; digitalizzazione; intergenerazionalità; azione professionale

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1. Introduction

Intergenerational learning has long been discussed as a central aspect of older people's participation in society. Through intergenerational learning opportunities, the generations are supposed to learn about each other and thus avoid or reduce loneliness, (mutual) devaluation, and exclusion (Bjursell, 2021; Franz, 2014; Kulmus, 2018, 2021; Walsh et al., 2017). However, during pandemics in particular, not only are the possibilities of physical contact in general limited, but intergenerational contacts have been considered especially dangerous for older people. Providers of seniors' education and intergenerational learning programmers have therefore faced enormous challenges in the past two years. As the whole provision process was suspended and then only resumed under difficult conditions (hygiene and distancing measures), these challenges went far beyond questions of intergenerational learning offers. The planning processes have become challenging on several levels, for example related to digital learning formats, the digital competences of older people, and the digital competences of teachers and planners themselves. Looking to the future, the question arises of which of the developments brought about by the pandemic could also have a long-term effect on the provision of (intergenerational) learning offers for older people. This article therefore asks which central orientations are guiding action in program planning and what role intergenerational concepts play within these strategies.

The theoretical background for the study presented here is primarily a relational theory of program planning (Gieseke, 2008; Hippel & K pplinger, 2017; Daffron & Caffarella, 2021). The study is thus to be classified as research on professional action and located at the mesodidactic level (Fleige et al., 2019). In planning models that are not ideal-typical, but rather empirically based, program planning is described as 'adjustive action' (*Angleichungshandeln*), which is based on diverse and successive communication and decision-making processes (e.g., Gieseke, 2008). This perspective focuses on the interactive-negotiating perspective and emphasizes the role of program planners as a seismographic one: They recognize upcoming developments early on and "transform" them into educational programs. This process is shaped by the interpretations of professional program planners, which become the basis for their professional orientations. Within this theoretical context, and with a focus on later life, the idea of intergenerational learning becomes one of the tasks of senior education and program planning (Franz, 2014; Franz & Schmidt-Hertha, 2018; Schmidt-Hertha, 2014), especially in the very specific situation of a pandemic. Little research is yet available on the facilitation of intergenerational learning in educational institutions during the pandemic (Denninger & K pplinger, 2021). Existing papers on the pandemic tend to focus in this context on, for example, changing relationships between grandparents and grandchildren (e.g., Lyu et al., 2020), but independently of facilitation by educational institutions (Talmage et al., 2020). To fill this gap, this paper addresses the following questions: How was program planning managed, which (sustainable) effects could unfold for planning in educational work with older people, and what role does intergenerationality play here? To that end, a short overview of intergenerational learning is given (Section 2), after which the empirical study is addressed through a presentation of the theoretical background and methodology (3), followed by the results (4) and their discussion (5). A short conclusion ends the paper (6).

2. Intergenerational learning during the pandemic

Intergenerational learning has long been described as a way to meet the challenges of demographic change (Bjursell, 2021; Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Jarrott et al., 2021; Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014). It has been seen as having a high potential to eliminate social divisions, protect older people from exclusion and marginalization, and, at the same time, make use of the potential of old age (Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014). Nevertheless, rationales for intergenerational formats vary, as do definitions of intergenerational learning (Findsen & Formosa, 2011).

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First of all, intergenerational formats can be distinguished according to whether they explicitly aim to be learning formats or not (examples of the latter are given in, for example, Glass and Lawlor (2022)); furthermore, different degrees of intergenerationality can be described in (learning) settings: There are several understandings and conceptualizations of intergenerational learning that mainly differ in terms of how explicit intergenerational learning is defined in the concept (Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Franz & Schmidt-Hertha, 2018; Schmidt-Hertha, 2014). Findsen and Formosa (2011) offer a good overview of the several notions and ideas behind the concept and goals of intergenerational programmes and policies.

The variety of the concept also reflects the underlying diverse understandings of what is meant by generation (Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Franz & Schmidt-Hertha, 2018; Schmidt-Hertha, 2014). In general, in a pedagogical meaning, generations take on the roles of teachers or learners, depending on their knowledge and experience. In a broader understanding, intergenerational learning ‘only’ means learning together and from each other (EP-ALE, 2021), merely by having young and old people together in a class or program, assuming that everyone has experiences to share. In a more specific understanding, intergenerationality is meant as a core content of intergenerational education rather than only learning together or from each other (Franz & Schmidt-Hertha, 2018). However it is conceptualized, fostering intergenerational encounter and learning can be seen as an important measure to meet the challenges of an ageing world.

The implementation of intergenerational strategies and programs was massively hampered by the pandemic, just as intergenerational contacts in general were considered dangerous, especially for older people (Bjursell, 2021; Formosa, 2021; Kulmus, 2021; Łuszczynska & Formosa, 2021). The pandemic was therefore characterized in Germany, as elsewhere, by contact bans or at least contact restrictions; contact, especially for larger groups in closed rooms, was forbidden at times or at least made subject to massive restrictions (keeping a distance, masks, no activities such as singing or exercise/sports that would have resulted in increased aerosol emissions, etc.) (Kulmus, 2021, 2022). Due to the statistically verifiable danger, especially for older age groups, not only these general contact restrictions but also physical contact, particularly between older and younger people, was considered life-threatening for older people, at least initially (Glass & Lawlor, 2022; Hărăguș, 2022). This situation had consequences not only for such matters as visiting rights in residential and nursing homes for the elderly, but also for educational institutions, especially those that explicitly serve the elderly or recruit a high number of participants from elderly groups.

There is now a whole series of studies on senior education and intergenerational learning in the pandemic (Jarrott et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2021; Kulmus, 2022; Lyu et al., 2020; Talmage, 2020; UIL, 2020). However, planning at the mesodidactic level is rarely considered. For example, a paper by Unesco’s Education Sector strongly emphasizes the potential of family and intergenerational learning as a response to the pandemic (UIL, 2020). Jin et al. (2021), based on a large-scale international comparative study, examine the potential for intergenerational conflicts of interest that could arise from the different situation of older and younger people in the pandemic. Jarrott et al. (2021), on the other hand, focus explicitly on the planning of intergenerational services, but without referring to planning theories in adult and senior education. They show a clear link between intergenerationality and digitization or ‘remote’ services in the pandemic. The authors conclude that intergenerational programs “should incorporate plans for remote alternative programming when in-person contact cannot occur” (Jarrott et al., 2021, p. 21), but they also claim balancing benefits and challenges regarding the identified goals of the program. This connection will also become relevant in the study presented in the following sections.

3. Empirical study: Planning programs for older adults during the pandemic

3.1. Background to the study: ‘Knowledge islands’ as a heuristic background to describe program planning in the pandemic

The study presented below was conducted during the Corona pandemic over a period of approximately one year. Overall, what we are concerned with is the specific and concrete design of what, in adult and continuing education theory, is generally designated ‘program planning’ (Daffron & Caffarella, 2021; Gieseke, 2008; Sork, 2010; Wilson & Cervero, 2011), with a specific focus on pandemic experiences, in combination with the inter-generational issue, given this has become an even greater challenge in times of Covid. The aim was primarily to understand programming during the pandemic, asking which aspects of planning became particularly relevant and, at the same time, capturing perspectives on the sustainability of pandemic-related changes and new experiences. Intergenerationality was elaborated as one area of interest among others, such as digitization, both of which emerged in the course of the study and successive evaluation steps.

Educational program planning is initially described as “elaboration of a program according to the assignment of an organization from a content-related and didactic perspective that is target-group-specific and/or open to all addressees” (Fleige et al., 2019, p. 40). It is based in the paradigm of voluntariness and the related openness and institutional diversity in educational work with (older) adults. More recent literature on program planning does not provide new models, which is why the discourse about the planning process needs to rely on literature and models developed quite some time ago. Therefore, even current discourses, if talking about models, refer to these.

We can divide typical program planning models along two major lines: On the one hand, there are linear models of planning, describing it as an ideal-typical procedure (Sork, 2010), which set out a step-by-step process in which planners should follow certain tasks in a determined order. On the other hand, there are interactive models (Sork, 2010; Hippel & K apflinger, 2017). One of these that has influenced the German discourse is based on empirical research, which it may – in turn – also guide (Gieseke, 2008; Hippel & K apflinger, 2017). The ‘actions of alignment’ (Gieseke, 2008, p. 80) describe subject areas as ‘islands of knowledge’, as shown in figure 1 (Gieseke, 2008; Hippel & K apflinger, 2017).

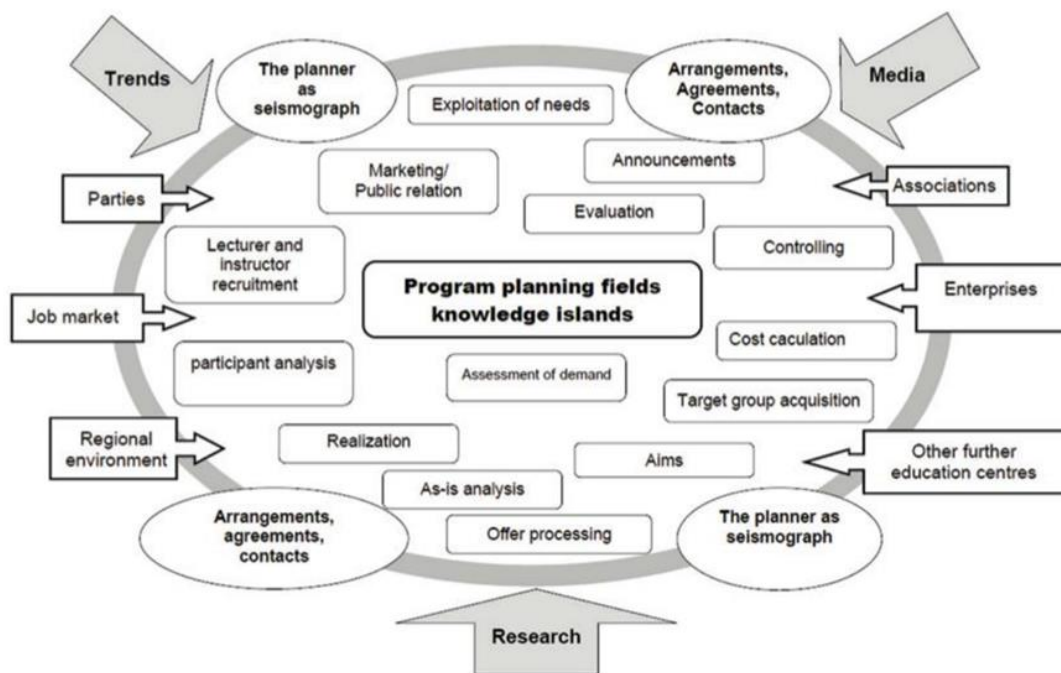


Figure 1. Islands of knowledge based on Gieseke (2008) (revised and translated in Hippel and K pplinger, 2017).

These subject areas become relevant in concrete planning processes in different combinations and in which planners must draw on professional knowledge. As has been shown by recent empirical studies, these subject areas may also be differentiated and concretized for specific contexts (Fleige et al., 2022). This is specifically helpful in the context of senior education because this field of professional action in Germany has always been defined by a strong plurality. The field is located in different organizations and not only in adult or continuing education in the strict sense; it is characterized by a high diversity of offers and formats and a great heterogeneity of the target group, and it is very often provided as projects, not as permanent programmed education (Kolland et al., 2020; Friebe & Schmidt-Hertha, 2013). For concrete planning questions, the existence of some sort of explicit educational program is therefore a good criterion for bringing into focus institutions of senior education from a genuinely adult-educational perspective.

The complexity of the planning conditions in seniors has become even more true during the pandemic, when educational providers experienced serious disruption which hit adult and continuing education at its core (e.g., Bjursell, 2021; K pplinger & Lichte, 2020). Actors in the field of educational work with (older) adults had mainly functioned as providers of classroom teaching, a method they grounded on the educational-scientific idea of the significance of encounters, corporeality, and local positioning. While it was simply impossible to provide classroom teaching during the lockdown, the subsequent development and continuing pandemic situation led to challenges regarding the maintenance of programs under the pressure of uncertainty.

3.2 Methodology: Qualitative expert interviews

The present study seeks to contribute to empirical research about planning processes for older adults during the pandemic. It contributes to the concretization of program planning during the pandemic, with a special focus on the issue of intergenerational activities in the institutions.

In Germany there is a stable structure of adult education institutions and a less stable structure of senior education institutions. Specific intergenerational offers, on the other hand, tend to be realized on a project-by-project basis (Schramek & Stiel, 2020) and are therefore less institutionalized. The most important types of providers of education for older people include, in principle, institutions of academic and university continuing education with special programs for guest auditors, in which intergenerationality is one of the core objectives; and institutions of general continuing education, which offer programs open to all age groups but also invite specifically older adults and therefore have a high number of participants in the second half of life (nearly half of the participants were 50 or older in 2019 (Lux, 2021).

The core sample of this study comprises 12 interviews carried out in several institutions offering educational programs. Additionally, two interviews with municipal coordinators were conducted to gain more background information.

Table 1. Methodological approach and sample.

Methodological approach			
Qualitative, semi-structured expert interviews with program planners			
Period of implementation of the interviews: June 2021–May 2022			
Duration of the interviews: 45-70 minutes			
No.	Experts: Role	Institution	Code
1	Program planning	Academic institution	Ex-I1
2	Program planning	Academic institution	Ex-I2 ¹
	Program planning	Academic institution	
3	Program planning	Academic institution	Ex-I3
4	Program planning	Academic institution	Ex-I4
5	Program planning	Adult education center 1, program area health education	Ex-I5
6	Program planning	Adult education center 2, program area foreign languages	Ex-I9
7	Program planning	Adult education center 2, program area basic education	Ex-I10
8	Program planning	Adult education center 3, program area basic education	Ex-I11
9	Program planning and deputy head of institution	Adult education center 3, program areas healthy nutrition and English as a foreign language	Ex-I12
10	Management & program planning	Community center for senior citizens	Ex-I6
11	Management & program planning	Community center for senior citizens	Ex-I7
12	Management & program planning	Community center for senior citizens	Ex-I8
Supplementary interviews: Background knowledge			
Ko-I1	Municipal coordination open work for senior citizens		
Ko-I2	Municipal coordination open work for senior citizens		

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The interviewees were addressed as experts in their role as those responsible for the program as program planners, a role which, however, often coincides with that of managing director of the institution, especially in community centers. The over-arching question concerned planning strategies and orientations during the pandemic, but also with specific regard to the future. Accordingly, the guideline for the interviews covered topics such as experiences gained, and possible solutions developed since the beginning of the pandemic or the planner's interpretations of target groups and lecturers as well as their perspective on the future. Knowledge islands (Hippel & K pplinger, 2017) served as the heuristic background for the guiding questions and were supplemented in the course of the study by aspects of digitization in pedagogical areas and intergenerationality (Kerres & Buntins, 2020).

The evaluation was carried out by applying content-analytical categorizations (Kuckartz, 2018), with the aim of carving out strategies and central orientations of planning during the pandemic. This implies identifying both the perception of the pandemic and the most important activities in order to be able to use these as a backdrop to which an analytical description of the planning orientations can be related. These strategies are sketched below. In this outline, deductively-inductively developed categories of evaluation are applied, such as the digitization of programs, possibilities for classroom teaching, participants, lecturers, the interpretation of the pandemic, resources, intergenerationality, and institutional conditions.

4. Results: Planning strategies between knowledge transfer and encounter, between stagnation and innovation

The planners' reflection on the pandemic usually starts with the description of a kind of shock-induced paralysis caused by the first lockdown, also described as 'complete disorientation' and 'jitters' (Ex-I3; also, Bjursell, 2021; K pplinger & Lichte, 2020; Rohs, 2020). Thus, 'paralysis' is actually not quite the right term insofar as even the cancelation or postponement of events implied a considerable amount of work, for example with regard to the repayment of course fees and course models applied (cancelation, postponement, digitization, etc., Ex-I3, Ex-I2, Ex-I1). On the other hand, the term 'shock-induced paralysis' well describes an emotional moment as well as the circumstance that initially, during the labor-intensive handling of the situation, any attempts at forecasting were completely stifled.

The whole situation has been dealt with in a more diverse manner since the moment that the possibility of classroom teaching emerged again, albeit only under strict rules to maintain proper hygiene and safe distancing. The model-less of the situation allowed for greater leeway in the concrete design of the educational operation under restrictive conditions in view of still existing risks for older participants. In this context, diverse planning strategies can be reconstructed which show evidence of two dimensions, each with antinomic poles – as outlined in the final section – namely, paralysis versus innovation and encounter versus knowledge transfer.

4.1 Continuous innovation: The pandemic as reinforcement of existing trends

“This has been initiated before and will definitely be continued by us” (Ex-I1)

This strategy is first of all characterized by an almost complete conversion of the programs into digital, often synchronous, formats. A considerable number of already existing digital possibilities and forms is being continued and expanded; thus, we find, for instance, further developed formats such as podcasts or project groups. As a prerequisite for the ability to make use of such advantages, the interviewees mention a relatively good infrastructure for digital formats and minimal (data-protection-related) legal problems. Good infrastructural

equipment is also named as a prerequisite not only for the conversion of educational offers, but also for the creation of virtual spaces for encounters:

And then I first convinced the lecturers of the tools, sometimes I felt like a missionary, but then there were also positive group dynamics, also among the lecturers, also because we were able to create virtual spaces independent of the teaching schedule. (Ex-I2)

Furthermore, cooperation with other institutions is intensified, for example through corresponding reciprocal co-advertisement for digital programs with other institutions. By making programs accessible on a trans-regional level, it has been possible to attract new and also ‘younger seniors’. This development is also due to the fact that, at least for short-term events, it is possible to employ publicly known lecturers, deemed a ‘highlight’, sometimes even coming from abroad. Addressing the ‘young olds’ is where a kind of partial intergenerationality comes in, although it is not expressed by this term or concept.

The willingness of both lecturers and participants to engage in new formats is ultimately described as rather high. Still, this thrust toward digitization comes with an increased workload and requires strong commitment on the part of the planners, as is evident in numerous individual consultations with lecturers and participants, including offers by the planners themselves to install software for participants and lecturers via remote servicing or to carry out test runs for teaching. This strategy focuses above all on continuing to do justice to the mission of imparting knowledge and aims at maintaining, as far as possible, all offers of mediation. At the same time, however, there is evidence of an explicit search for new digital spaces for encounter, for instance via the installation of a virtual ‘coffee room’ (Ex-I1).

This strategy is to be seen against the backdrop of the planners’ perception that their institution is endowed with relatively high-standard basic equipment as far as digital resources are concerned, combined with a relatively high autonomy of action. The pandemic is seen as reinforcing already initiated changes, especially with regard to new digital formats and trans-regional or even international cooperation, these being changes which would also allow them to move toward a much more expanded target group, including more intergenerational contacts by targeting younger (old) people, and a supra-regional presence. Based on the currently available data, this strategy is to be found in programs for guest students at universities and in two program areas of adult education centers.

4.2 Cautious observation of the evolving situation: The pandemic as a manageable disruption of the regular course of action

“We will only actually know once we have normal access again.” (Ex-I5)

This strategy features only a partial conversion of classroom teaching into digital formats. These are developed not only as synchronous programs, but to a high degree also as asynchronous formats, such as the provision of teaching videos (e.g., presented via YouTube), a method which does not require media competence on the part of the participants. For lecturers, however, the effort required is much greater if videos are meant to be publicly available and thus have to meet certain professional standards. What is needed here, therefore, are financial resources for the additional investment of time or for contracts to be awarded to external providers. A lack of equipment may also have constituted an impediment to synchronous formats, at least during the initial period (e.g., due to data-protection-related concerns with regard to the use of Zoom meetings).

In addition, content-related reasons are given for the limited conversion of formats: Health workshops, for example, though they may be converted to a certain degree, can then not guarantee control over the correct execution of the movements so important in health education, while offers of educational trips, to name another example, can simply not be digitized. Conversely, the advantages of digital formats are pointed out, for example when guided tours (e.g., through a church), if carried out as professional video tours, allow for more exact and slower observation, rewinding, or repeated listening, which is not possible during a lecture given in a church packed with visitors.

Furthermore, this strategy refers to the lack of willingness among participants to register for online course offers, which, at the same time, is linked with increased supervision efforts:

Even when we offered online courses to existing learner groups, the demand for these remained rather low. Yes, that did not work so well, although we did offer close supervision such as we were able to provide, you know, we have to be honest here, for example to explain once more how this works with their camera. It was more or less close support. (Ex-I5)

For the lecturers, too, a great deal of training and individual supervision is being offered by the planners, in particular. There are lecturers who, despite the fact that they work as freelancers, are not willing to engage in the new format; as the number of lecturers is rather high, however, this is not considered a crucial issue. Intergenerational issues are not considered in this strategy, possibly due to the core identity of the institutions in which these planners work: They do not explicitly address older people, but ‘only’ have a relatively high proportion of older participants, which is why they are part of the sample.

In the background of this strategy we find a relatively good/stable level of resources, for example for professional videotaping or the installation of ‘streaming rooms’ for lecturers. All in all, those showing this strategy interpret the pandemic as a temporary break in regular operation which is disruptive in character, but not entirely irreversible. Therefore, considerations concerning the future need to be put aside until the end of the pandemic and a wait-and-see attitude must be adopted:

But that, too, will stay with us, you will regularly find new content (e.g., teaching videos, author’s note), as you’d call it, on our media sites. [...] As long as this works that way, we will stick to it. And then we’ll reconsider. [...] To do everything digitally does not really fit our institution. (Ex-I4)

The planners argue from a position of a subjectively rather high planning autonomy despite superordinate governing bodies and funding regulations, an autonomy also allowed for by the fact that financial resources were provided for digitization, training courses for lecturers, streaming rooms, or external expertise. This strategy is to be found in some academic institutions and program areas of adult education centers.

4.3 Hoping for a return to the old ways: The pandemic as an exhausting intensification of massive resource problems

“Well, we would like to soon work again the way we used to, and the participants want that, too.” (Ex-I8)

This strategy means that programs are only partially digitized or not digitized at all, and, if digitized, then only in that teaching videos are created (at least, this was what happened during the early stages of lockdown). Such videos are then provided via You Tube, thus requiring little competence on the part of the participants. This

limited or non-existent digitization is explained by referring to attitudinal barriers among the participants which, in turn, are ascribed to a lack of digital competence and to “reservations and distrust towards everything digital” (Ex-I3). These assumptions are then linked to the question of what is to be expected of digitized offers anyway. Accordingly, in one interview, although the interviewee reflects that digitization should not be completely blocked, a certain skepticism towards it is emphasized: “Not everything can be digitized!” (Ex-I8).

This perception results partially from individual feedback given by participants, but it also reflects the stereotypical conceptions of executive staff in the institution who, showing only a low degree of affinity towards the digital themselves, accordingly let their personal skepticism guide their view of the participants (“There was also a certain skepticism that our participants would, in fact, not have the necessary skills” Ex-I3). A lack of affinity towards digital media is also reported with regard to (several) lecturers, some of whom work as freelancers or for expenses only. These lecturers themselves are often at a later stage in their lives, with a strong need for routine and encounter, and therefore show little willingness to familiarize themselves with models of synchronous digital teaching, this being a format quite foreign to them. In addition, there are content-related considerations, because some of these programs (e.g., sports and moving exercises or ‘museum walks’) are difficult to digitize without changing their core character. In this context, there is also mention of an increased effort to supervise those lecturers willing to engage in videotaping and an extraordinary effort to care for sometimes very old participants. This additional effort manifests itself in technical support as well as offers to talk personally simply to fight loneliness.

Intergenerationality is not a specific issue in this strategy. On the contrary, it comes only into account as a critical issue regarding future perspectives: Due to the pandemic, the institutions are losing participants and volunteers. As a consequence, the planners are concerned with the acquisition of new participants and volunteers but are not very optimistic in this respect. This lack of optimism is mainly due to the planners’ notion that, first, the ‘young olds’ still work and have no time for educational opportunities; second, according to the planners’ perception, they act more spontaneously and are less committed to constant education or volunteer activities; and third, they have much more of a consumer attitude, which is why a stronger service concept would be needed to attract them. In this strategy, there seem to be no ideas about new ways to acquire participants or volunteers or adopt new intergenerational concepts.

To further clarify this strategy, we need to note that these planners work in institutions that organize their educational work mainly through honorary lecturers and volunteers, the majority of whom already find themselves in the second half of their lives and mostly have few resources as far as the enhancement of digitization is concerned. Therefore, the predominant impression is that the limited resources and strong hierarchical relationships with superordinate decision-making bodies result in a rather restricted relative autonomy in planning, which, in turn, leads to a certain fatigue. The look ‘to the future’ is rather a look back, as also manifested in the perception that there is little support for strategic considerations (including from the participants). This strategy was found in one academic institution and two community centers.

4.4 Structural Innovation: The Pandemic as Legitimization for New Orientations

“We’ll probably have to explore entirely new horizons.” (Ex-I7)

This strategy is characterized by very little digitization of the educational programs. There were almost no technical resources for synchronous offers. However, the pandemic was grasped as an opportunity to install basic digital equipment, for which funds were now being provided. Thus, thanks to a few highly motivated lecturers,

it was possible to create a small number of isolated digital offers. Above all, the new technology could be used for digital contacting, such as individual video conversations with (regular) participants.

What is remarkable here is that, although there is talk of a lack of digital competence or even of willingness to engage in digital methods among the participants, the lecturers are still described as motors or supporters. This, however, has to be seen against the backdrop of a rather limited educational program and a small number of lecturers. One of this strategy's peculiarities is the way in which the planners tried to maintain close proximity to their participants: Personal and regular phone calls, as well as video calls with participants, became important. This practice was accompanied by the decision (in this case, on the municipal level) to principally keep the centers open so that even (spontaneous) individual visits from participants were possible. Furthermore, this strategy often included frequent home visits paid to participants, either to install tools for video conferences or to explain the situation at the institution in person.

In this context, and similar to the strategy described before, the interviewees reflect extensively and in an 'age-competent' manner on how quickly the cancelation of regular offers can intensify the immobility of very old people and how this might affect the future of the institutions. Apparently, this triggers strategic considerations and increases the urgency with which new orientations are promoted and justified, for example vis-à-vis the coordinators. With regard to digitization, these considerations focus above all on an improved (including in terms of digital) visibility of the institution's program. They refer to the orientation and networking of the institution with its program and are guided by the basic assumption that, in the near future, a new generation of seniors needs to be 'serviced' whose needs will have changed fundamentally.

In contrast to the previously described strategies, this strategy also comprehends discussion of the content-related orientation, driven by the idea that what is needed now is more education (through encounter) and less entertainment. These considerations also refer to the schedule configuration of the program which – if the aim is to attract 'young seniors' – needs to be extended into the evening, thus catering for older people who are still working:

Succeeding generations of seniors have an entirely different concept of life, I'd say they're not interested in the *Wildecker Herzbuben* [i.e., traditional German music], but in computer courses. [...] They have completely different demands. (Ex-I6)

This change in interests relates to the need for stronger networking in the neighborhood, which, in cooperation with other institutions, would, for example, also allow families (and, furthermore, even younger senior citizens) to be reached and, in general, to better provide for needs on the content level, for instance via cooperation with adult education centers for language or computer courses (Ex-I6, Ex-I7). Closer networking with cultural and social institutions or sports facilities in the neighborhood would, furthermore, make it possible to combine educational programs with service offers (e.g., in fitness studios), thus making it easier to reach "consumption-oriented older people" (Ex-I7).

In these considerations, intergenerationality is of great importance. In a specific form, it is a crucial focus of the strategy, even though the planners do not use the concept or term 'intergenerationality' in their considerations or reflect on the intergenerationality of the approach. Instead, it is – perhaps unconsciously – part of the survival strategy of the institution and is not legitimized by intergenerational theoretical approaches, but simply by attracting new and longer-term participants. By opening up to intergenerational audiences, a broader, longer-term participation is aimed for. In addition, increased visibility and better networking in the district are expected. The fact that this will also enable new learning processes between generations does not seem to be in the

foreground, although it would certainly occur as a side effect. The intergenerationality of the approach is specific precisely because there is no definite understanding of generations and no definite intention to ensure intergenerational learning behind the planning considerations; rather, the primary goal is to secure the institution through securing participants. Ultimately, a gradual intergenerationality is shown here, from very old people through younger and even still working older people to families and thus also to young children.

On the one hand, this strategy is to be seen against the background of a union of management and program planning in one person, which may explain the more pronounced strategic considerations with regard to the institution. On the other hand, these tasks are integrated into municipally accounted for community work with low financial resources, which enables very little planning autonomy, for example concerning the use of funds. Against this backdrop, the planners make use of the pandemic to justify new strategies – both vis-à-vis the next hierarchical level up and, in cooperation with this level in the search for new wordings, vis-à-vis the public and in political debates within the district. This strategy was found in one community centers and in two program areas of adult education centers.

4.5 Systematization of the strategies along two dimensions

The strategies identified above can be systematized along two dimensions (Figure 2), which show central orientations of the planning activities and in which the research question about future perspectives is taken up again. These are a dimension between knowledge transfer and encounter and another between paralysis and innovation.

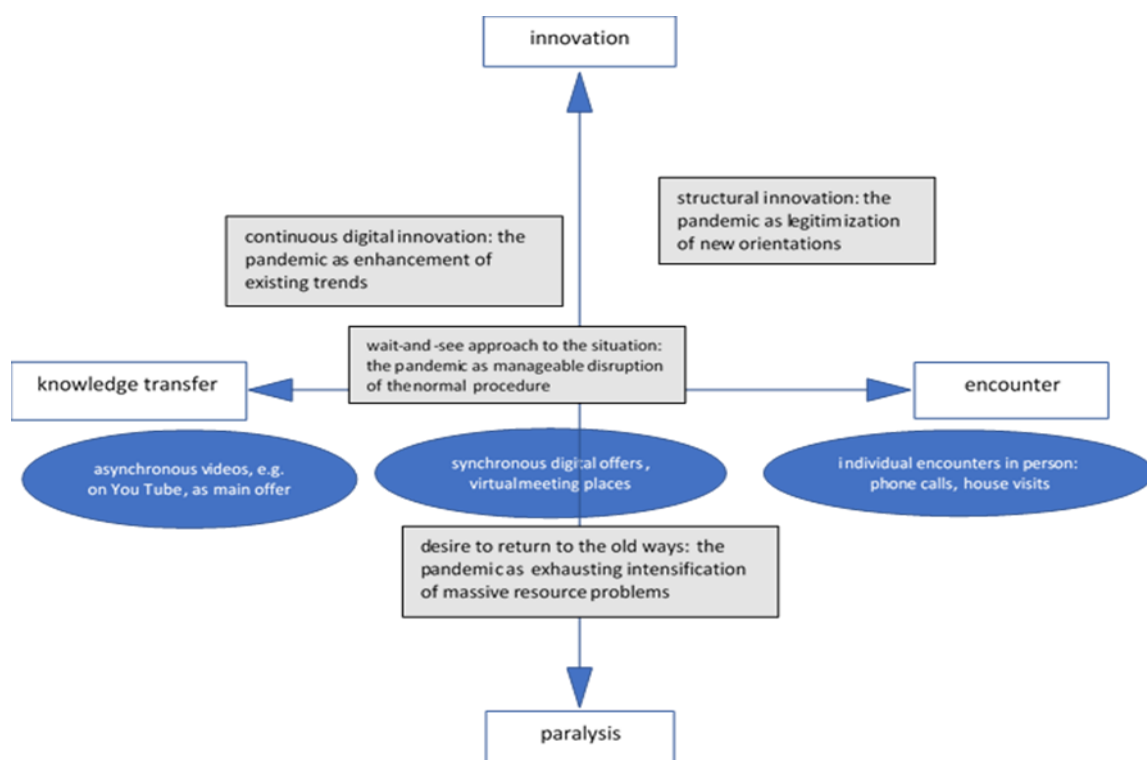


Figure 2. Planning orientations between knowledge transfer and encounter and between paralysis and innovation.

The focal points of the first orientation are the digitization of the offer, from asynchronous provision of teaching videos via synchronous offers with virtual meeting rooms for encounter to no digitization at all, but, rather, encounters via telephone or in person. This is the manifestation of the fundamental orientation of the planners during the pandemic, that is, their decision to, first of all, concentrate on their respective core task: the transfer of knowledge, including the asynchronous provision of knowledge, on the part of planners in university-related institutions, on the one hand, and physical encounter as the main task of planners in municipal community centers, on the other. The second dimension between stagnation and innovation reveals the interpretation of the pandemic as either a catalyst (and means of legitimization) or an obstructive force in the development of programs and institutions. In most strategies, however, innovative considerations regarding program development above all refer to formats, referring to content only in the case of ‘structural innovation’.

Intergenerationality, without the term ever being used by the planners themselves, has become relevant to innovative strategies, as the planners refer to the future needs of their target groups, to the loss of participants due to increasing immobility of their participants because of age and pandemic stay-home recommendations, and to future generations of older people who are better educated, more knowledge-oriented but also more consumer- and service-oriented. During the pandemic, the intergenerational encounter had been closely linked to the possibility of digital offers, but in the most elaborated innovative strategy, the focus goes back to the local level, with plans to create types of ‘learning networks’ within a certain neighbourhood. Intergenerational ideas then come in to ensure the existence of the institution in the long term.

5. Discussion

First of all, from a methodological point of view, a larger sample would be desirable, especially in view of the complexity of senior education. In addition, it would be interesting to follow up on all of the planners after a longer period of time and, at least once, at a point in time at which the pandemic could be really considered a thing of the past. Such a follow-up study could also systematically re-investigate the question of the content-related (permanent) changes to the programs.

Second, the relevance of the organizational conditions to the perception of relative planning autonomy could be investigated more systematically. The availability of financial resources, technical equipment, and professional staff instead of volunteers as well as the dependency on issues such as legal conditions of funding (specifically in the case of adult education centers and community centers) could have a severe impact on creativity with regard to innovation.

In this context, the third fundamental question arises, namely to what degree the planning strategies are individualized and personality-dependent and what level of ‘professionalism’ becomes visible. The qualifications of the diverse planners differ considerably. In some cases, academic study courses in adult education, or at least in pedagogy and, in one case, in social pedagogy, had been completed; in others, planners had completed academic study courses in entirely different fields or had no background in academic study course but had training in geriatric care. Therefore, a systematic adult-educational professionalism in this field is missing and should be promoted by training offers regarding program planning.

Fourth, the concept of intergenerationality also needs to be discussed. In the empirical results, a very broad understanding, in the sense of ‘bringing generations together’, was introduced, albeit this was little reflected on by the planners. However, the professionals showed a quite specific understanding in the sense that it only appeared as a strategic means of ensuring the future of the institution. When used very broadly, the concept could

lose its analytical depth. A specific understanding, however, opens new horizons towards fostering lifelong learning on the local and (cross-)regional level by implementing intergenerationally-based learning networks.

6. Conclusion

Intergenerationality has arisen in different aspects of the empirical results, principally introduced as a legitimization strategy to ensure the existence of an institution. However, even the strategic promotion of intergenerational contacts in learning institutions may have unexpected side effects. As stated in the theoretical chapter, intergenerationality is discussed as one measure to meet demographic change and the potential social divisions and exclusion processes that may come with it (Bjursell, 2021; Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Jarrott et al., 2021; Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014). By promoting cross-regional and local learning networks, including intergenerational encounter, not only can the bond between generations be strengthened after the experience of strong social distancing, but lifelong learning can also become more real (Bjursell, 2021).

The networking ideas also rely on new digital possibilities that do not only allow for cross-regional intergenerational connections but could also promote the incidental digitization of older people. While it must be of high interest to evaluate the effects of the pandemic and of (intergenerational) offers during the pandemic on the learning of older adults, the results of the research presented here show the urgent need to foster professionalization processes among those planning and delivering (intergenerational) programs for older adults. Fostering a lifelong society, active ageing, and intergenerational solidarity relies greatly on the professional attitude of the planning (and teaching) staff, whether they are providing pure senior education or intergenerational education. Given that the innovation processes will continue after the pandemic ends, the institutions can contribute a great deal to intergenerational solidarity, to local and even cross-regional lifelong-learning networks, and to the visibility of institutions where older adults can learn – maybe together with younger ones.

Notes

1. The interviewee was involved in program planning in two different institutions and was thus involved in two quite diverse processes of program planning. This sample particularity, however, will not be further discussed in the study; it is only mentioned for reasons of transparency.

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