

# The Study Circles methodology in the education of seniors



# Erasmus+

Changing lives. Opening minds.



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## Introduction

There are more and more people in the European Union aged 60+. At the same time, people who are currently entering retirement age are significantly different from their peers from previous decades. Usually they are more active, better educated, and a significant part of them care about a healthy lifestyle.

Therefore, the educational offer addressed to modern seniors must be constantly updated and adapted to their needs. It is worth remembering that people in senior age start learning out of an internal desire to stay active, to learn what they did not have the opportunity to learn at an earlier age, to adapt to a rapidly changing world. They also participate in the education process in order to be among people, integrate and as a result of the need to participate in activities for the benefit of society and local communities.

Three organizations with various structures and experiences in the implementation of the educational offer for seniors, undertook the task of exploring the Study Circle methodology and checking how it will work in practice.



**The main assumptions of the Study Circles working method:**

- Each person has some knowledge and experiences that they can share with others
- Participants in learning circles are both learners and teachers
- People who want to acquire knowledge or skills in a certain field, solve a problem that bothers them, etc., meet regularly in small groups (Study Circles) in order to jointly explore the topic of their interest.
- The Study Circle group works under the guidance of a leader chosen and approved by its participants.
- The whole group jointly sets the purpose of their meetings and the rules of cooperation in the group.
- Each person is responsible for achieving the set goal.
- Process - a democratic discussion among equals is as important as the content that the circles deal with.
- The group is supported by a Facilitator who is a representative of the institution that organizes education using the Study Circle method.<sup>1</sup>

We present to you the characteristics of our experiences and the conclusions that we have drawn from the pilot activities.

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<sup>1</sup> A.Kłujso, S.Lenarczyk, P.Masłowski, E.Nagalewski, E.ielińska-Chmielewska, E.Zimny, "Study Circle. The Swedish method of adult education ", CRIS, Rybnik, 2014.

## Project Seniors in the Education

### Project objectives

The aim of the project is to increase the educational and social activity of seniors in local communities by creating opportunities to use their potential, knowledge and experience.

Detailed objectives:

1. Increased knowledge and skills of the organization in applying the Study Circle method.
2. Increasing the knowledge of seniors about the opportunities to participate in lifelong learning in the local environment and in partner countries.
3. Getting to know interesting forms and methods of working in groups of seniors in partner organizations.
4. Development of employees' competences in the field of interesting methods of working in groups of seniors.

### Partnership - characteristics of partner organizations

#### The PCKK Education and Development Foundation



- was established in January 2020. It is a non-governmental organization whose goal is to support the personal, educational and social development of adults, youth and children. A special place in the activities of the PCKK Foundation is occupied by the Senior Competence Center. It is a group of about 60 people actively participating in various development activities, they are also willing to share their experience and knowledge. The mission of the Senior Competence Center is: We develop an environment of active, aware and independent Seniors.

The vision of the Senior Competence Center:

Seniors consciously organize their lives. They improve cognitive skills and take care of physical fitness. They learn new things and they also teach others. They are open, flexible and adaptable. They follow digital changes.

The subject and scope of the current offer of the PCKK Foundation is determined for school years and depends on the currently implemented projects and the needs signalled by seniors.

Cognitive competence training and all forms of digital competence development have enjoyed unflagging interest for years.

The dominant forms of work are thematic workshops, during which participants improve their competences by working in small groups.

The PCKK Foundation is run by a 3-person board, and development tasks are carried out by a group of several trainers, volunteers or contracted workers.

### **Vzdelavaci Institut Stredoceskeho kraje**



- is a semi-budgetary organization established by the Central Bohemian Region. It employs 25 employees and a large group of external lecturers.

The structure of VISK includes:

- teacher development department,
- department of continuing education for public administration employees,
- department for educating social workers,
- department for international cooperation and projects,
- department for continuing education for seniors (Academy of the Third Age).

The activities of the Academy of the Third Age have been carried out by VISK since 2011 in 13 cities in the region. About 1,000 students participate in them annually. The main topics of seminars, workshops, courses and excursions are history, science, health, nature.

The head of the department decides about the educational offer in close cooperation with methodologists and lecturers.

### **Kaunas Third Age University (Kaunas TAU)**



- is a voluntary non-governmental organization that has been operating since 1999. Currently, about 1,500 seniors study at 13 faculties. The main tasks of Kaunas TAU are to ensure a better quality of life for the elderly and to promote lifelong learning. Since 2015 the University is a member of the National Association of Third Age Universities (TAU), which unites 49 TAUs.

At the beginning of its activity (in 1999), the university had six faculties, and in the 2019/2020 academic year – already thirteen faculties. In their activities in 2019 1373 students participated. Under the influence of the pandemic in 2020 the university's activities were limited to about 600 students, because not all faculties had the opportunity to operate in a contact manner, and the distance method is not suitable for practical classes. Currently, about 800 students study at 13 faculties. The main tasks of Kaunas TAU are to ensure a better quality of life for the elderly, to promote lifelong learning and more active social participation.



Lectures, seminars, and discussions are conducted by university professors and practitioners - doctors, lawyers, theologians, museologists, artists, politicians, culture and travel professionals. The activities of each faculty are unique, responding to the purpose of a certain field of science and practice and the learning needs of the audience. The need for self-expression, driven by emotions, is realized spontaneously. Self-realization requires spiritual and intellectual efforts in search of one's purpose. The diversity of the university's activities provides the conditions for this. Part of the audience has been attending the university since its establishment - after graduating from one faculty, they start attending another. Here you not only learn, but also establish friendships and cooperation. Conferences, seminars, various events, meetings with representatives of culture and art, exhibitions of TAU community members, trips, educational excursions promote this cooperation.

Kaunas TAU actively participates in various project activities - both by the ministries of the Republic of Lithuania and international organizations, including ERASMUS+ projects. This promotes changes in studies that enable self-realization and social participation of students, teachers, TAU activity organizers.



## Study Circles – pilot

### Assumption of the Study Circle method

The methodology of organizing educational processes known as Study Circle has been used in various countries for over 100 years. Its history, assumptions and examples of use are well described in the sources presented in the Bibliography chapter.

Study Circle work is a development activity carried out by participants according to their needs and interests. There is no limit to the topics that can be developed in circles. The method assumes that each participant has some knowledge and experience that they can share with others. Achieving the development goal set by the group depends on the active contribution of its members. Circle participants meet regularly in small groups. A work plan and learning materials are key. The work of the group is led by a democratically elected leader.

Here we recall the most crucial ideas of the Study Circle method, what captivated us and encouraged us to check the effectiveness of this method in the work of institutions organizing lifelong education of seniors.

Organization of learning circles in accordance with the Study Circle methodology:

- gives learners the opportunity to choose development topics;
- students also have a choice of the most appropriate learning methods;
- the group jointly sets the schedule of meetings;
- relatively short process implementation time (2-3 months);
- the group agrees on educational goals appropriate to the assumed implementation time, establishes an action plan (the support of a facilitator can be useful here);
- participants undertake tasks on their own;
- the group is led by a democratically elected leader (often the natural leader of the group or a person recognized by the group as an expert on the subject of the circle);
- participants assume the role of listeners and/or experts, it gives them a sense of agency and the possibility of self-realization.

All of the above-mentioned characteristics of the Study Circle method remind senior learners that they can have an impact, that they can co-decide, that their experience is important and someone can benefit from it.



Oscar Olsson, who in 1902 prepared a description of the method and applied it to the educational system, wrote "The purpose of the Study Circle is not the accumulation of factual knowledge, but the spirit and atmosphere that lead to a continuous search"<sup>2</sup>. This approach is in line with the needs of seniors, for whom the process is of key importance in learning: group participation, discussions, joint action, integration.



<sup>2</sup> A.Kłujso et al., *Study Circle. The Swedish method of adult education*, CRIS, Rybnik, 2014, p. 13

## Assumptions of the study circle method pilot

Observation of the ways of organizing education for people aged 60+ show that the majority of entities responsible for this process prepare an educational offer based on the assumptions and experience of the staff of lecturers and trainers. The seniors themselves are more or less actively involved as recipients of the activities.

After a thorough analysis of the Study Circles idea, we decided to organize and carry out educational activities based on this methodology.

The partner organizations decided that each of them would organize 3 learning circles, support the participants, monitor the course and collect feedback. Reports from pilot activities will be created, which will allow to draw conclusions regarding the implementation of the Study Circle method in organizations.

## THE COURSE OF THE PILOT AT THE PCKK FOUNDATION

The PCKK Foundation organized 3 pilot learning circles: Tourist routes of the Jelenia Góra Basin, Handicraft and Smartphone Photography.

### **Report on the work of the study circle Tourist routes of the Jelenia Góra Basin**

15 people participated in the study circle

#### **Schedule of meetings**

7.02.2022

14.02.2022

21.02.2022

28.02.2022

7.03.2022

12.04.2022

28.03.2022

**The aim** of the group's work was to learn about the tourist values of selected routes in the Jelenia Góra Basin and to develop their characteristics in the context of accessibility for seniors.

**The method of organization of the group's work and the course of the process**

Participants of the circle were divided into smaller teams and chose nearby places worth visiting. They agreed that they would develop the characteristics of walking routes, close (accessible thanks to local transport) and further (those that require dedicated transport).

They chose less known or most liked routes.

The formula and format of the information collected had been agreed. They worked using maps and printed and online tourist guides.

They used common Google docs, learned how to create photo albums in a Google Pictures gallery and share them. They learned the basics of copyright and the principles of CC licensing.

The group described 6 tourist routes and the descriptions were supplemented with photos.

The materials were placed on a specially created website

<https://sites.google.com/view/trasy-turystyczne-sened>



During the first meeting, the group chose a leader, who immediately asked another person to cooperate in running the circle.

According to the group, the model elements of the SC were implemented in 95%. The group size was larger than the assumed 12 people.

All participants were very pleased with the activities in the circle.

Participants received wall maps of the Jelenia Góra Basin and they also used other printed maps, brought guides and materials of their own choosing and used and shared internet resources and their own experiences. In a few cases, they walked the route to take photos themselves.

The communication within the group was very good, it took place directly and via instant messengers, e-mail, file exchange and sharing albums in the cloud.

**Analysis of the tasks of the facilitator and leader and the ways of their implementation**

*A facilitator is an organizer: a person from outside the group ("someone from the outside"), a representative of the institution, passing on the basic principles of the Study Circle method and providing materials for conducting classes.*

*The leader is responsible for the group and the results of its work. In addition, for the purposes of the pilot, it was agreed that the leader's tasks would include reporting the work of the learning circle in writing.*

In the circle, two women shared the tasks of the leader. One was mainly involved during group meetings, the other was responsible for preparing reports from individual meetings.

The facilitators supported the group organizationally, reminding about deadlines, and substantively helping to unify the developed content. Finally, the facilitator also posted the results of the teams' work on the website.

**Strengths and weaknesses of the circle Tourist routes of the Jelenia Góra Basin**

The strengths included: mobilization, independence, responsibility, cooperation of participants in achieving the set goals; reminders and confirming the time of each meeting by SMS. The following were also emphasized: very nice atmosphere, great work of the leaders, mutual appreciation; group involvement in the creation of materials.

Participants noticed that the turnout was not always full and there were different levels of involvement in the process - they considered these to be the weaknesses of the circle.



## Report on the work of the study circle - Handicraft

**Number of participants - 8**

### Schedule of meetings:

- 11.02.2022 - organization of the circle
- 18.02.2022 - crocheting - responsible person Grażyna S.
- 25.02.2022 - cross stitch - responsible person Krystyna P.
- 4.03.2022 - wet felting – responsible person Elżbieta B.
- 9.03.2022 - wet felting - responsible person Elżbieta B.
- 18.03.2022 - summary, evaluation

### How the meetings went:

- Part I - presentation of own works made with the technique covered by the meeting, discussion about tools, sources of knowledge and inspiration
- II part - we learnt new things - workshops
- Part III - summary of thematic classes
- Part IV - short presentation of sample works related to the topic of the next meeting

**The aim of the circle's work was:** learning and improving the skills of crocheting, cross-stitching and wet felting of wool, taking into account the selection of materials, tools and design.

The assumed goals were achieved.





**How was the leader chosen?**

During the first meeting, the participants got to know each other, talked about their handicraft passions and experiences. After getting acquainted with the tasks of the leader, they democratically chose the leader of the group. In addition, they decided that a different person, most experienced in a given technique, would be responsible for each technique.

**To what extent have the model elements of the SC method been implemented?**

*Model elements of the method:*

- *group of 7-12 people*
- *participants independently indicate the subject of the classes or the problem they want to deal with*
- *the group builds on the knowledge and skills of its members*
- *participants learn from external experts and / or materials*
- *participants choose a Leader responsible for the group's work*
- *the group is supported by a facilitator*
- *the group works according to the schedule for about 2 months*
- *each person contributes to the work of the circle.*

In the opinion of the group, all elements of the model were implemented in 100%.

**What substantive materials were used, who selected them, how were they made available?**

Before the meeting, the facilitator placed links to digital materials (instructional videos on the discussed techniques). Experienced participants agreed before the meeting and brought brochures and thematic notebooks. An important instructional material was the finished work of the participants, which was presented and discussed in terms of the materials, tools and design used during each class. In addition, people independently explored the techniques they were interested in on the Internet, They also borrowed printed materials from each other.

The evaluation shows that the participants most willingly used instructions on the Internet, brochures and thematic notebooks, as well as original, finished own works brought by the participants, presented on the "exhibition table".

The organization purchased hoops, threads, needles, worsted wool and other necessary supplies.



### **Roles of leader and facilitator**

The facilitator moderated the first meeting, especially since it was an online meeting. She explained the roles and tasks of the leader and the facilitator. The facilitator posted current information on the circle's work on the website: what happened at the last meeting, how to prepare for the next one and what online materials are worth watching. Each time before the scheduled meeting, the group received text messages reminding about the meeting and the topic. Before the meeting, the leader and the person responsible for the topic also consulted by phone, agreeing on materials, etc. During the meeting, discussions and exchange of experiences were always held, experienced people gave instructions. The meeting was coordinated by the leader. A four-point scheme, established for all meetings, was helpful. The facilitator visited the group during the meeting, asked about current needs and possible help in supplying materials for the next meeting.

In this circle, the way the tasks were carried out by both people was exemplary.

All participants were very pleased with the activities in the circle.

**As strengths of the circle** participants emphasized: group integration, preparation for meetings, joint planning in the group, positive energy and kindness.

**Among the weaknesses of the circle's work**, the participants noted the short implementation time for the planned 3 techniques. This allowed people new to the subject to get acquainted with the technique, experienced people - to share their knowledge, but there was no time to deepen their skills.

### **Comments and reflections of the participants:**

- all the ladies actively participated in the meetings and had the opportunity to share their own experience, which distinguishes this form of work/learning from those encountered so far;
- learning in a learning circle was enjoyed by all participants;
- there was kindness, humour, mutual help in the group and plans for the future of continuing development in the field of handicrafts were made;
- I definitely recommend participation in the study circle because: you have the opportunity to influence the subject and organization of meetings, you can learn something, but also give a lot of yourself (each of us is an interesting person), you can make interesting contacts and maintain them.

### **Comments and reflections of the facilitator:**

A very committed and complementary group, independent. Indeed, in the future, it is worth ensuring 2-3 meetings for one technique, which will allow even advanced people to develop.

## Report on the work of the Study Circle - Smartphone photography

**Number of participants - 13**

### Timetable

Study circle Smartphone photography met 6 times.

- 4.05.2022 - organization of the circle
- 26.05.2022
- 9.06.2022
- June 23, 2022
- June 30, 2022 - summary

**The aim** of the circle's work is to increase the ability to take good, interesting photos using the potential of the smartphone camera and to present the effects in various digital forms.

The group worked in the following areas:

- getting to know the functions of the CAMERA application on your own phone
- setting image perspective
- correcting photos with programs
- create a slideshow with music
- making a movie

### How was the leader of the group chosen?

The leader was chosen by the group.

It was a person with several years of experience in the field of photography.

### To what extent have the Study Circle model elements been implemented?

*Model elements of the method:*

- *group of 7-12 people* - the group consisted of 13 people, the participants said that it was too large;
- *participants independently indicate the subject of the classes or the matter they want to deal with* - the group, with the support of the facilitator, developed a thematic scope about the goals of the circle;
- *the group is based on the knowledge and skills of its members* - the leader was a person with extensive experience in photography
- *participants learn from external experts and/or materials* - before the classes, the facilitator sent the group links to substantive materials and videos. An expert was invited to a class on synchronization between galleries on a smartphone and in the cloud;
- *participants choose a Leader responsible for the group's work*

- *the group is supported by a facilitator*
  - *the group works according to the schedule for about 2 months*
  - *each person contributes to the work of the circle* - participants were strongly involved, they share their experiences both during meetings and in the group
- Smartphone photography on FB



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/369058655022551>

In the opinion of the group, the elements of the model have been implemented, in 93%  
The level of satisfaction of the group with learning in the circle is 9.5 on a scale of 1-10.

#### **What content materials were used, who selected them, how were they made available?**

Training materials were selected by the facilitator and made available via links before each meeting.

Participants got acquainted with them earlier, and could return to them at any time.

Communication within the group was very good.

#### **Strengths of the circle**

- The considerable involvement of the participants was undoubtedly a very strong point of this form of training.
- Mutual friendly help during exercises
- Mutual help and cooperation of participants
- Possibility of using multimedia messages under the care of a good trainer, exchange of views in the same age group and less similar scope of knowledge.
- Organization of group work.
- A lot of news, knowledge and information.
- Cooperation in a group of people interested in the issue.
- I learned a lot about my smartphone, I learned how to describe and correct my photos using programs.

#### **Weaknesses of the circle**

- In a short time
- Too large group

## THE COURSE OF THE PILOT AT THE VISK

### The first Study Circle

Content - topics: **Psychology - Violence, its causes, forms and possibilities of prevention**

Group of 9 people

Location: Kutná Hora

Schedule:

24.02.2022 – Violence – aggression as an innate drive

10.03.2022 - Violence – aggression as a result frustration

22.03.2022 – Violence - aggression from social cause

12.04.2022- Violence - types

20.04.2022- Violence - category

The participants of the Study Circle in Kutné Hoře focused on the topics „Violence“ which is a topic of psychology with a very current theme. Participants deal with theories explaining the causes of violence, the most common manifestations of violence and its forms, possibilities for directing violence and its possible elimination.

The first communication took place electronically, where the participants were introduced to the manner, method and topics of SC. They then met in person at the venue.

At the first meeting, the participants chose a facilitator from among themselves, after their brief introduction.

Participants sat in a study circle and followed the instructions provided in the study materials and the form of the SC usage method. The materials were provided by the project organization in printed form, the groups meet in the same study circle. During the meeting, an attendance list with the signatures of the participants, photo documentation and records of the materials provided is kept. At the end of the meeting, the SC participants always evaluate what the meeting gave them and determine the next topic for the next meeting.

The topic of the first discussion was "Violence - aggression as an innate instinct".

At the next meeting the topic was "Violence - aggression as a result of frustration."

At the third meeting - "Violence - aggression from a social cause".

The fourth theme was- "Violence- Types"

The last topic was -"Violence- category"

The plan of the educational groups was to expand their knowledge in the area of the discussed topic in order to achieve their educational goal, apply the acquired knowledge and share it in their surroundings. At the final meeting, the evaluation took place in the form of a questionnaire. The evaluation shows that this method is suitable both for our organization and for the seniors themselves in their activities.

### **The second Study Circle**

Content - topics: **Local history wanderings in the Czech regions III. – Prague with many faces**

Group of 12 people

Location: Rakovník

Schedule:

2.03.2022 – Medieval Prague

16.03.2022 - Baroque Prague

29.03.2022 - Patriotic Prague

13.04.2022 - Prague at the turn of the century

Study Circles' participants in Rakovník focused on the significant historical stages of the settlement of the Prague agglomeration and the further development of Prague from the Middle Ages to the present day. The first communication took place electronically, where the participants were introduced to the manner, method, and topics of SC. Then they met in person.

At the first meeting, a leader was chosen by the participants from their ranks after their short introduction.

The participants sat in a study circle and followed the instructions provided in the study materials and the form of the SC usage method. The materials were provided by the project organization in printed form. The groups met in the same study circle. During the meeting, an attendance list with the signatures of the participants, photo documentation, and records of the materials provided were kept. At the end of the meeting, the SC participants always evaluate what the meeting gave them and determine the next topic for the next meeting.

The topic of the first discussion was medieval Prague - a harsh and cold face. The beginnings of Prague, Romanesque courtyards and rotundas, Gothic Prague – Old and New Town of Prague. Walls and gates, the oldest bridge and the largest square, Ungelt and Karolinum.

At the next meeting, the topic was baroque Prague - a mysterious and mystical face

The first steps of baroque in Prague and real baroque gems. Malá Strana and the New World. Palace and gardens, Diezenhofer's first building and the last wooden cottage in Prague.

At the third meeting, they had considerable interest in Prague's patriotic face - a determined and kind face

A public park, the first railway station, the Czech theater and the National Museum. Classicism and Romanticism in Prague. Historical statues and monuments. Karlín, Smíchov, Vyšehrad. They included all these monuments in the study.

In the last session, they focused on - Prague at the turn of the century - a multifaceted and beautiful face.

The Prague Art Nouveau and its manifestations. Again in New Town. Publishing house and bank, luxury hotel and villa. Architects like Hibert and Ulmann, sculptors like Bílek. Vinohrady, Bubeneč.

The plan of the educational groups was to expand their knowledge in the area of the discussed topic with the aim of achieving their educational goal and to apply the acquired knowledge and share it in their surroundings. At the final meeting, the evaluation took place in the form of a questionnaire. The evaluation shows that this method is suitable both for our organization and for the seniors themselves in their activities.

### **The third Study Circle**

Content - topics: **A local history tour of the Czech regions II.**

Group of 8 people

Location: Sázava

Schedule:

18.03.2022

6.04.2022

9.05.2022

13.06.2022

During their meetings in Sázava, Study Circles' participants focused on important areas and regions of our country. Individual topics were devoted to the historical roots of the settlement of the landscape and the influence of people on its further development. During the meetings, they tried to walk through the face of the landscape with important historical figures, noble families, and wise householders. They focused on what traces past generations have left us and how the landscape and people connect today. The topic offered participants possible trip destinations for active leisure time.

### **The topics of individual meetings:**

#### **BY LOCAL TO THE BORDER 18.03.2022**

I stayed in my beloved south. The axis of our journey this time will be the narrow gauge railway. The train has been running here for a little over a hundred years. A careful driver can get from Hradec to Nová Bystřice in half an hour, by train it takes ninety minutes. Ninety



minutes of beauty. And behind the window paintings by the best landscape painters. Silver ponds, dark green spruces, light-colored beeches and birches, occasionally white buildings or an onion-shaped church tower.

#### BY LOCAL TO THE BORDER - 6.04.2022

We will pass well-known places, such as Jindřichův Hradec, less well-known, such as Kamenice, and completely unknown, such as Kaproun.

And along the way we will meet giants like Balbín, sad heroes like Jiří Graswl and striking figures like Mr. Šatava. Simply Canada - that is, Czech.

#### NORTH – 9.05.2022

Lake from the Elbe to the border mountains, Špork's estate, Lysá in the footsteps of Mách's Krkonoše pilgrimage.

#### WEST– 13.06.2022

Along the Ohří river from Litoměřice to the spa triangle, along the Czech-German language border.

The first communication took place electronically, where the participants were introduced to the manner, method and topics of SC. They then met in person at the venue.

At the first meeting, a leader was chosen by the participants from their ranks after their short introduction.

The participants sat in a study circle and followed the instructions provided in the study materials and the form of the SC usage method. The materials were provided by the project organization in printed form, the groups met in the same study circle. During the meetings, an attendance list with the signatures of the participants, photo documentation and records of the materials provided was kept. At the end of the meeting, SC participants always evaluated what the meeting gave them and the next topic for the next meeting was determined.

The plan of the educational groups was to expand their knowledge in the area of the discussed topic in order to achieve their educational goal, apply the acquired knowledge and share it in their surroundings. At the final meeting, the evaluation took place in the form of a questionnaire. The evaluation shows that this method is suitable for our organization and for the seniors themselves in their activities. The topics covered are motivation for their active life in old age, and a visit to the discussed places was planned.

## THE COURSE OF THE PILOT AT THE Kaunas TAU

### **Kaunas TAU Faculty of Design, topic - "DECORATION (Handicrafts)"**

A group of 8 people came together who wanted to try this method

#### **Schedule**

The frequency and intensity of sessions for each topic were discussed and agreed upon. Time was set aside for the knowledge to "combine" and to summarize the received information, and we also looked for new ideas for the next meetings. A survey was conducted by filling out a questionnaire, how the participants imagine the activity of the circle, what seems most important in achieving the goals, what they expect from the SC course, how they imagine their contribution to the Study Circle and what they expect from other participants.

#### **Meetings took place:**

20-01-2022 - organization of the circle

18-02-2022 - painting with acrylic paint, responsible person Birutė

01-03-2022 - silk printing with plants (Lector)

15-03-2022 - felting on silk (Lector)

29-03-2022 - Painting on glass with acrylic paint and creating Easter decorations, responsible Zita and Gražina

12-04-2022 - felting of wool, Regina and Zita are responsible

26-04-2022 - discussion

The purpose of the group work was to test this learning method and learn new decorating techniques.

#### **Has the group achieved its educational goal?**

For the first time, the group could choose topics. All participants were active, offering ideas on how to achieve the set goals.

The first session passed successfully. The topic was laid out methodically. The work was a little bit slow, and several students failed to finish.

In the second session we wanted to study this technique for some more time. The lecturer was surprised at the students as we finished the job on time. The result was amazing.

The third session was also expected as the lecturer introduced her other technique, which was of great interest to the students.

Everything seemed to go according to plan until the group leader asked:

- what will we do next time?

I had to answer that I don't know....

Then she remembered that she was responsible for organizing the lectures, proposing the topic, and so on. Because of this, the lecturers did not manage to find the session so quickly.

Students of the Faculty of Design, Zita and Gražina, conducted an activity.

The last session went more smoothly. The topic was discussed and touched upon by all participants. It was conducted by Regina and Zita, students of the Faculty of Design. The session took place independently, without the dean of the faculty.

### **How was the leader selected?**

The leader of the study circle was chosen from the group of participants of the Faculty of Design, according to how a person is able to define a goal, help others to achieve it, solve tasks with joint efforts.

How they are able to create a general picture of the cognitive process so that the participants can clearly imagine what they have to do during each session and reconcile different opinions. How they communicate with other members or support democratic principles. The choice of leader was discussed and decided openly with the approval of the whole circle group. The person chosen by the group felt the trust and tried to justify it.

### **To what extent have the model elements of the SC method been implemented?**

Participants of the study circle tried to help and cooperate with each other. This means that all participants shared responsibility for the final result.

They chose a goal, discussed priorities and decided what they wanted to know.

They clearly defined the term that they decided to allocate to his Study Circle (total number of hours).

They decided on an activity plan and planned a study course on specific topics.

Ratel agreed on all aspects of the plan.

The plan of the study circle included various ways and means of working for the circle.

Expected sources of information and required material were discussed and identified.

We used "brainstorming", "IT and library databases", "general opinion" and other terminology.

The participants agreed on how information and discoveries will be exchanged among themselves.

Various social activities, outings and meetings in nature, the library and museum were included.

Study circle participants made changes during their studies. (Because it's a new experience for us, we adjusted to reach the goal -)

SC participants themselves decided what tools were necessary for work and activities.

### **How satisfied are the participants with the SC learning?**

This is a new experience at the Kaunas TAU Faculty of Design, because previously the TEACHING method was used, when the lecturer or teacher decides what the topic will be and how to implement it, the listeners were only passive observers. We think the students of the design faculty liked the new learning method "Study Circle" and it will be more successful in the next school year.

### **What kind of substantive materials were used, who chose them and how were they made available?**

The group was provided with common methodical material, which included the intended cycle of activities, presented the necessary topics and areas for discussion, and defined the ways and directions of working in the Study Circle. The found rooms for meetings. The material was specially prepared for a specific group of students of the Design Faculty of Kaunas TAU Study Circle. Part of the material was later prepared by the participants themselves.

### **How was the communication in SC (leader, group, facilitator, institution, etc.)**

Study circle participants and the leader had the opportunity to participate and observe each other during the sessions, work together and make notes. The focus of the activity of the study circle was communication and discussion between equal partners while searching for common solutions. The dialogue led to the expression of various opinions, in other words, the opportunity to participate in the dialogue was not open to a few participants (as it used to be before), but to all participants.

A group of participants was created in Messenger, where all participants could see information as soon as someone wrote. If it was a question, all participants could respond to it. If a reminder, or information about meetings, as well. Each time before the scheduled meeting, the group received messages with all information, also by phone calls.

**Analysis of the tasks and the manner of their implementation by the facilitator and the leader**

One of the most important aspects of the facilitator's activity was to motivate and encourage the participants to be active and provide ideas and suggestions to be discussed/implemented in SR groups.

The facilitator tried to advise the participants of the SR group - what tools to choose, where to find the necessary materials and suggested and mediated the selection of the Study Circle expert (lecturer). He prepared material for planning and recommended various measures for circles. He regularly made suggestions for expanding and improving activities.

Before presenting the general concept to the SR participants, he planned and prepared a specific activity program for that group.

Defined goals and areas. Presented visual material with the main elements of the concept for the presentation.

Since we only started using this method this year, we are still learning everything.

**Strengths of this circle**

Participation in Study Circle groups is especially important for older people, because it expands their cognitive boundaries, teaches them the principles of teamwork and encourages them to work in groups. By using humor and playful elements, we gained the opportunity to feel that when we united in common activities, we became stronger as individuals and that we can realize both personal interests and complex projects faster and more efficiently. SR participants were much more actively involved in the activities of the faculty, expressed their opinions, discussed, shared knowledge, and cared for each other.

**Weaknesses of this circle**

The success of the process depends on the activeness of the participants in planning and organizing SR activities. So, for now we have been learning to actively participate in this activity.

The participants who volunteered to share their experiences were brave, and the topics were interesting.

The topics were interesting but it turned out that with a good knowledge of the technique, they can't show it methodically to others. It was not clear what to do and how to do it. Therefore the results were not what we expected.

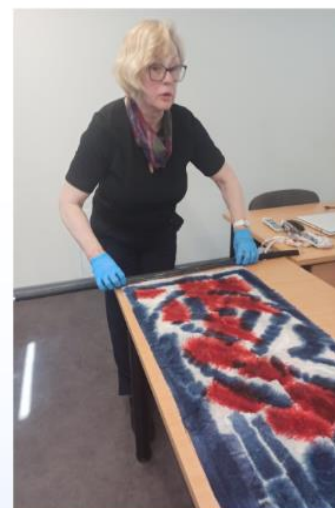
## Reflections

Is this method suitable for Kaunas TAU Faculty of Design?

In our case, we tried not to copy, but simply to adapt to the needs of the project to the main principles of Study Circle, which are most suitable in our case, focused on the experiential transfer of knowledge and abilities to the participants of the project group - elderly people.

I think the students of the design faculty are happy and liked the new learning method "Study Circle" and it will be more successful in the coming 2022-2023 school year.

This new study year, after the pandemic, we expect a larger number of listeners, so there should be more groups. Since the interests of the listeners are very different, we will be able to offer more diverse topics for the circles, so that all participants can choose the topics that are most interesting to them.





### Study Circles - English language

Overall - 13 English groups of 4-8 students in each at Kaunas TAU.  
Two groups (A2-B1) were selected to test the Study Circle method.

The A2 group consists of 5 female students, all of whom started as beginners and reached the A2 language level, hence the group is long-established.

In December, 2021 they were introduced to the Study Circle method and nine meetings were agreed upon to take place in 2022.

#### Schedule of the SC:

January 26th, February 2nd, February 9th  
February 23rd, March 2nd, March 9th  
March 30th, April 6th, April 13th

Students had a brainstorming session in the first half of January, during which they chose the most relevant topics.

The teacher only observed.

The three final topics selected by the students for the Study Circle meetings were:

1. At the Restaurant/Café
2. At the Grocery Store
3. At the Airport

All topics are relevant to the students and applicable to everyday life.

The teacher guided the students, pointing out what to focus on for each topic and advised them to practice all language skills.

The **main goal** of all three study circles was similar: to refresh\_and\_broaden one's English language knowledge on a chosen topic, working collectively in a team, without the extensive teacher's intervention.

The Study Circle **achieved** its goal.

#### Tasks and implementation:

- The leader developed a simple meeting agenda to make the session more productive;
- Each student was given a different task to prepare for the meeting to develop a certain skill. The task was never the same for one person.

- The student who prepared the exercises had to then present and moderate them during the meeting.

**Strengths:**

- Great atmosphere in all meetings
- All students were active
- All students took great responsibility for the tasks they were assigned

**Weaknesses:**

- A2 students are not proficient enough to work without an actual teacher
- Students make many grammatical, pronunciation, and word pattern mistakes, which could be assumed as “correct usage” if the teacher does not address them.

Overall,

- students enjoyed a new form of studying and becoming teachers
- achieved their goal of revising and deepening their English knowledge on three relevant topics.

However, the Study Circle method could not be further implemented in this group, as students still rely heavily on the teacher to address the mistakes they make.



## Testimonials of participants of the pilot project

### Study Circle - Tourist Routes of the Jelenia Góra Basin

- I really liked the possibility of choosing the topic on my own, valuable tips and support of the host, group work and communication and exchange of experiences, and the involvement of participants, which allowed me to break away from difficult topics that we encounter in everyday life.
- Working in a team and reaching sources on your own triggers activity in the participants, teaches compromises (the role of the facilitator is very important in this), strengthens relationships and improves communication in the team.
- The SC method can motivate participants in a surprising way and activate even very introverted people and include them in the group.
- I am very happy to participate.

### Study Circle - Handicraft

- I like this form of learning: in small groups, when you can exchange your own achievements in a given field, it is a great therapy for your own development. Collaboration in a team and getting to know other people is valuable.
- The very form of handicraft turned out to be not only learning and improving what we already know. Participants spontaneously organized mini exhibitions, during which they presented their works made in a given handicraft technique. There were modern works, but also personal, family heirlooms, with short comments about family history.
- Meetings are interesting, relaxing and creative. They allow for self-realization and maintaining contacts.

### Study Circle - Smartphone photography

- I really like this form of training, it allows for discussions, conversations, accessing various materials on my own, which allows me to better assimilate and get to know the subject.
- Classes difficult for a novice smartphone user. Recommended additional meetings of circle participants and improving practical work with a smartphone.
- Classes in the circle met my expectations, they took place in a very nice, friendly atmosphere. Although the scope of the acquired knowledge is not exhaustive. The digital world is developing so dynamically, it is so rich in various novelties and in order to learn more amenities, it would be advisable to repeat the training cycle, but with novelties that we do not know yet.

## Influence of organizing the education of seniors using the Study Circle method on increasing the digital competences of students

At the beginning of the 20th century, Oskar Olsson wrote that "the book and the library should have a central role in the research circle".<sup>3</sup> This sentence is still valid, but books are often more easily available via the Internet, and a huge amount of various materials can be found on the web. This phenomenon stimulates the development of digital competences of seniors.

Participants of learning circles improve their skills of searching for information on the Internet and assessing its credibility. At the beginning, the role of the facilitator is important here, who should pay attention to developing a critical approach and awareness of copyright in seniors.

In the process of learning in circles, seniors:

- use a variety of communicators to exchange information and source materials;
- they learn to develop issues in common documents using cloud solutions;
- present the effects of their work using digital media (presentations, padlet, jamboard, etc.);
- use digital photo galleries, create albums, co-create and share them;
- use the possibilities of video meetings.

In a natural way, according to current needs, they immerse themselves in the digital world, which certainly makes it easier for them to function in the information society.



<sup>3</sup>A. Klujso et al., *Study Circle. The Swedish method of adult education*, CRIS, Rybnik, 2014, p.14

## Conclusion and recommendations resulting from piloting the Study Circle method

### Conclusions

- Pilot project with using Study Circle method has been very useful for partners' organisations, because it supports cooperation between participants and teaches them to work in a team. It also helps to find natural leaders in any group.
- Using Study Circle method also helps participants for their return to an active citizenship and also contributes to improving their lives.
- Using digital technologies throughout all activities helps participants in increasing their self-confidence and their courage to live in the 21st century.
- The study circle methodology is effective for constructing a unifying and empowering environment, which is important for sustainability of the lifelong learning process.
- The Study Circle method is not the best for developing foreign language communication skills in lower-level groups. Students still rely heavily on the teacher to address the mistakes they make.
- The readiness of the leaders and teachers to develop a culture of learning is a challenge and a base for implementation of the study circle methodology.
- Recommendation is clear – to continue in using and developing Study Circle method according conditions in every our workplace where we realize Academy of the Third Age

### Recommendations

After the pilot activities, the partnership recommends the widespread use of senior learning organizations in accordance with the Study Circle methodology. Application of this method:

- allows participants to get involved, thanks to the real influence on the choice of the topic of the circle,
- strongly motivates to active participation by the fact that listeners share their knowledge and interests,
- teaches independent searching for knowledge, using Internet resources,
- influences building relationships - students share materials, communicate with each other, prepare for classes also outside the "classroom",
- influences the improvement of students' interpersonal competencies, such as: communication (verbal, non-verbal, but also with the use of various digital tools), teamwork and dealing with conflicts, public speaking and active listening, kindness and empathy, and leadership skills.

It can be very useful to conduct interpersonal training for students, who will then be better prepared for the likely role of leaders of learning circles.

It is also worth conducting training for educators, during which participants will learn the advantages of organizing senior education using the Study Circle method, they will be able to learn the methodology of work and understand the role of a facilitator.

For the actual implementation of the Study Circle method in the organization, it is necessary to change the attitude of the educational staff. The Study Circle method requires a departure from the traditional method of administration in favor of self-learning of the students. The educator becomes the organizer of the learning process, a facilitator.

The facilitator strongly supports the group in the processes of: organizing the circle, choosing a leader, and educational goals of the circle. Helps you find and share educational materials.

Plays a special role in circles without previous experience, strongly supports the leader, at least in the initial period of the circle's operation. In senior groups, the facilitator usually also helps students to use new technologies.

### **Evaluation of Study Circle work**

In general, in the case of non-formal and informal education of seniors, the study of learning outcomes is not needed, and in some cases even not advisable. However, it is worth ensuring that before the end of each meeting there is time for the audience to reflect and look for answers to the following questions:

- What have I learned today?
- What did these lessons remind me of?

This helps to organize and remember the content.

After completing the series of meetings, an evaluation should be made, paying attention not only to the learning outcomes, but mainly to the interpersonal processes taking place in the group.

If the organization for some reason wants to evaluate the learning outcomes of students, the Study Circle process itself makes it very easy. Participants know what they want to learn, they set educational goals and learning outcomes together.

In the pilot process, we assessed the learning effects of the Smartphone Photography circle.



### Important Tips

- The topics of the Study Circle are indicated and formulated by potential participants.
- The organizer specifies the time frame for the process. In order to maintain the stability and interest of the group, the duration of the circle should not be longer than 8-10 weeks.
- The goals set by the students should be possible to achieve within this time. If the topic is very extensive - you can plan another learning circle.
- New issues for the students may require the involvement of an expert from outside the group for some meetings.

### Summary

Based on the feedback from seniors participating in the pilot Study Circles, reports and reflections of the facilitators, we highly recommend implementing or developing a senior education organization in accordance with the Study Circle methodology.





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