



Senior Knowledge Buenos Aires

LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Summary

Senior Knowledge (*Saber Mayor*) is a non-formal educational programme where senior citizens volunteer as teachers to share their knowledge in various disciplines with other elderly people, either in face-to-face or virtually.

The project came about within the framework of the Mayores Promotores (Senior Promoters) programme, which encourages elderly people to volunteer for municipal services (education, tourism, culture, social support, etc.). The idea, and pilot test, stemmed from one of these volunteers who was an expert gardener and offered to share her knowledge with her peers through practical workshops.

Given its success, the Buenos Aires City Council decided to replicate the idea in order to expand the number of courses and participants.

In 2018, the project began formally by offering face-to-face, decentralised courses that took place at municipal centres, in order to foster inclusive access. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, all activities had to go online, but still attracted high levels of participation.

The courses cover a huge range of topics, always focused on the interests and perspectives of the target audience. These include issues related to self-care

and well-being, gardening, art, culture, history, human rights, social engagement, alternative therapies, languages, digital technologies, etc.

City:

Buenos Aires

Country:

Argentina

Inhabitants:

3.075.646

Topics:

Volunteer work and participation, Lifelong learning, Senior population

Buenos Aires has been linked to the Educating Cities movement since its origins and was the first Argentinian city to adopt the Charter

Goals

- ▶ To promote active and healthy ageing, which fosters the empowerment, personal development and social engagement of senior citizens in the community.
- ▶ To guarantee the right of older people to take part in educational activities focused on their interests.
- ▶ To foster the role of senior citizens as providers and receivers of experiences and knowledge, both among equals and between different generations.
- ▶ To bolster mechanisms of social engagement and inclusion of the elderly on an equal footing.



Context

The Autonomous City of Buenos Aires has a population of 3,075,646 inhabitants. Its main economic activity is the service industry, followed by retail, manufacturing and construction.

The city has more than 658,700 senior citizens and life expectancy averages 77.2 years. Women make up 62% of the total of this population.

As for the profile of the trainers, they fall into the 55-75 age range, with the majority being professionals or people with

technical knowledge in a certain subject. There is an equal split between men and women.

The courses are open to all citizens, although priority is given to older people (55+ years). The students come from different parts of the city. Since the launch of the online courses, though, there are participants from remote parts of Argentina and even from other countries such as Uruguay, Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela, Spain and Israel.

Methodology

Senior citizens interested in giving a workshop must sign up with the Department of Social Integration for Senior Citizens. This is done by means of a form in which they explain the training project that they are proposing.

The project team conducts a suitability interview (face-to-face or via video call) to find out more about the potential trainer, who in turn must present a structured plan of the classes. The process ends with an evaluation by an advisory council (made up of eight senior citizens with teaching experience) to analyse the viability of the workshop, the training plan and the trainer's skills.

At the outset (2018), the project was totally face-to-face. The first step was to define the strategic lines and delimit the themed areas and spaces for the courses. In order to bring the actions closer to senior citizens and cover the entire city, it was decided

to decentralise the activities to community centres (civic centres owned by the council) and/or civil society organisations.

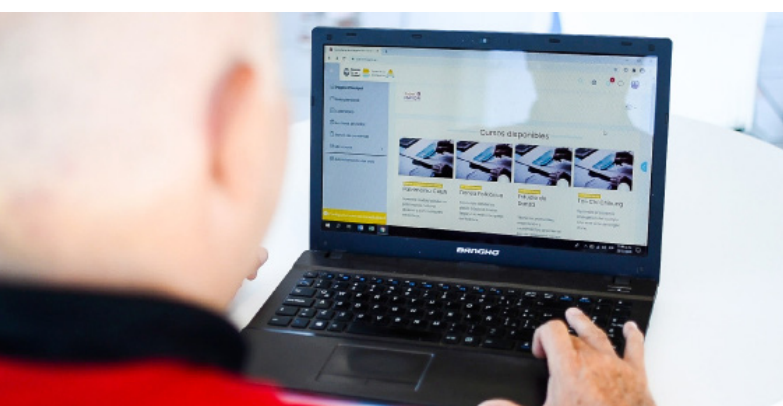
After the first edition, co-creation meetings were held with older people from different neighbourhoods and communes of Buenos Aires in order to evaluate the programme and expand on interests and needs. As a result, an **online platform** was created to centralise all the information on activities in the programme and to generate new ways of interaction and training.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 forced all activities to go online. Mentoring was required for the volunteer teachers to learn how to use the digital tools for training. They were also guaranteed support from the technical team during sessions to help them if necessary. The courses were mainly publicised on social media (the Department's Facebook

and Instagram profiles), while distribution lists were also generated (via WhatsApp) to reach out to more people.

Most of the courses are taught by volunteer senior citizens, but courses offered by municipal departments and/or civil society organisations are also included. The elderly people who work as trainers receive official recognition through a certificate of appreciation that is awarded at an end-of-course event (either in person or online).

The project is coordinated by the Department of Social Integration for Senior Citizens in collaboration with other municipal areas such as tourism, education, social care, culture, parks & gardens, etc.



★ Evaluation

The programme reflects the municipal commitment to guarantee the right of older people to active participation in lifelong learning activities, established both by local laws and by international human rights treaties.

In the first stage of its implementation, the programme was entirely face-to-face, with a noticeable increase in the training activities planned, which went from eleven in 2018 to fifty-three in 2019. Although the year 2020 started with thirty-four face-to-face courses in the first term (at nine decentralised locations), the COVID-19 pandemic forced the programme to go online. Despite this situation, the programme was adapted and more than forty-five courses were held in 2020, with more than nineteen thousand online interactions recorded. The forecast for 2021

is equally positive, as at the time of writing (July 2021), eighty-five training projects have already been registered on the platform.

One of the strengths of the programme is that it highlights the role of older people as providers of knowledge, while also underlining their civic commitment and engagement. What's more, by offering them a safe space in which to challenge themselves, older people can break stereotypes and create new parameters with which to enjoy old age. Likewise, the peer education component proposed by the project bolsters aspects of mutual support, empathy and recognition, which are a great help in creating a rewarding and empowering learning climate.

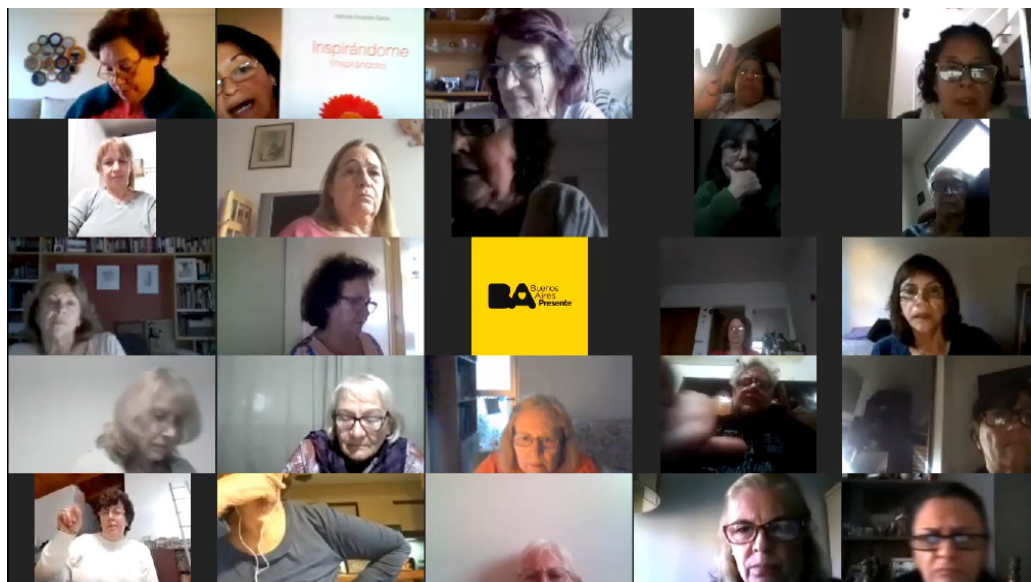
As a result, the trainers often finish one course and then prepare new proposals, while also

talking about the experience with their close circle, which creates a multiplier effect and increases the scope of the project. There is also a high level of loyalty from the course attendees.

One of the difficulties observed is the digital divide in the elderly population, which generally presents more difficulties in accessing and/or using digital tools. However, the project sets out to transform this difficulty into an opportunity by providing training and support to encourage older people to lose their fear of making mistakes and to continue learning.

➔ Future proposals

The future of the project is to ensure a blended training programme with face-to-face and online classes, as this combination provides a more tailored response to the different realities of this age group. What's more, partnerships are being set up with other local and provincial governments in Argentina to replicate the model and create synergies.



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