Senior Universities: inclusion or reproduction?

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Abstract.

Over the past two decades, nearly all Spanish public universities, and a significant number of private universities, have endeavored to develop and promote Universities for Older Adults, known by various names.

Furthermore, within institutions such as universities, there has been a rise in interdisciplinary research on education and related publications. This has led to the development of a distinct subfield within the educational system, with its own language, roles, and structures. It is important to note that this subfield holds a significant amount of power. Both universities and regional governments allocate funds, infrastructure, and human resources to these programs.
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Keywords: Ageing, Senior Universities, Lifelong Education.

1 Introduction: Ageing societies in a good state of conservation

At the beginning of the 20th century, life expectancy in Spain was less than 40 years. Consequently, the population was considered old at around this age. Since then, life expectancy has more than doubled in Spain, although this is a global phenomenon. The Covid pandemic has led to a temporary decline in this indicator, which is now in the process of recovery.
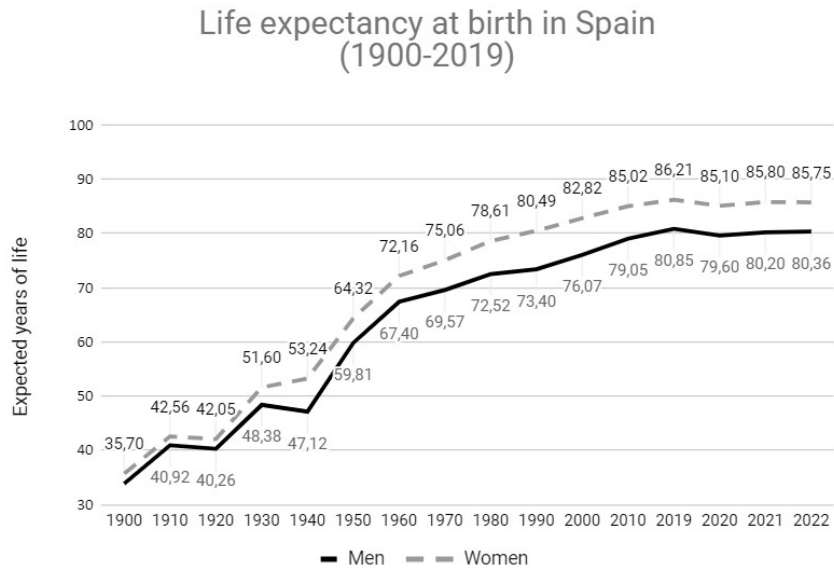
Fig. 1. Source: (Goerlich, 2008), INE and own elaboration

This is undoubtedly a great social achievement, but it has other demographic consequences: the increase in life expectancy in the population pyramids means a strong ageing of the population, which impacts, among other areas, on social policies.

Although this phenomenon is already affecting the entire planet, it is becoming more acute in the most developed countries. This can be seen in the following graphs, which show the evolution of the population aged under 15, compared to those aged 65 and over, both at world and national level. In the case of Spain, the population aged 65 and over surpassed the population under 15 in 1997, while globally there is still a large gap.
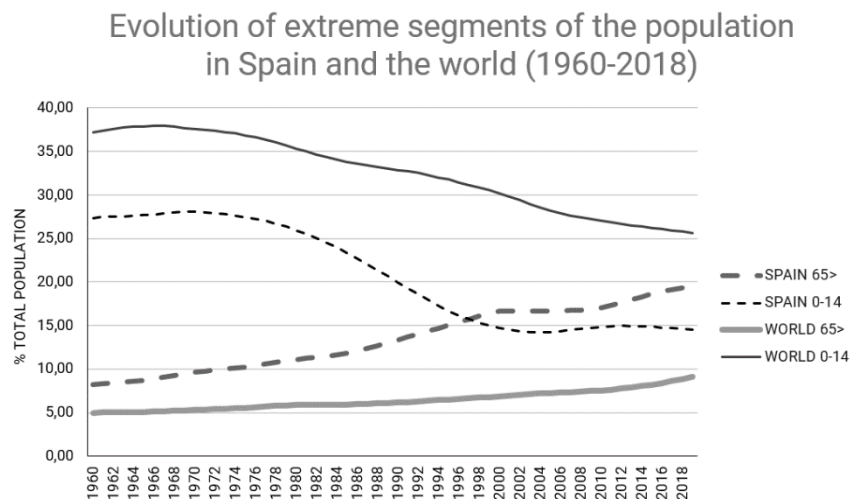
Evolution of extreme segments of the population in Spain and the world (1960-2018)

Fig. 1. Source: For the world, World Bank estimates based on the World Population Prospects of the United Nations Population Division; for Spain, INE.

But for our purposes, more important than the increase in life expectancy at birth is the increase in life expectancy at age 65, which, as we can see in the graph, exceeded 23 years in 2019, just before the pandemic crisis.
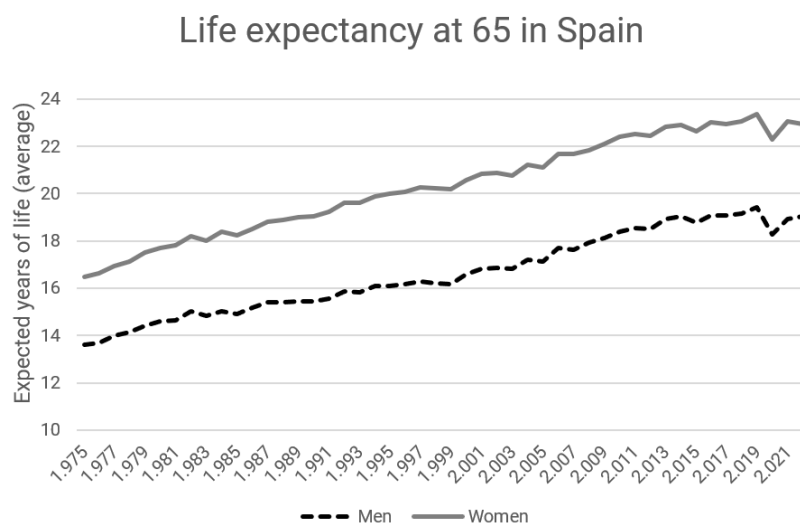

Life expectancy at 65 in Spain

Fig. 1. Source:INE

Therefore, the issue, in the case of Spain and developed countries in general, is no longer the ageing of the population, since it is a given fact. It is not even necessary to claim today the *"vejez"*, whose name, in the opinion of some thinkers (Beauvoir, 1970), would have been erased by euphemisms such as *"personas mayores"*; in the same way that retirement, ceased long ago to be, as it was considered for a good part of the 20th century, "social death" (Guillemard, 1972). Once old age has been reclaimed, first by intellectuals and then by civil society itself, other debates have opened up, related to work and the end of work, inequality, social policies, health policy, etc. And once old age, old men and old women, became visible, real, alive for many years, a new problem arose: "what to do with old people educated in the welfare state, educated and healthy"(Baigorri, 1999).

However, age frames are certainly relative, as a social construction, and the extension of the "social placenta"(Baigorri, 2003, p. 45) is causing a delay in the age of maturity of young people, and therefore their full incorporation into the world of work; as well as the consequent delay in the age of retirement, given the good physical and mental state of most people in early old age. In fact, in countries such as Spain, we should stop talking about "over-65s", breaking this milestone that serves as a cohort limit, since the legal retirement age already extends a few months beyond, and will soon reach 67, although the real average retirement age is still slightly below 65.
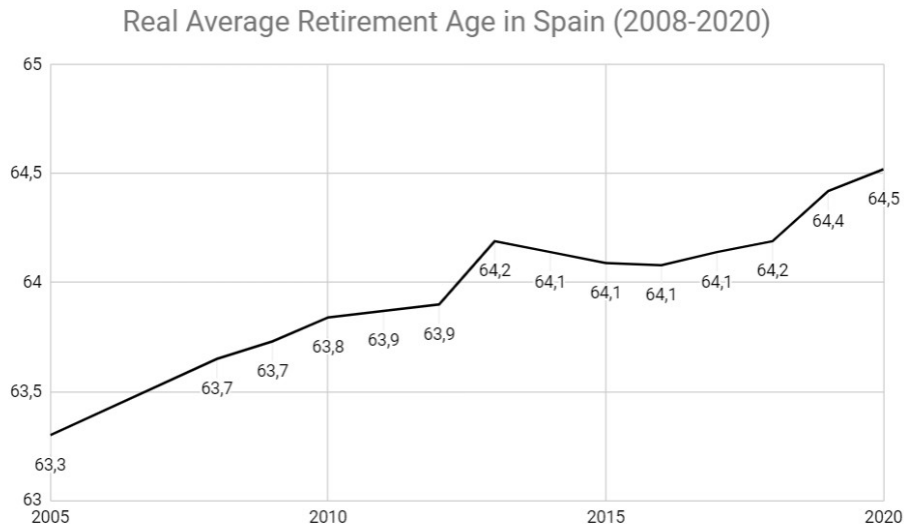

Fig. 1. Source: INSS

But in contrast to these social processes of extending the working age, including working life, we find another paradoxical situation, which is the result both of the social advances in individual and labour rights achieved throughout the 20th century and of certain corporatist privileges. On the one hand, there are a number of professions that are allowed to retire from the age of 60 without any kind of penalty on the resulting pension: primary and secondary school teachers, police officers, miners, and even in some artistic or high-risk professions, they can retire from the age of 55. Although the weight of these early retirements, without financial loss for the pensioner, is decreasing, as can be seen in the following table, nevertheless, in 2020, more than one hundred thousand workers still retired between the ages of 60 and 65, still accounting for 37.2% of all retirements.
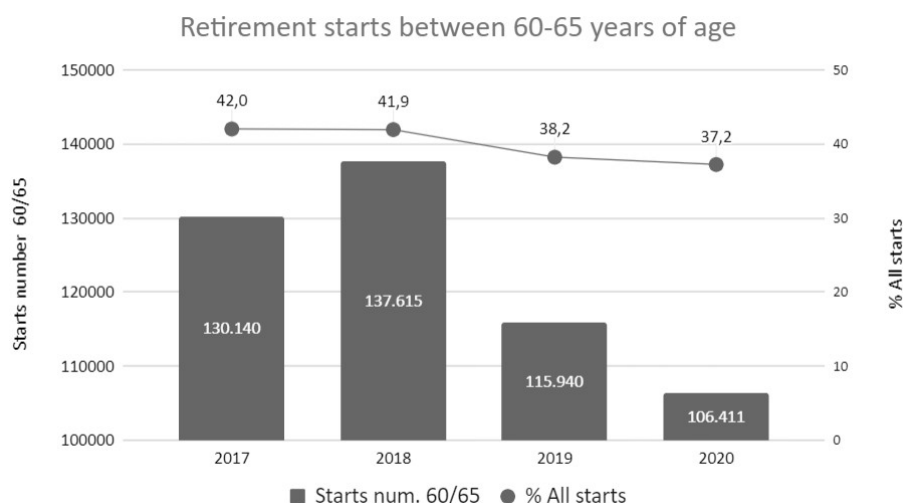

Fig. 1. Source: INS

Moreover, as a result of successive processes of sectoral reconversion, economic crises and recessions, etc., a significant contingent of the population has been generated which, although it has not reached the minimum retirement age at any given time, has left the productive system through early retirement, pre-retirement or long-term unemployment. Although the published data do not allow for an in-depth and detailed analysis for all the cohorts of interest, the following table shows, for the 50-59 age cohort of the Spanish population, that 10% of this population, almost half a million people, are in this situation. And the evidence shows us, from the empirical case taken as the object of analysis (in which

the lowest age of the participants is 54 years), that the contingent of people in varying degrees of age, from mature to advanced old age (82 years is the highest age in the case analyzed) is larger than that of "over 65", the lower mark usually used in studies linked to old age.

Table 1. Spanish Population Aged 50-59 Who Receive Some Type of Pension

Receive		All	Men	Women
Early retirement	Cases	109.800	78.500	31.200
	%Cohort Cases	2,25	2,92	1,43
Retirement pension	Cases	77.500	61.900	15.700
	%Cohort Cases	1,59	2,30	0,72
Other pension	Cases	332.000	140.900	191.100
	%Cohort Cases	6,81	5,24	8,73
Total pensions of any kind	Cases	489.800	258.800	231.000
	%Cohort Cases	10,00	9,60	10,60
Source: INE				

These age cohorts are important because, as we shall see, the characteristics of the users of the so-called Universities for the Elderly confirm the ambiguous nature of the term "elderly", which has been imposed on the term "old" or "Third Age". In fact, we are talking about age cohorts that are between 50 and 80 years old.

Faced with this reality, new operational concepts have appeared at the turn of the century. One of the most striking, undoubtedly, due to its effects on so many policies at all levels (local, regional, national, global), is that of "active ageing" (OMS, 2002), which has become a veritable mantra. And it has gone from its primitive meaning as "healthy ageing" in its first definition by the World Health Organisation at the end of the century, to understanding the condition of being active as referring to a whole condition of active citizenship and not simply to the ability to remain physically active (Cambero & Baigorri, 2019). Therefore, the determinants of "active ageing" are now health, safety, social participation, and also lifelong learning. And, as noted, these are older people who know their rights, enjoy a powerful welfare state, are educated, healthy and incorporated into the Telematic Society (Baigorri & Chaves, 2005).

2 Training aimed at the elderly: what exactly are we talking about?

For healthy old people, with good eyesight or good glasses, digitally literate at least in the basics, living in affluent societies, the key components of active ageing are health, participation, security and autonomy, and lifelong learning throughout life.

Attending the responses collected in the course of our research, both from the elderly participants and from the experts consulted, as well as from the observation of our object of analysis, we can deduce that, indeed, educational activities bring well-being to the elderly, for several reasons.

The routine that we find annoying as young people (going regularly to school, then to work), constitutes a tool to give meaning and purpose to older people's lives and can thus increase their mental well-being. Even on some days when we "don't feel like it" because we are physically unwell, or the weather is bad, the regularity of taking the car or bus to attend a course where others expect to meet us can be comforting.

Of course, it helps to fight loneliness, which is just as harmful to your health as tobacco. The stimulus of learning new things keeps the brain active, preventing diseases such as Alzheimer's. And, for those who did not have the opportunity to access formal studies, let alone university, in their youth, it is a new and especially stimulating experience.

But what exactly are we talking about? Because adult education, lifelong learning, lifelong learning, education of the elderly, are terminologies that often confuse us, because they are used interchangeably in the existing literature both on Universities for the Elderly and on other initiatives of the same or similar order. Other times they are used in contradictory ways because they are names that do not always, at least in origin, refer to the same object.

In fact, and partly as an effect of this terminological chaos, almost from the first moment in which the motto or mantra of **Lifelong Education** (the most widespread terminology today) began to spread, both from the UN and above all for practical purposes from the planning bodies of the European Union, we find critical analyses of nominalism; These considerations are in line with the critique that, from some epistemological perspectives, is made of the will of postmodern thought to assign more or less bombastic names to processes or categories that already existed, although with less sonorous denominations. In this case, it used to be lifelong learning, and even earlier it was adult education.

Thus, we find works that present a critical reading of

> "the recent trend of using the concept of "lifelong learning" in all the documents of the European Union, as if it were something new, when in the 70s, within the framework of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, several initiatives and proposals vigorously developed the idea of Lifelong Learning as an inspiring principle for the change of education systems" (Fernández, 2000, p. 50).

The author also refers to the Enlightenment will, among the Spanish educational reformers of the eighteenth and first decade of the twentieth, to make educational continuity throughout the life cycle one of the keys to social change understood as modernization, although the reforms sought almost never came to fruition, or were ephemeral.

In fact, **Adult Education** has been present in societies practically since the beginning of the Industrial Society, aimed either at maintaining an up-to-date professional qualification or at the reintegration into the cycles of formal training of those who for whatever reason have dropped out; in short, to "encourage and help low-skilled adults to improve their level of education". as repeatedly expressed in the ministerial orders that regulate "basic education and its curriculum for adults in face-to-face, distance and virtual distance modes" (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2017).

Spain's oldest Education Law, the so-called Moyano Law, already established that the government (Ministerio de Fomento, 1857) "It will also encourage the establishment of evening and Sunday lessons for adults whose instruction has been neglected or who wish to advance in knowledge." (Art. 106).

In the case of Spain, various programmes have followed one another in the twentieth century, from the Pedagogical Missions of the Republic, the National Board against Illiteracy in the post-war period, to the first Permanent Adult Education Programme (1973), which was already in accordance with the guidelines of the new General Education Law of 1970. The two most important laws reforming education in Spain (1970 and 1989) also claimed to be inspired by the principles of lifelong learning, although in the opinion of some pedagogues, "the reforms have done, in practice, nothing but add new discontinuities between educational levels and modalities and between the education acquired and the needs of people to live and work today" (Fernández, 2000, p. 50)

On the other hand**, Continuing Education** is a variation of the concept of Adult Education that arises in the context of advanced societies, fully or massively schooled, based on the realization that, either due to changes in the productive system or in technology,

"that adults need to continue learning, even if they have gone to school or university"(Fernández, 2000, p. 24).

Lifelong learning therefore extends beyond the productive age in economic terms (an age that in turn has been expanding), and to the knowledge that escapes the work activity, since from it derives both a fuller life and the ability to establish satisfactory cohabitation relationships. But it remains, like Adult Education, something that goes beyond (or more appropriately, we should say more properly) old age. Taken together, it is "understood as any learning activity to improve knowledge, competencies and skills with a personal, civic, social or employment-related perspective"(Gomez Llorente, 2007, p. 7), And in fact, it is common to find it confused with adult education in many academic works. Above all, in those of a pedagogical and didactic nature, since in both cases they are processes of teaching adults, whose characteristics require strategies and tools different from those of children or young people.

Finally, the **Education of the Elderly**, in its various expressions, would be, within the framework of the perspective of permanent education, or throughout life, "the point of arrival of a path, as well as a springboard towards greater personal development" (Robichaud, 1988, p. 425), that is to say, training explicitly aimed at the older population, already outside the productive system, understood in a loose sense in terms of age cohorts. In this sense, it is an inseparable concept from the aforementioned concept of Active Ageing popularised from the reports of the World Health Organisation, which set the search for a healthy old age as an objective. For an extended review of these nomenclatures, see (Morón, 2014).

3   Seniors at the University

On a well-known Q&A platform, Quora, someone asked the following question a while ago: "Why do older people go to college? I've seen people who are in their 70-80s attending and I never really understood why". And a recent, well-qualified retiree offered his own reflection on the matter:

"Really! As a 66-year-old recently retired Silicon Valley engineer who plans on returning to a university for a third degree it seems perfectly obvious to me. (I'm going to work on a Ph.D.) It is for the sheer fun and pleasure of it. An education is its own reward. I hope you aren't foolish enough to think that an education is just about getting a job? That is merely a small side benefit of it. The university

education is about building better human beings. That has been the case since Plato opened his first Academy in Athens circa 350 BC." (Ussery, 2019)

To respond to this demand, to this need felt by many older people, initiatives have been emerging since the last third of the twentieth century. The various existing typologies express very diverse functionalities, from social distinction to self-management processes that aim to put an end to cultural class gaps.

The 1970s were extremely fertile ground for the establishment of institutions providing non-formal learning opportunities to older adults, in particular, the Institutes for Retirement Learning, Elderhostel, and Senior Colleges (Formosa, 2019). In fact, in 1976 the journal Educational Gerontology began to be published, with works ranging from active ageing, about retirees who need to continue working and need professional training "to help themselves, their peers and others" (Sheppard, 1976), cultural training, or higher education through access to formal courses at university, normally of little interest to the elderly due to the economic cost in time, the lack of information and the feeling out of place in the classroom, as stated in (Graney & Hays, 1976) and (Wasserman, 1976). Examples of almost all the diversity of experiences can be found in the case of Spain.

3.1 The Volkshochschule (Folk Universities)

These institutions (Universidades Populares), normally promoted and supported in Spain by the City Councils, but also by other types of institutions in other countries, are not strictly aimed at the elderly, but at the all audiences. In developed countries, they cover those deficiencies or aspects that are not covered by official education or sectors of the population that are outside the formal training established by the State. In the least developed countries, they continue to fulfil the initial function for which they were created in France and other European countries: literacy, women's training, child protection, community organization, economic and social development, technical and scientific training, as well as artistic and cultural development.

Emerging in France in the nineteenth century within the framework of the workers' movement, particularly in the anarchist movement (but also among bourgeois philanthropists), they basically aimed to teach literacy and provide basic knowledge (both technical and social skills) to move in the complex emerging urban-industrial society. However, the oldest inspiring experience is German, which arose in 1878 when the Humboldt Akademie organized courses open to non-graduates, promoted by the social-

liberal syndicalist Max Hirsch, as an attempt to confront the growing weight of the workers' education associations created by socialist militants (Richez, 2018, p. 37)

Universal access to education, and then massive access to higher education, undoubtedly limited its influence, but in the last third of the 20th century there was a greening, extension and expansion of the movement of the Popular Universities. Undoubtedly, one of the factors was the crisis of the formal university itself, which the movement of May 1968 turned into the demand, since then a constant, of "another university" (Richez, 2018).

Pero seguramente tuvieron más influencia dos fenómenos sociodemográficos: por un lado la crisis económica iniciada con la del petróleo en 1973, que se alargó casi una década, y condujo a profundas reconversiones industriales, con pre-jubilaciones masivas en algunos sectores; y por el otro el aumento de la esperanza de vida, que hizo evidente la presencia de un enorme stock de población adulta y mayor desocupada o jubilada, demandante de conocimientos.

Ivan Illich's proposals on alternative forms of education, especially in (Illich, 1985) favoured a new emergence, not only in several European countries such as France, Germany or Spain, but also in America. Among its new objectives was also to revitalise the rural environment (Marc, 2007) and precisely to address the demand for knowledge and skills of the population then called the Third Age. Although from the 1970s onwards this objective was assumed in many developed countries by the State (from the departments of Education, Culture or Social Welfare), it was also very present in the activities of the Popular Universities, especially in rural areas (Bastien et al., 2004).

3.2   Adult schools

When the target audience of the Volkshochschule is only adults, they are also sometimes referred to as adult schools and evening schools, which were set up specifically to enable workers to attend after work. There is also the term continuing education or education by extension to refer to lifelong education. The institutions responsible for this training are not only the Volkshochschule Universities, but also sometimes the official Universities and other institutions.

In the case of Spain, the interest in the training of the elderly arose in 1978, promoted by the Ministry of Culture, through agreements with cultural entities, under the name of "Classrooms for the Third Age", as they are considered "socio-cultural centers" with which to respond to the cultural and educational demands of

the elderly. to the need to keep up with the times in a society of accelerated change and to their desire to remain active, participative and useful to society.

In 1983, when the State of the Autonomies emerged, an organization appeared, CEATE, which grouped these initiatives distributed throughout the different regions, given the need to develop projects and programs at the state level, promote the exchange of experiences between the regions, and represent them before the public authorities. Currently, some 100,000 elderly people benefit each year from the socio-cultural activities carried out in the hundred or so Centres and Entities integrated in the CEATE (http://ceate.es/)

3.3   Senior universities

However, other paths have developed in parallel, more specifically oriented to training imitating the methods, dynamics and attitudes of formal education, including higher education: these are the Universities for the Elderly. Although sometimes the nature of one or the other is unclear. Hence the need (Requejo Osorio, 2009) within the European framework, to specify more clearly the specificity of the training to be provided by the different institutions with the explicit addition of "third age".

It was in 1973, on the initiative of Professor Pierre Vellas, that the first university for the elderly was created at the University of Social Sciences in Toulouse, with the aim of offering the elderly a programme of activities that respected the conditions, needs and aspirations of this period of life.

The aim of the university for the elderly was to offer the elderly a permanent education and various cultural and training activities, which would provide them, both by encouragement and by coexistence, with an open mentality, a desire to reach out to others and induce behaviours favourable to the adaptation of all the problems associated with ageing. However, the ultimate goal of Professor Pierre Vellas was, above all, to create a public health institution that would give more priority to applied research programs to improve the living conditions of the elderly and promote health prevention (Vellas, 1990).

After the creation of the University of Toulouse, many French universities began to develop similar programmes, although the names have been extremely diverse (Chamahian, 2010), so that they have even generated different associations depending on the type. Among its denominations: Université Inter âge (UIA), Université Tous âges (UTA), Université du Temps Libre (UTL),

Université Culture et Loisirs (UCL), Université Tiers Temps (UTT), Université Populaire (UP), Université Ouverte (UO), etc.

The British University of the Third Age was inaugurated in 1982, clearly opposed to the French model of "top-down" Universities of the Third Age, to provide a network of self-mobilised senior learning groups, with the militant intention of being an exercise in social cooperation, radical adult education and senior citizenship. It has 140,000 active members in over 500 U3A groups, inside and outside the UK[1] under the national umbrella of the Third Age Trust. Founded by historian Eric Midwinter, social entrepreneur Michael Young and demographer Peter Laslett, they set out to "challenge the British education and political system with the disruptive notion that pensioners had the ingenuity, experience and energy to manage their own social and educational affairs"(Midwinter, 2004).

As we will see, the Spanish model is closer to the French than to the English, although we must refer to an experience, perhaps the only one in Spain, not attached to a University and which, following the English model, presents more self-organising features, of a self-managed type.

This is the University of Reciprocal Experience Seniors (UMER), created in 1994 by a group of seniors, former political exiles who had not had the opportunity to study. It is a non-profit organization that organizes conferences every Thursday, led by academic experts. It is explicitly aimed at retirees with few resources (a single annual fee of €25 gives access to all its activities). It is governed exclusively by volunteers, at all levels, although they receive some subsidies from IMSERSO and the Autonomous Community of Madrid[2].

But as we said, the dominant model in Spain is the French model, attached to universities, public or private. In fact, some studies present it as the only model for the elderly (Rivero & Galván, 2019) ignoring on the one hand the other existing alternatives.

They emerged in the last decade of the 20th century as University Programmes for the elderly and, as in France, they have acquired various names (Universidad de la Experiencia, Aula de la Experiencia, Universidad de la Tercera Edad, etc.). In 1992 the first experiments appeared, at the University of Alcalá de Henares, the Pontifical University of Salamanca and the University of Granada[3].

[1] There is a world organization: http://www.aiu3a.com/

[2] Close to this model would be the Bilaketa experience of the municipality of Aoiz (Navarra), but to the extent that it is not explicitly offered as a University, it would be closer to the Popular Universities, since in fact it has a youth section and a section for seniors.

[3] Although there were already several so-called Aulas de la Gent Gra in several Catalan universities since 1983

And they were born with an explicit desire to respond to university-level training for the elderly, and in the university institution itself. At the turn of the century there was an explosion, grouping since 2004 into a powerful State Association of University Programs for the Elderly (AEPUM), which regularly holds congresses and promotes research on related aspects.

There are currently 49 universities, public and private, members of the association. According to AEPUM, in the 2018-19 academic year (we took data from that year, as those marked by the pandemic, which caused participation to drop drastically, were not representative) almost 60,000 students would have participated, and just over 6,000 teachers. The ratio of students to teachers is not constant: thus, at the University of Jaén, with 15,000 students and 900 professors, there are 275 professors for 660 students in the courses for seniors; while in Extremadura, with 20,000 students, and 1,800 teachers, with 2,200 older students, only 175 teachers participate. The graph shows the distribution by Autonomous Communities and the number of students in the 2018-19 academic year.
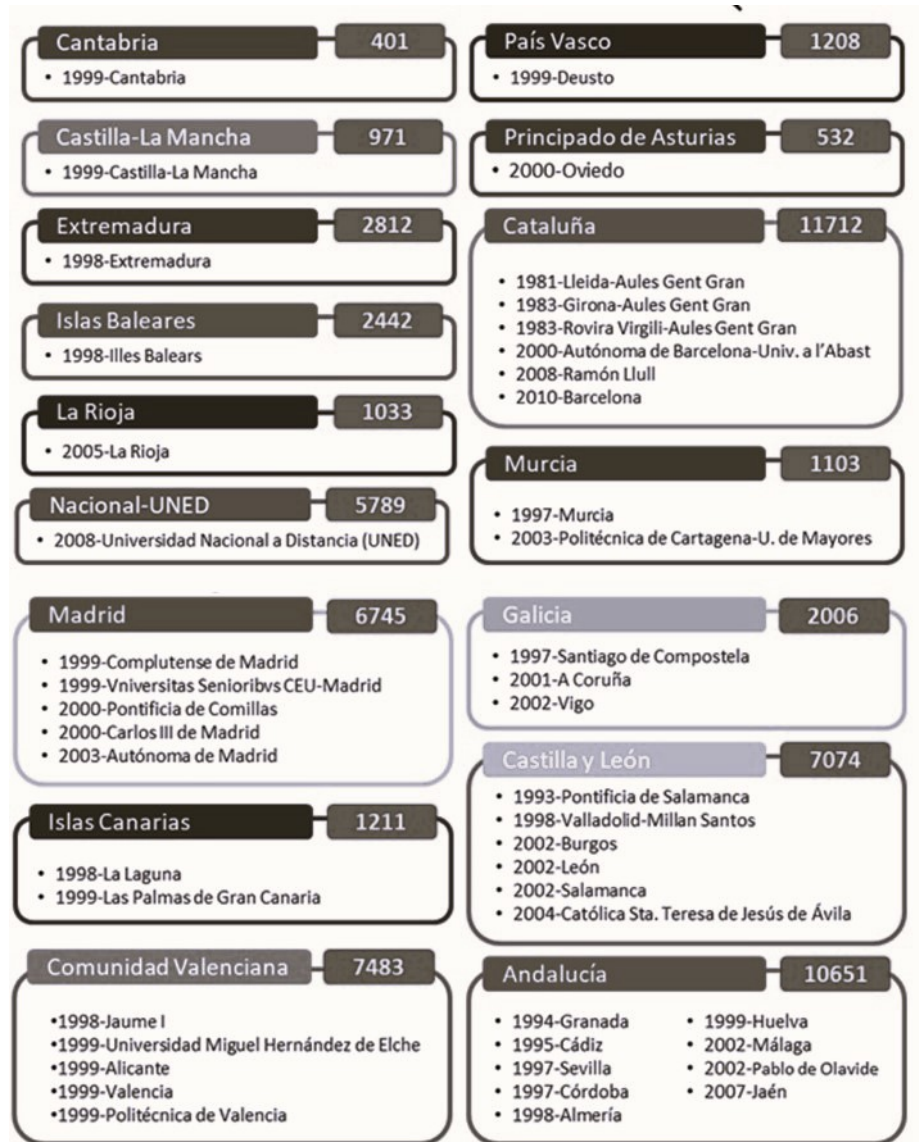
Cantabria	401
• 1999-Cantabria	

Castilla-La Mancha	971
• 1999-Castilla-La Mancha	

Extremadura	2812
• 1998-Extremadura	

Islas Baleares	2442
• 1998-Illes Balears	

La Rioja	1033
• 2005-La Rioja	

Nacional-UNED	5789
• 2008-Universidad Nacional a Distancia (UNED)	

Madrid	6745
• 1999-Complutense de Madrid	
• 1999-Vniversitas Senioribvs CEU-Madrid	
• 2000-Pontificia de Comillas	
• 2000-Carlos III de Madrid	
• 2003-Autónoma de Madrid	

Islas Canarias	1211
• 1998-La Laguna	
• 1999-Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	

Comunidad Valenciana	7483
•1998-Jaume I	
•1999-Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche	
•1999-Alicante	
•1999-Valencia	
•1999-Politécnica de Valencia	

País Vasco	1208
• 1999-Deusto	

Principado de Asturias	532
• 2000-Oviedo	

Cataluña	11712
• 1981-Lleida-Aules Gent Gran	
• 1983-Girona-Aules Gent Gran	
• 1983-Rovira Virgili-Aules Gent Gran	
• 2000-Autónoma de Barcelona-Univ. a l'Abast	
• 2008-Ramón Llull	
• 2010-Barcelona	

Murcia	1103
• 1997-Murcia	
• 2003-Politécnica de Cartagena-U. de Mayores	

Galicia	2006
• 1997-Santiago de Compostela	
• 2001-A Coruña	
• 2002-Vigo	

Castilla y León	7074
• 1993-Pontificia de Salamanca	
• 1998-Valladolid-Millan Santos	
• 2002-Burgos	
• 2002-León	
• 2002-Salamanca	
• 2004-Católica Sta. Teresa de Jesús de Ávila	

Andalucía	10651
• 1994-Granada	• 1999-Huelva
• 1995-Cádiz	• 2002-Málaga
• 1997-Sevilla	• 2002-Pablo de Olavide
• 1997-Córdoba	• 2007-Jaén
• 1998-Almería	

Fig. 1. Universities for the Elderly by Autonomous Community Fuente: AEPUM

In short, we are facing a new institution, linked to a fundamental institution of society (the University) that is precisely oriented to the research and dissemination of its achievements, which has even generated what we could call, in the Bourdian sense, a new field, which has generated its own language, roles and productive and power structures. The Universities for the Elderly are thus

presented, from an emic reading, as an example of the inclusivity of the university system.

4 Theoretical framework

As has been pointed out, Universities for the Elderly as an object of study can be approached from very diverse disciplinary perspectives, from Gerontology to the Sociology of Organizations, through Pedagogy, Psychology or Social Structure. Although, as summarized in the following table, there is so far a certain psychopedagogical predominance, since it is in fact from this field that a large part of the experiences have been generated and managed, and managed.

4.1 Psychopedagogical and psychosocial approaches

From a psychopedagogical approach, the works tend to focus on the difficulties of the education of older adults, and on the curricular design of the academic courses or "careers". As is the case of the andragogical approach proposed by (Knowles, 1980). This approach considers the special characteristics and needs of adults in their learning process, such as self-direction, previous experience, and relevance of content. Regarding the perspective oriented to curriculum design, it examines how programs and courses are designed in universities for the elderly, taking into account the specific needs and interests of this population. Such as the competency-based approach, collaborative learning, and intergenerational learning. The work of (Brookfield, 2018) and his critical-reflective approach to curriculum design, and John Dewey's classic foundation of progressive education and experience as the basis of learning, remain relevant.

Being from the field of Pedagogy where most research has been done, we can say that a whole new discipline has been developed, within this general discourse, Gerontological Pedagogy, which "offers concrete proposals for socio-educational programs to respond to the needs of the participants while promoting participatory citizenship" (Bermejo, 2012). Other times they call it Educational Gerontology, depending on the perspective (Pedagogy or Gerontology).

From a more psychological perspective, it is the issues of participation and motivation that can be addressed, that is, what factors influence the participation and motivation of older adults in

educational programs. Theories such as achievement motivation theory and self-determination theory.

John William Atkinson, who worked with David McClelland on his theory of achievement motivation, highlights the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the achievement of learning goals (Atkinson & Raynor, 1974). As well as (Ryan & Deci, 2000) develop their own theory of self-determination, which focuses on intrinsic motivation and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs to promote participation and commitment.

Psychology also addresses the benefits of learning in older adults, due to its impact on the maintenance of cognitive skills, promotion of mental health, development of social skills and improvement of quality of life. (Carstensen et al., 2006) they address the social-emotional theory of aging, which highlights the positive role of learning and ongoing development in the emotional well-being of older adults.

But also important are the barriers and challenges that older adults face when participating in educational programs, such as physical limitations, technological barriers, negative stereotypes, and lack of social support (Bowen et al., 2011).

From a psychosocial perspective, there are several possible approaches. On the one hand, in relation to lifelong learning, which examines the importance of continuous learning in the lives of older adults and how universities for older adults can be a space to promote it. Against the classical theory of disengagement in old age, (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953) they formulated the theory of active aging early on, emphasizing the importance of maintaining an active life and continuous learning in old age. Along these lines, and with the same empirical objective analyzed in this work, this perspective is addressed in (Rivero & Galván, 2019). In short, "the concept of lifelong learning as a new framework that changes traditional ideas and expands the very concept of education" (Rubio, 2007). In the European Union, in 2000 the Commission drew up a memorandum on the subject, the specification of which has been taking shape in successive years.

4.2 Sociological approaches

Beyond the interest that the subject has from the perspective of the Sociology of Education, attending to many aspects related to access, organization, institutional issues, group relations, etc., there are two perspectives that seem especially interesting to consider.

Vance Packard and the Status Seekers.

He is an author who is now quite forgotten, because his condition as a journalist meant that the dominant academic sociology did not value him, but in the mid-twentieth century he introduced a series of critical analyses of consumer society, the problems of opulent societies and large organizations, of great finesse, which anticipated many ideas that have subsequently been developed.

One of his most successful works was The Status Seekers. In (Packard, 1959), It focuses on the theme of consumerism and the quest for social status in American society at the time. Packard argues that modern society is obsessed with the pursuit of status and that much of human behavior is driven by the desire to be perceived as successful and respectable in terms of wealth, social standing, and recognition. The concept of conspicuous consumption developed by (Veblen, 1899) is at the heart of this approach.

On the other hand, advertising plays a fundamental role in promoting consumerism and creating a consumer culture. And advertising techniques are used to persuade people to buy goods and services not only for their real needs, but also to satisfy their desires for status and social recognition. And the author examines how the consumption of certain products and brands has become a way to show social status and belong to a certain class. People tend to buy products that are associated with certain social groups or strata in order to differentiate themselves and elevate their perceived status.

Thus, from the point of view that Packard suggests, would the users of the Universities for the Elderly be pursuing that status that access to "the University" would grant them, a status that is linked to the middle class?

Bourdieu: distinction.

Bourdieu's theory of distinction is of special interest in the subject matter at hand, in terms of access, opportunities, and educational inequalities for older adults. This may include analysing how socio-economic resources, cultural capital, and educational practices influence the participation and educational outcomes of this population.

Distinction refers to how people seek to differentiate and distinguish themselves socially through their consumption choices, behavior, and cultural activities. These choices are based on social norms and values that vary according to the social class to which they belong. Thus, social inequalities are perpetuated through education and culture, establishing, through access to certain cultural consumptions, "titles of cultural nobility" (Bourdieu, 2006,

p. 15). This concept could play an important role when analyzing colleges for seniors, on how people seek to differentiate and distinguish themselves socially through their choices of consumption, behavior, and cultural activities.

In the context of senior colleges, the concept of distinction can help to understand how older adults choose to participate in specific educational programs and how this may influence their identity and social recognition. Some possible implications of the concept of distinction in relation to colleges of seniors include:

1. Selective choice: Older adults may choose to participate in educational programs that provide them with a sense of prestige and status, allowing them to differentiate themselves from other age groups and strengthen their social standing.

2. Valorization of certain types of knowledge, in this case supposedly academic, university knowledge, although in reality they are informative talks. But in contrast to the "popular" language of the Volkshochschule or the self-managed models, they pretend to participate in the language of the academic elite

3. Creation of exclusive social networks: Distinction can lead to the formation of exclusive social groups in which they share similar interests and establish relationships that reinforce their social position.

4. Reproduction of inequalities, insofar as social and economic inequalities influence participation in and access to universities for older people.

In this sense, it is important to take into account Bourdieu's linked concept of capital, which consists not only of what is at stake in the economic field, but also in the social field (relationships, prestige, contacts) and in the cultural field (knowledge, skills acquired in the family or in school institutions) and symbolic (recognition given, whether diplomas or certificates that give people social identity). to obtain which the Universities for the Elderly would be especially functional.

Although Bourdieu's analysis seems to be linked exclusively to a taste that is more aristocratic than bourgeois and in a certain way monolithic, and therefore would not fit in today's world, in which differentiation in itself is a value and a sign of distinction, it is fully applicable, because the UMs are a product especially "of the provinces". of cities where distinction is not always, or rarely, expressed in the same almost aristocratic metropolitan terms. Yes, as you point out (Busquet Durán, 1999), for Bourdieu, the function of culture (or cultural consumption, rather) is to be a weapon in the struggle for the recognition and prestige of the dominant social groups, undoubtedly in the case at hand it functions perfectly as an element of identity, social cohesion and differentiation.

Although sometimes the UMs can resemble a kind of pastiche to the observer, because in many cases the lecturers with second- or third-rate professors, the result of the organizer's network of friends and not of a selective ranking, who obtain some extra income, even so it works, have the same role as those decoration accessories to which Bourdieu refers. It is a

"Recognition of the distinction that is affirmed in the effort to appropriate it, even if it is under the illusory species of the bluff! or imitation, and in order to distinguish oneself from those who are devoid of it, the pretension inspires acquisition, which in itself trivializes the properties hitherto most distinctive, and thereby contributes to continually sustaining the tension of the market of symbolic goods, forcing the possessors of the distinctive properties threatened with disclosure and vulgarization to seek indefinitely in new properties the affirmation of their singularity"(Bourdieu, 2006, p. 326).

5   Goals and hypotheses

In all the internal and external documents of the Universities for the Elderly, the language of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is distilled. The term "giving back" abounds, and so the idea of a "new philosophy of the Universities of opening their doors to the elderly, wanting to thank with a cultural benefit and recognition those who could not access university studies" (Alfonso et al., 2011) is repeated in numerous works by those responsible for programs.

But do the Universities for the Elderly really respond to this principle of inclusivity? Do they really reach those they should, fulfilling the function they proclaim? Are they socially responsible or are public resources being used for the benefit of certain social groups, in a kind of fiscal regression?

These are the research questions that we have asked ourselves, although there are many other questions of interest for sociological research (in this case from the field of Sociology of Organizations), such as the organizational and power dynamics, in the university environment, that develop around the Universities for the Elderly.

The empirical observation of the participating public, due to its mere physical appearance, leads us to consider the possibility that the objectives and purposes disseminated are not being fulfilled. This requires analyzing more solid indicators that allow us to contrast two options with respect to Universities for the Elderly:

- As an example of the rupture of the models of social reproduction promoted by the educational system. The UMEX would thus be an example of how the education system is inclusive and gives

the opportunity to access knowledge to people from disadvantaged classes.
- As a continuation of the system of social reproduction that consolidates the educational system since most of its beneficiaries are upper-middle class people.

Our objectives are, therefore:

- To know the socio-demographic characteristics of the users of the University of Extremadura for the Elderly
- Know their motivations for participating, and the benefits they perceive to be obtained.
- To analyse the socio-economic differences between UMEx students and the rest of the population in their age groups in Extremadura
- Define the social functions of the UMEx

Our starting hypothesis, based on observation (including participant observation, as teachers) is the existence of a mismatch between the characteristics of the user population of the University for the Elderly and the population of the same age segments. If our hypothesis is correct, it will show a higher-class position or status than the average of the population.

6   Methodology

The research has been carried out, in addition to the use of secondary sources, both bibliographic and documentary and statistical, using observation as an empirical basis, carrying out some interviews and discussion groups, but mainly by conducting a survey of users of the University of Seniors of the University of Extremadura. A first wave (2019) collected 161 questionnaires, and a second (2020) 322 questionnaires. In addition, a General Survey on Living Conditions of the population aged 55 and over (with a margin of error of ±2.62, carried out in 2020 within the framework of the research project "Scenarios of active ageing in Extremadura" (2019-2022) has been conducted.
Our empirical object is the University for the Elderly of Extremadura, created in 1998 within the University of Extremadura, and which currently serves almost 2,500 students in eight and seven campuses in the region. Although attached to the University, it has a completely autonomous management system, obtaining its resources through agreements between the Junta de Extremadura and the promoting team, aid (in the form of salary supplements and provision of auxiliary services) from the

University, and student enrolments. Currently a "career" or "degree" of 5 "courses", with 8 "subjects"/course, basically Humanities and scientific dissemination.

The talks are given two days a week, in the afternoon, during the official school year. Attendees obtain a Graduate Diploma, not valid for professional practice but which they can display, and after the "degree" they can continue in postgraduate courses. The tuition fee in 2023 is €80 for the "degree" (funded by the Junta de Extremadura); and 100e the "Postgraduate". With this, they also have access to many complementary social activities, such as excursions, social gatherings, dances, etc., as well as membership of the Alumni and Alumni Association. The staff assigned to the program is made up of 12 people: a Director, a Coordinator and 10 administration and services employees.

Fig. 1. Evolution of the student body by location
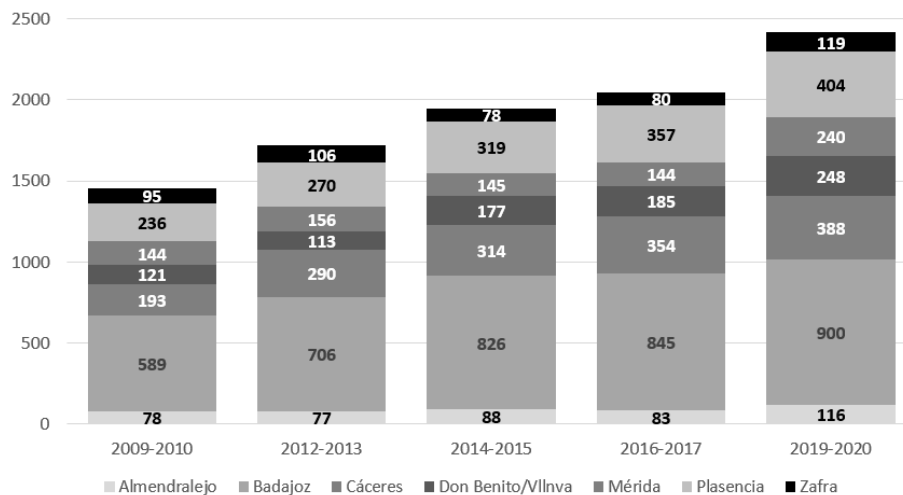
7   Results

As has been pointed out, this work does not address all the dimensions indicated, nor does it exploit all the material obtained, but we focus on answering the questions posed, that is, to compare some variables of the socioeconomic characteristics of the UMEX students and those of the group of people over 55 years of age in the region. and see how much they resemble each other.

To do this, we have looked at two variables, which measure on the one hand their cultural capital (taking the level of education achieved as an indicator) and on the other hand their current economic situation.

What we observe is that while for the entire population of these age groups in the region, almost half have no education other than primary education, and in almost half of these, incomplete, in the case of UMEX students the proportions are reversed: almost 48% have university studies. and less than 3% have less than completed primary education.

	EXTREMADURA		UMEX	
	%	Acum.	%	Acum.
Incomplete primary education	23,5	23,5	2,8	2,8
Complete primary school (before Elementary Baccalaureate, from 1st to 6th year of EGB)	24,4	47,9	12,2	15
Compulsory Secondary or First Grade completed (Elementary Baccalaureate, up to 8th year of EGB)	13,2	61,1	14,4	29,4
Post-Compulsory Secondary or Second Grade completes Higher Baccalaureate, Baccalaureate -BUP and COU)	9,9	70,9	22	51,4
Completed 1st Degree Vocational Training (or 1st or 2nd Grade Officer)	3,6	74,5	5,8	57,2
Completed Vocational Training 2nd Degree (or Industrial/Work Master's Degree)	4,4	78,9	4,3	61,5
Complete University Diploma/Technical Engineering	10	88,9	25,7	87,2
Bachelor's or Bachelor's Degrees	9,9	98,8	11,9	99,1
Master's Degree or PhD	1,1	99,9	0,9	100
Don't know	.1%	100		

Fig. 1. Level of education attained (population 55 and over)

En cuanto a la situación familiar, observamos diferencias no menos sustanciales. Así, aunque la mayoría de la población de 55 años y más de la región declara que su situación económica familiar es Aceptable, tan sólo un 37% declara que es Buena o Muy Buena. Sin embargo, entre los asistentes a la UMEX quienes dicen estar en esa situación alcanzan un 67%, casi el doble.

Los datos evidencia, por tanto, que existe un sesgo de clase notable en el alumnado de la UMEX.

	Very bad	Suitcase	Acceptable	Good	Very good	NS/NC
EXTREMADURA	1,4	7,1	53,5	33,1	3,9	1
UMEX	0	3,4	29,6	63,3	3,7	

Table 1. Family economic situation

8   Conclusions

In view of the provisional conclusions that we can draw, it is doubtful that the approach offered in the discourse of the Universities for the Elderly, based on the case analyzed, reflects the objective reality. Although we must wait to analyze other components and variables, it does not seem that they are really inclusion programs, but rather seem to respond to the model of social reproduction exposed by Bourdieu.

This has important implications, as we would be facing a process of fiscal regression, whereby the middle and upper middle classes obtain public aid for their cultural consumption. Local and regional governments invest funds that could perhaps be used in models of more egalitarian and democratic dissemination of useful knowledge to the elderly, without discrimination.

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