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Marvin Formosa *Editor*

The University of the Third Age and Active Ageing

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Editor

Marvin Formosa
Department of Gerontology
and Dementia Studies
Faculty for Social Wellbeing
University of Malta
Msida, Malta

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Chapter 21

Concluding Remarks and Reflections



Marvin Formosa

This final chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the travails of the University of the Third Age (U3A) movement which, since its modest inception in 1973, has certainly exceeded all expectations. It does not strive to tie loose ends in a steadfast manner. Rather, the chapter serves as a beacon for stimulating further theoretical and empirical research on third age learning and the U3A in particular, by tracing the similarities and divergences of U3As across European and Asian-Pacific contexts; the benefits of participation in U3As on learners' quality of life; and their social and psychological well-being. However, this chapter also points out that the U3A's track record in the democratisation of late-life learning—especially in terms of social class, gender, disability and ethnic biases—leaves much room for improvement, to the extent that one can conclude that many U3As are reinforcing a degree of inequality amongst older persons in general but especially amongst the most vulnerable sectors of the ageing population. The chapter's final section highlights the need for the U3A movement to renew itself so as to remain relevant to incoming groups of older persons whose generational habitus is certainly distinct from that of preceding cohorts—to whom the U3As are generally targeted—by including a number of policy recommendations for the future.

Similarities and Differences

All the chapters within this edited text highlighted a relatively common philosophy amongst U3As in the various countries and two continental locations under focus. U3As are generally united in their efforts to provide learning opportunities for older adults, as well as to increase the visibility of older generations whose presence and worth tend to be universally undervalued and discounted. U3As also remind civil

M. Formosa (✉)
University of Malta, Msida, Malta
e-mail: marvin.formosa@um.edu.mt

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society and political parties of the actual meaning of the term ‘lifelong learning’, whilst providing a niche for a category of citizens who are generally left out in the cold as far as learning opportunities are concerned, since governments tend to cling to traditional models of education that promise higher levels of production, profitability and employability. Many authors stressed how U3As in their countries contribute significantly to active ageing, as participation in learning programmes encourages older people to move out of their homes to join peers in physical, cognitive, expressive, creative and social accomplishments. To take a feather out of Iceland’s cap, the mantra of U3As in this country is that—irrespective of one’s age—it is never too late for older persons to rethink their situation in life, embark on new missions, fulfil ambitions and act upon dreams and desires. Regardless of whether U3As are fiercely autonomous centres, embedded within traditional universities or instigated by the government, all U3As strive to enable older people to engage in the sharing of knowledge, skills, interests and experience; determine the benefits and enjoyment to be gained, and the new horizons to be discovered through late-life learning; and ultimately, to applaud the capabilities, potential and social value of older people. In their attempt to reach out to a wider and more numerous audience, U3As endeavour to overcome any defensiveness on behalf of older persons about participating in late-life learning, usually driven by the old adage that ‘you cannot teach an old dog new tricks’. Moreover, U3As are ready to collaborate with educational institutions to undertake research into ageing and the position of older people in society. Again, one finds Iceland’s U3A in Reykjavik to be at the forefront of such initiatives, as the BALL project received the Erasmus + Award for Excellence in the field of adult education, with its results having been published in the book *Towards a dynamic third age* (Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2016) which includes guidelines and recommendations on how to best prepare for the third age. Indeed, the majority of U3As based in Europe take part in projects funded by the European Commission such as Erasmus + , Tempus, and until its termination, Grundtvig. For example, the Maltese U3A took part in a Tempus project entitled Centre for Third Age Education (n.d.) with 14 other U3As in countries like Italy, Slovakia, Russian Federation, UK, Spain, Azerbaijan and Ukraine. The objectives of this project included raising awareness of third age learning in such countries, to establish new U3As in all these countries, and to coordinate intergenerational learning projects. This Tempus project succeeded in creating third age education centres in all the partner countries, purchasing equipment for the running of these centres, developing study programmes and curricula for each centre, as well as providing training to 180 teachers and facilitators in the field of geragogy. The project culminated in an international conference on third age learning in Genoa which also included the launch of the publication *Active ageing: From wisdom to lifelong learning* (Amoretti, Spulber, & Varani, 2017) which collected and presented the different experiences that separate countries face in promoting and implementing third age learning, whilst documenting the best practices implemented in the various sociocultural contexts that characterised the partner countries. The International Association of Universities of the Third Age (n.d.) also engaged in a number of research projects on themes ranging from senior tourism to art appreciation in later life, to equal learning opportunities across the life course.

However, the chapters in this edited text also uncovered a long-standing schism in both the *modus operandi* and *modus operatum* of U3As. On the one hand, the affixation of Francophone-inspired U3As to traditional universities—as is the case in France, Germany, Lebanon, Spain and Malta—brings about both potential advantages and risks. Although such U3As are generally successful in accessing funds, retaining nominal enrolment fees (as they make free use of university resources) and implementing any study programmes that strike the members' fancy due to the large pool of teaching personnel at the university, classes tend to take place on university campuses which tend to be far away from residential centres, and thus, relatively inaccessible. Moreover, Francophone U3As run the risk of being characterised by a lack of agency, as the academic body has the last say on most matters and total decision-making power on aspects related to learning. On the other hand, the self-help approach favoured by U3As following the British model—as in the UK, Australia and New Zealand—opens the possibilities of nominal membership fees; accessible classes run in community halls, libraries and private homes; flexible curricula and teaching styles; wide course varieties that range from the highly academic to arts and crafts; no academic constraints such as entrance requirements or examinations; and the opportunity to mix with alert like-minded people who enjoy doing new things. Nonetheless, drawbacks are also present. First, the British U3A movement has become the victim of its own success in that its triumph in attracting more learners gave rise to issues with locating suitable venues, and enough volunteers to run courses of study and interest groups. Second, Laslett's (1989: 22) criterion that 'no support from the funds of local or central government shall be expected or sought' is debatable. Whilst such a stance renders such U3As at risk from being marginalised and disengaged from potential valuable allies, Freire's (1972) dictum that no learning sphere can ever be politically neutral makes such a claim of political impartiality highly dubious. After all, one of the founders of the British U3A movement was categorical that the U3A in Britain was, from the outset, hinged upon the ideals of 'utopian socialism' (Midwinter, 2007). Finally, whilst it is possible that the autonomy of teaching and learning in the U3As will be impaired if facilitators participate in uniform and standard training courses, it is equally conceivable that they may not have the ability to teach or communicate well. Third age learning diverges from the basic pedagogical and andragogical principles and is embedded in geragogical philosophies and practices (Formosa, 2002; Gómez, 2016). Of course, there are U3As which do not fit either of these two models. Those of special interest include U3As in Russia, China and Taiwan, which emerged neither as part of traditional universities, nor as self-help organisations, but were directly established, managed and financed by government authorities and ministries as part of the countries' official state policy. Although a passionate debate on the pros and cons of such a state of affairs is understandable, the fact that there is no unitary manner as to how U3As have been launched and preserved contributes further to the richness of the third age learning movement. Indeed, despite the idiosyncrasies characterising the various formats of U3As, the evidence paints a picture of a dynamic, flexible, accessible learning movement which is meeting the needs and interests of a rapidly growing number of older adults without the necessity of binding script. Whilst entertainment activities such as

bingo may well remain a favourite option for some elders, it is establishments such as U3As which will be increasingly sought in the coming years considering that each incoming generation holds higher levels of educational attainment and qualifications than the preceding one.

Universities of the Third Age as Vehicles for Active Ageing

As active ageing refers to ‘the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age’—whereby the term ‘active’ refers to ‘continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force’ (World Health Organization, 2002: 12)—it is clear from all chapters in this manuscript that U3As in the European and Asian-Pacific contexts do contribute to the improvement of the levels of active ageing in their respective countries. There are unmistakable health benefits from participating and attending learning programmes at U3As, benefits that can be split into physical and mental well-being. The U3As’ unique blend of learning and social activities places an unorthodox emphasis on autonomy and participation, and hence, countering the ‘decline and loss paradigm’ commonly associated with increasing chronological age. Since the beneficial impacts of joining a U3A traverse both health and social boundaries, U3As accentuate the need for a departure from notions of active ageing in purely productive terms, to one that embraces mental and physical well-being, and social participation. Participation in U3A centres provides members with a renewed focus in their personal lives, which strengthens their mental well-being by bolstering their sense of purpose, self-confidence and self-worth. This is especially valuable to older persons who have not yet come to terms with retirement, who are still experiencing a sense of bereavement and social alienation following the loss of a working day’s structure, and lifelong colleagues and friends. As a recent study reported,

Involvement was described as having focus, and a purpose for the day which ensured mental wellbeing... Learning subjects such as languages and music were described as being beneficial to memory. The opportunity to face new challenges was perceived as having a positive effect on health and wellbeing.

Third Age Trust (2018): 13

The above is far from surprising since a study on the relationship between emotional well-being (operationalised as autonomy, personal growth, control, positive relationships with others, purpose, personal acceptance and generativity) and participation in the São Paulo U3A in Brazil concluded that ‘the students [sic] who had been longer on the program run by the institute studied, exhibited higher levels of subjective and psychological well-being... where the satisfaction and benefits gained [from learning] extend into other areas of life’ (Ordonez, Lima-Silva, & Cachioni, 2011: 224). The chapters herein also point out how for many U3A members, friendship and feeling connected to others were equally beneficial, especially when one

considers the difficulties in forming new friendships following work exit and widowhood, especially for older men and women, respectively. U3As have much potential in permeating members with improved levels of bridging and bonding types of social capital and may arise as an arena of social cohesion by providing mutual support in times of life crisis or difficult life transitions such as in the case of bereavement, sickness or moving house. In the UK, it was reported that as

...most U3A activities take place during the day and on weekdays, participants reflected that it provided a good replacement for the previous work time...joining the U3A was a planned positive step in retirement offering the opportunity to meet new people who were different from those in the workplace...

Third Age Trust (2018): 13

This also means that U3As hold a strategic role in mitigating against loneliness and isolation, as many members offer continuous support and presence to each other on a daily basis. The arising sense of social cohesion is particularly evident when one realises that the U3A movement is an important part of the lifelong education system, a key segment of building a learning and intergenerational society, one of the basic public services enjoyed by civil society, and hence, acting as a channel towards active citizenship in later life. U3As are also key catalysts for active ageing as they succeed in affecting important and far-reaching life changes to members. To cite again the recent study published by the Third Age Trust,

Many participants spoke about people who had been bereaved whilst being part of the U3A. The membership offered support. A phrase used was that the U3A “folded around” the bereaved member, so they are safe in the knowledge that they are part of a group that cares about them. The U3A remains a focal point for those trying to redefine their lives and sometimes themselves in this situation. Several times, the phrase “it saved my life” was used...The same ‘group care’ approach was also evident when sickness was discussed.

Third Age Trust (2018): 13

Finally, the real thrust in favour of active ageing enacted by U3As is witnessed by the centres’ engagement with communities. The Third Age Trust (2018) outlined how U3As in England supported local community halls, libraries, environmental campaigns, art centres, churches, village fetes, dementia support days, as well as music festivals. Another research study reporting on the Choir of the U3A Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia, and the benefits perceived by members undertaking this active music engagement in non-competitive choral singing found that

...participants who are all members of the Choir of the Hawthorn U3A perceive membership of the group to be significant in their lives. Such programmes as the choir that is the focus of this study offer a way for seniors to be involved in an activity that engages and maintains well-being through forming and sustaining relationships within a community singing in a community choir can provide...musical and social experiences for a group of older people active in society. Such physical, mental and social engagement assists older people remain independent and active in the community; thus, delaying the need for residential care.

Joseph and Southcott (2015): 345

Throughout the preceding chapters, this community engagement on behalf of U3As was especially evident in the Australian and Thai contexts. For instance, Lamb

underlined how over time many U3As in Australia engaged with the wider community, by developing relationships with local government councils, local newspapers, radio and television stations, and other older age group organisations in their localities. Moreover, several U3As in Australia have taken some of their activities into retirement villages for the benefit of those residents in care units, aiming to outreach to older persons who are generally not typical members in U3As. Echoing Joseph and Southcott's (2015) sentiments, she concluded that U3A choirs often visit such villages to provide musical entertainment where residents can join in community singalongs. As access to participation in music, dance and art is of particular value to older people, especially those suffering from dementia, and since these activities stimulate feelings of happiness and well-being and open up new channels of communication, the Australian U3A's efforts in favour of community engagement are resulting in direct positive impacts on the quality of life and emotional well-being of older persons residing in rural and pastoral parts of the country. As Richards and colleagues outlined in a previous chapter, in Thailand, the importance of cultural exchanges to spreading the U3A network is exemplified by how the Silpakorn U3A is able to reach a number of different communities, so that locals from separate villages participate in learning programmes or meaningful activities such as cooking, handicraft, dancing, Buddhist practices, singing and folk music. In this way, the Silpakorn U3A was successful in incorporating a number of surrounding communities in both the construction and implementation of its learning ethos and vision. Since people do not age actively in a social vacuum but do so by continuing their participation in social and cultural events, the U3As hold much potential in becoming efficient and effective vehicles that enable citizens to reach higher levels of successful and productive ageing.

Quandaries and Lacunae

Whilst the U3As' beneficial impacts can never be overestimated, it is nevertheless clear from the chapters in this volume that the movement is entrenched within a Parsonian vision of the world—namely a normative social system in which superficially divided groups are united by shared values (Parsons, 1951). Although U3A members do assist and support each other in times of difficulties, problems are always approached—to use Wright Mills' (1959) terms—as 'private troubles' rather than 'public issues'. Moreover, as U3As refrain from engaging in age-related advocacy, they create a 'neutral' space for the practice of older adult learning, which ultimately functions as an arena for the safeguarding and protection of a third age lifestyle. This, in turn, compels the U3A movement to practise 'social closure'—namely an engagement in drawing boundaries, constructing identities and building communities in order to monopolise scarce resources for one's own group, thereby excluding others from using them (Weber, 1978). Although this is mostly unintentional, practices of social closure function to dissuade subaltern older persons from enrolling and participating in U3A learning programmes and social events. The subsequent

subsections highlight the role of U3As in reproducing unequal relations in later life with special emphasis on elitism, gender, racial/ethnic bias, third ageism and internal ageism.

Social class. Researchers have long commented how ‘threatened...by elitism and pastime activism, U3As might indulge in narcissism and escapism and miss altogether the highest vocation they should respond to’ (Philibert, 1984: 57), and how U3As ‘pandered to the cultural pretentious of an aged bourgeoisie who had already learned to play the system’ (Morris, 1984: 136). The situation remained unchanged, and typical U3A members continue to hold higher-than-average levels of socio-economic status. On the one hand, for middle-class older persons, joining U3As means going back to an arena in which they feel confident and self-assured of its development and outcome. Moreover, for middle-class older persons U3A membership becomes a strategy of ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984) in the way that coffee-table books and paintings are used to impress friends and other social viewers. On the other hand, working-class elders are apprehensive to join an organisation with such a ‘heavy’ class baggage in its title. Moreover, the liberal-arts curriculum promoted by most U3As is perceived as alien by working-class older persons, who tend to experience ‘at-risk-poverty’ lifestyles and are more interested in vocational knowledge and practices.

Gender. U3As include gender biases that work against the interests of both men and women. On the one hand, although U3As include a higher percentage of female members, studies showed that they are generally anchored in gender expectations about women’s traditional roles. For instance, whilst male learners are more likely to dominate any discussion even when in the minority, U3As also tend to be characterised by a ‘masculinist’ discourse where women are silenced and made passive through their invisibility (Formosa, 2005). On the other hand, men do not enjoy any preferential treatment since most curricula tend to reflect the interests of females (Formosa, Chetcuti Galea, & Farrugia Bonello, 2014; Formosa, Frago, Jelenc Krašovec, & Tambaum, 2014a, b). For instance, health promotion courses are generally delivered by female tutors with a bias towards women-related health issues such as weight loss and osteoporosis. U3As are yet to latch on to the successes of the Men’s Shed movement which notes how men may not embrace conventional formal learning contexts, yet participate enthusiastically in community organisations—such as sporting and hobby clubs (Golding, 2015)—which can be counteracted by setting male-friendly curricula that attract higher membership rates of older men. It is positive to note that, as illustrated in a previous chapter, the Maltese U3A has taken some mitigating steps and action towards increasing the male membership.

Racial/Ethnic bias. U3A membership, even in large multicultural cities, tends to lack ethnic minorities in its membership body. Finsen and colleagues (2017) argued that this may arise due to the fact that the projected ethos of U3As mirrors the values of the dominant groups in society, so ethnic minorities feel that they do not have the necessary ‘cultural capital’ to participate. This critical perspective was recently substantiated by Ratana-Ubol and Richards (2016: 92) who pointed out that U3As were ultimately created in—and for—a Western context so that there might be ‘some difficulty with or resistance to efforts to link and frame and extend...the U3A

concept specifically [as] an international movement'. The authors proposed that for the Thailand context (and for any other that finds similar resistances or difficulties in framing senior citizen lifelong learning in terms of the U3A concept)

...the term *third age learning* should be preferred...adding a cross-cultural and international dimension to this. Third age learning...helps to cut across the *tradition-modernity divide* and related 'divides' or issues without losing the essential message and attraction of an increasingly significant overall concept - a concept too important to lose because of some cultural issues and semantic dilemmas.

Ratana-Ubol and Richards (2016): 96 - italics in original

Third ageism. Although Lamb in this volume noted how Australian U3As conduct learning sessions in retirement villages, it is ostensible that U3A membership does not generally include older persons with mobility and cognitive difficulties. U3As hinge their outreach work upon Laslett's (1989: 4) definition of the 'third age' as a 'period of personal fulfilment, following the second stage of independence, maturity, responsibility, earning, and saving, and preceding the fourth age of final dependence, decrepitude and death'. Henceforth, sparse effort is made to outreach those persons in the 'fourth age'—namely who are homebound or living in residential care, and thus, unable to reach classroom settings. As Indeed, Robbins-Ruszkowski (2017: 2017–8) articulated, 'despite attending UTAs in two cities over a period of four years, I never saw anyone in a wheelchair. Very few people used a cane. All meetings were held in university spaces across the cities, to which people arrived by bus and tram'. This is problematic because both young-old persons with early-onset complications from strokes, diabetes and neurological diseases and old-old persons with mobility and mental challenges may still harbour learning needs and interests (Formosa & Cassar, forthcoming). Although one notes some efforts to outreach homebound older persons through online strategies, U3As generally overlook how learning opportunities can positively impact the personal and social development of frail older people, as well as older persons with dementia.

Internal ageism. Many U3A members use the learning prospects and the arising camaraderie at centres as strategies to resist, and some even to deny their transition into ageing lives. Certainly, U3As may be seen as vehicles through which middle-class and able-bodied older persons mitigate against what Brown (n.d.) terms as 'oldering'—namely a type of labelling, a specific form of Foucault's (1982) objectification, a process whereby older persons make themselves subjects, accepting inferior status and ageist discrimination. Whilst such a stance may seem a positive one from an advocacy point of view, it is also somewhat detrimental. Reminiscent of Wilinska's (2012) research, most U3As in European and Asian-Pacific milieus strive to reject the idea of 'old age' rather than resisting ageist discourses, rarely outreaching older peers who have little in common with typical U3A members, and hence, playing only a minor role, if any, in changing the social circumstances of older citizens. In Karpf's (2014: 42) words, U3As are 'just gerontophobia in its latest carnation', just like when the 'magazine articles that tell you "How to Look Fabulous At Fifty"...they encourage you to deal with prejudice not by challenging it but by trying not to look old'. Indeed, 'inasmuch as U3As promote an increasingly valued

cultural model of aging, it is necessary to highlight the hidden ways that they can reproduce existing inequalities' (Robbins-Ruszkowski, 2017: 2019).

Renewing Universities of the Third Age

As the U3A movement surpasses its 45th year of operation, its key challenge is two-pronged. The first is for U3As to remain relevant and attuned to the life-world of present and incoming older cohorts. The U3A movement generally overlooks how incoming older cohorts are characterised by diverse generational dispositions when compared to those held by older adults during the early 1970s and 1980s when Vellas and Laslett conceptualised and launched their Francophone and Anglophone U3A versions. Despite its promise, the notions of 'activity theory' and 'active ageing' are fast becoming inadequate to capture the complexity of older persons' lives in the face of changing family dynamics, increasing individualisation, the all-encompassing online world, and a burgeoning silver industry (Moody & Sasser, 2014). The U3A movement includes no impassable shield against what is termed as structural lag—namely a failing on behalf of structural arrangements to meet or be relevant to the needs of a large proportion of the clientele they are supposedly serving (Riley & Riley, 1994). In their uncritical espousal of the benefits of active ageing and older adult learning, U3As are running the risk of ignoring how daily lives in the third age are changing over time. Indeed, U3As must reflect on how the mantra of 'keeping active' has turned into a moral imperative, and need to heed Katz's (2000) advice to unpack a further notion of learning in relation to later life. This may mean going beyond the safe waters of 'individualised' learning for personal satisfaction, to build bridges with the realms of productive, positive and spiritual ageing. Older persons are becoming less amenable to be treated as empty receptacles for the deposit of knowledge, and strive to make significant economic contributions to society, especially in terms of employment, volunteering, caregiving and formal accredited education (Foster & Walker, 2015). The fact that a record number of older persons are choosing to remain in the workforce for much longer than previously indicates the need to understand older lives differently. At the same time, retirement is no longer merely the onset of social and cognitive finitude, and ageing is now perceived to offer the chance of making sense of persons' lives. As Cohen (2005) argued, retirement can represent a liberation phase, when people feel a desire to experiment, innovate and skirt around social conventions to explore new paths to creativity. Finally, older persons are rebutting the old adage that no reference to ageing as such, or increasing birthdays, should be made in elder learning. Scholars and learning facilitators such as Moody (1990) and Russell (2008) have explored the possibilities of 'transcendental' learning through which older adults reflect on their lives and repair relationships, seek to understand their role in the world and acknowledge their impending death. The extent to which U3As must undergo an inclusive and extensive renewal process becomes even more warranted when one considers the vast range of older adult lifestyles in late modern societies. These range from (i) golden years where relaxing

time remains the dominant preoccupation; (ii) neo-golden years in which the emphasis is on pursuing self-development; (iii) portfolio life where the individual seeks a balance between work, family responsibilities, leisure pursuits and volunteering; (iv) second career in a new employment arena; and (v) extension of a midlife career where an individual continues his/her existing career as long as possible (Kidahashi & Manheimer, 2009). In view of such a wide diversity of lifestyles, Withnall (2010) argued persuasively that the concept of lifelong learning really has no practical future on account of the need to develop any all-embracing framework within which dissimilar challenges could be addressed. Instead, she believed that

...it is more important to think in terms of 'longlife learning', a concept that would encompass a whole range of economic, democratic, personal and other concerns throughout the life course whilst highlighting the enormous impact of demographic trends both now and in the future. Learning would come to be recognised in all its different forms at all ages and would contribute not just to economic progress and social inclusiveness but to people's desires for personal development and creativity as they grow older. Such learning would not necessarily be linear or even cumulative in the sense of building up a clearly defined bank of knowledge and skills, but it would allow for a personal exploration that makes sense at an individual level and would be enduring and connective...

Withnall (2012): 663

The second challenge refers to the required practical and pragmatic strategies to steer the U3A ethos away from one of 'lifelong learning' and towards a 'longlife learning' one. This goal necessitates four concurrent strategies.

Overcoming French-British polarities. Contrary to what is generally assumed, learning as an 'end-in-itself' and learning for educational accreditation are not necessarily incompatible and may even be complimentary. Whilst many older adults emboldened by their U3A experience go on to a tertiary educational programme, numerous older adults in tertiary education enrol in U3As (Formosa, 2014). Rather than entrenching the U3A experience in an absolutist vision—advocating either strict autonomy or complete integration with traditional universities—there is much potential in seeking partnerships with tertiary educational sectors, government agencies, local authorities and non-governmental organisations. The chapters in this volume noted many such partnerships which resulted in a range of benefits, from rent-free premises which allowed low-cost fees to easy access for invited speakers and members to intergenerational solidarity. However, the possibility that U3As become absorbed as part of the silver industry, along with culture and travel, and an opposition to a 'commodified', needs to be resisted as this can blur the line between humanist and emancipatory learning with commercially run educational-travel enterprises (Moody, 2004).

Quality of learning, instruction and curricula. The precise contribution of learning in U3As to an empowerment and emancipatory agenda remains elusive. One must ask whether learners at U3A centres are too docile, too passive, as though listening alone were enough. This warrants a learning environment in which 'learners who are able to take control and direct learning...who, in their daily lives, know how to put into practice learning they have undertaken' (Gladdish, 2010: 15). The quality of instruction is also to be put under scrutiny. Facilitators should enable older

adults to foster the control that they may be consciously or subconsciously lacking through encouragement to take responsibility for their learning by choosing those methods and resources by which they want to learn. Learning in later life thrives on collaboration and partnership, characterised by ‘co-operative work’ between tutors and learners. Moreover, U3As must not assume that older learners continue living in some bygone world. Rather, e-learning has become increasingly popular in later life as it offers the opportunity for older learners to access information and communicate with others when and if they want to. For U3As to continue being relevant to contemporary elders, centres must make more effort to embed their learning strategies in the web 2.0 revolution, which contrary to its predecessor uses interactive tools—ranging from Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, online journals, to virtual picture databases—to offer limitless possibilities for an interactive, empowering and participatory form of older adult learning. The curriculum at U3As should be as bold and original as possible, negotiated with and even determined by the varied interests of learners. In this respect, there is a real urgency for U3As to include non-liberal and health-related areas of learning such as financial literacy and caregiving, as well as environmental, botanical and zoological studies.

Social inclusion. U3As include a relative absence of older men, older adults living in rural areas, older persons from working-class backgrounds, ethnic minorities and peers with mobility and cognitive challenges. Underlying reasons for such non-participation generally range from a lack of information, situational barriers such as caregiving duties, institutional barriers such as the middle-class and ethnocentric atmosphere of learning centres, and dispositional barriers such as negative attitudes towards learning in general (Formosa, 2016). Hence, special targeting and outreach strategies, bottom-up consultation and negotiation, and the usage of non-participants’ environments, issues and concerns for programme development are warranted if U3As are to reach higher and more equitable levels of social inclusion. Distinct strategies may include providing adequate transport facilities to and back from the learning centres, and holding sessions in learners’ residences, community halls, sports venues and residential long-term care facilities. Incorporating Men’s Sheds as part of U3As that offer courses such as restoring furniture, woodworking, mechanics and other material skills will also serve to attract higher numbers of older men to U3As.

To conclude this chapter and book, one can never overemphasise the need for further research that continues mapping the national travails of the international U3A movement. Space limitations meant that it was not possible to include chapters on a number of established U3As in Europe and Asia—such as those in Belgium, Finland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Luxembourg, Greece, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Norway, India, Japan, Nepal and Singapore, amongst others. Attention must also be bestowed on other continents, especially South America, where the U3A movement is much alive and kicking. Space limitations also meant that the contemporary interface between U3As and novel communication technologies was not tackled in this text. Compared with the humungous nature of the U3A movement, and extensive work performed by both volunteers and salaried workers to keep U3As afloat, it is unfortunate that academic deliberations on this movement remain rela-

tively sparse. It is sincerely hoped that this publication serves as a catalyst for the planning and carrying out of further theoretical and empirical research work on the U3A movement.

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Marvin Formosa is Associate Professor of Gerontology at the University of Malta where he is Head of the Department of Gerontology and Dementia Studies, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, and contributes to teaching on active ageing, transformative ageing policy, and educational gerontology. He holds the posts of Chairperson of the National Commission for Active Ageing (Malta), Rector's Delegate for the University of the Third Age (Malta), and Director of the International Institute on Ageing, United Nations, Malta (INIA). He directed a number of international training programmes in gerontology, geriatrics and dementia care in the Philippines, China, India, Turkey, Malaysia, Belarus, Kenya, Argentina, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation. He has published extensively across a range of interests, most notably on active ageing, critical gerontology, Universities of the Third Age and older adult learning. Recent publications included *International perspectives on older adult education* (with Brian Findsen, 2016), *Population ageing in Turkey* (with Yeşim Gökçe Kutsal, 2017), and *Active and healthy ageing: Gerontological and geriatric inquiries* (2018). He holds the posts of Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries, Country Team Leader (Malta) of the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), and President of the Maltese Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics.