

U3A Asia Pacific Alliance Melbourne 14-15th October, 2013

Professor Francois Vellas (Professor of International Tourism Economics at the University of Toulouse, France)

http://www.univ-Paris1.fr/fileadmin/IREST/Colloques/Fran%C3%A7oisVELLAS_Toulouse.pdf

Speaking with a delightful accent and turn of phrase, Professor Vellas talked about the beginnings of U3A in France, an initiative of his father, in 1974-5 in France. A need was seen by newly retired seniors who found few educational options open to them. There were some social options which, whilst good, offered nothing educationally. The first idea was to use academic resources to mix younger and older people, and both block isolation and create a social mix using the same premises.

There were three main aims:

1. Education – encompassing economics, political ideas, geography, history, etc, the aim was to provide the best possible education at university level, hence the name U3A
2. Physical Training & Sports – to use facilities to encourage an interest in and maintenance of health through physical activity.
3. Research – Seniors could assist in Geriatric University Research

Gradually the idea caught on in other countries, the main target being education. An international organisation was formed approximately two years later: <http://www.aiu3a.com/welcome.html> The mutual aims were to promote life-long learning, research and exchange of activities and ideas using established networks. There are now over 3,000 U3As world-wide and 2.5 million senior students. The current IAUTA board consists of members from Chile, Costa Rica, Poland, UK, Slovakia, China, France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, and Sweden. Conferences are held in different regions on different topics. There is an Educational Council and a Scientific Council, and matters which engage these relate to how to develop U3As and encompass their current needs – e.g. there are many universities in emerging countries and so how can the least-developed countries cater for their needs. A charter for U3As is being developed and will be released in June 2014 – it will be available to use as a reference point to make U3As special; it is not prescriptive. Celebrations of the 40th anniversary of U3A will be in France on 3-5 June, 2014; everyone welcome.

Cliff Picton (University Ombudsman Latrobe University)

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/about/management/organisation/ombudsman>

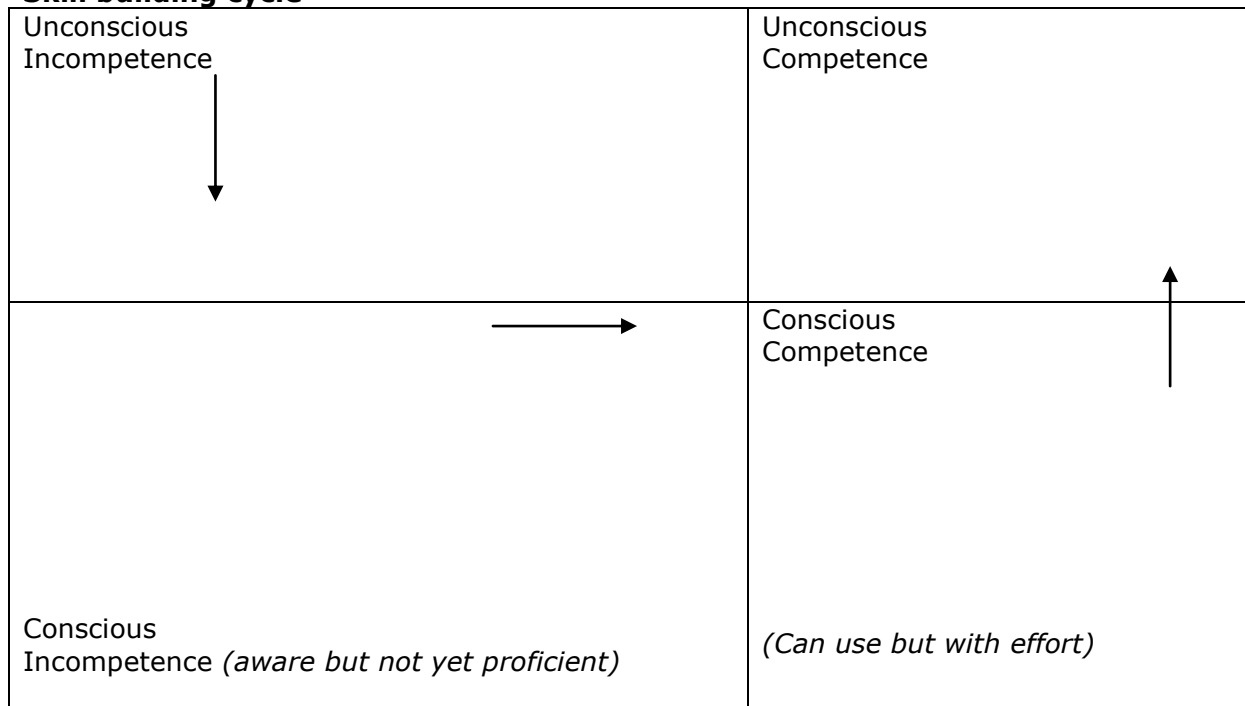
Cliff spoke about the origins of U3As in Australia. He taught gerontology at Leeds University in the 1970s prior to moving to Australia; he knew that in the UK social workers were concerned about isolation and lack of stimulation for older people. In July 1984 a public meeting was held in Melbourne to discuss options for seniors, and participants were encouraged to find solutions to move forward in ways which were best suited to their communities. U3A Melbourne was soon formed, followed by Hawthorn, Monash and Ringwood; there are now 100 U3As in Victoria. Some were supported by local Government although the then Minister for Education, Susan Ryan, was concerned about the use of the term 'university'. 1988 Bicentennial money aided some groups to be formed. Groups were forming in China around this time also. In Australia the Council for the Aging was used to spread the word to other states, with Perth then Adelaide coming on board; interestingly NSW was the last state (Victoria v NSW rivalry?).

"Intellectual curiosity gives purpose to life", I am not sure who said it, but it rings true. Seemingly there is no end to one's capacity to learn or share and exchange ideas, etc; one mustn't become complacent. Where are the multi-cultural aspects of our society shown in U3As?

There is a need to safeguard the independence of each organisation; national and international connections are good but they shouldn't dominate. The world is changing; people are working longer, women are playing a bigger managerial role, governments need to recognise the needs of the older generation, and U3As are in a good position to offer information or place submissions when relevant. When one looks at the state of the world, and the prominence war has, older people should show that there is a different way, and that war is not a solution. Share your U3As achievements, art work, writing, etc.

Jill Noble (author, facilitator, trainer)

Skill building cycle



Discussing ideas and socialising are important facets of informal learning at U3A, helping to tackle depression, isolation and low self esteem. It benefits memory and confidence, builds on skills and keeps the brain active. The more the brain is used, the more brain cells are produced and the more we think, the better the brain functions. 'Brain plasticity' – the brain can change at any age.

Exercises to help the brain:

- Move your body – exercise!
- Eat well - correct nutrition and calories
- Keep learning – travel, go to new places even locally, meet new people, talk, read.
- Challenge your brain – extend, push, time yourself then do better
- Sleep well – a routine can help
- Engage your senses – smell the flowers, use hands, ears, eyes – sit in a different place, clean teeth with a different hand, walk/drive a different route.

Retirement ends one career but you can have an 'encore' career!

Gill Walker (Senior position in Advertising)

Quoting Roy Morgan statistics, said there are more older folk than younger in country areas. Gardening is a high interest, and she asked how this featured in U3A programs. Suggested that intergenerational events e.g. Farmers' Markets, Carols by Candlelight, and technology learning are all good for linking and creating a sense of community and understanding.

Advertising needs to be through newspapers, TV or direct – you can't force all to use the Internet, a fact Governments need to recognise.

Points for good advertising should include:

- Good design which is ageless (bad design can be ageist). Watch colour combinations to ensure visibility, make contrast maximum
- Avoid stereotypes
- Avoid type/text over photographs, make it clear
- Use age-sensitive models
- Showing a group works better than showing couples
- Be transgenerational

To attract new members:

- Understand how members hear about U3A, use these sources
- Make business alliances with organisations who want to reach members
- Reach those still employed so they can think ahead
- Cross pollinate, don't be elitist
- First impressions count, provide welcome packs
- Survey to encourage continual engagement

Key Question – Would you recommend our organisation to a friend? Score from 1 to 10. In her take on scoring, those who give 9 or 10 are promoters, those who give 7 or 8 are passive, 0 to 6 are detractors and could well leave.

Provide renewal options from 12 months to 3-5 years to encourage continuity.

Tom Holloway/ Di Delchau (Tom spearheads World U3A, Di Online U3A)

Tom spends six months per year in Oxford, and six months in Hyderabad, promotes the use of Skype, and believes that an audio keyboard is not far away. He aims to promote the Asia Pacific Alliance and encourage world-wide connections through <http://www.worldu3a.org/> and <http://www.myu3a.org/>

Di spoke about the benefits of Online U3A for those unable to attend F2F due to health, isolation, careers, etc: <http://www.u3aonline.org.au/> She explained that this group was set up following a Federal Grant during the Year of the Older Person with the assistance of Griffith University, QLD. Since 2011 the site has become independent but is still hosted by Griffith.

A F2F U3A can access the courses available by applying for a site licence costing \$20 for 12 months. They then create their own username & password for members. Individuals can become a member of U3A Online and access both courses and discussion forums for an annual fee of \$25, organisations for an annual fee of \$15.

Rowena Allen (Director of her own company, Collective Impact)

She talked about the impact of closures such as SPC, where older folk who had been unskilled workers yet had been with the company for many years were left rudderless and in need of not just employment/activity, but also education as they had no qualifications. School drop-outs often want to re-engage in education when older or when having their own family.

She asked, "How much do we share our knowledge across age groups in our community?"

Contributing again after retirement can assist 'wellness'.

Karen Phillips (QLD To me the most inspirational speaker of the conference) Karen is described as *one of Australia's most sought after strategists in brand management, client communications and team improvement. She has worked with some of the world's leading brands across a diverse range of industries and offers a rare knowledge and understanding of the multi-levels of communication, brand management, online maximisation and client connections. Specialising in training organisations how to effectively manage clients, build brand presence and cultivate staff*

momentum, Karen communicates with her clients in an interactive and highly effective way to produce direct results.

Karen's seamless mix of energy, interaction, humour and expertise has made her one of Australia's most sought after presenters, and trainers.

Karen says there is so much more to do! She quoted, 'It's not the strongest nor the most intelligent who survives – it is the one most capable to change' (source unknown).

She asked, "Do you do what is right for others or do you follow your own destiny, aspirations, dreams?" Life can begin at any age.

She spoke of INFOBESITY – a world obsessed with information obesity so much so that one can suffer from IFS – Information Fatigue Syndrome. Don't just take on knowledge, do something with it; life isn't about finding yourself - it is about creating yourself. She used Turia Pitt <http://turiapitt.com/> as an example of someone who had been given every reason to give up, but is out there creating a new life for herself.

Karen believes that in every one of us there is something special we can do and says that whatever we do we need to love it so that we can do great work. **There is no last chapter, there is just a journey.**

If you don't believe you can, you won't. Find your profound purpose for being here; there is always a way through or a way round.

Panels

There were a number of panels on the second day including one featuring representatives from overseas countries and one representing all Australian States, the latter to which I was asked to contribute.

Points arising from panels:

Overseas representatives *(India was present but not at this part of the conference)*

- The UK Alliance has had exchanges with the Polish Alliance which was very interesting for all participants, there are over 300,000 U3A members in the UK. An interesting debate was organised between U3A members and youth (17-18yr olds) on whose responsibility are the aged – voluntary agencies, the government or family.
- Singapore began in 2011 and started as a Society for Continued Education, but they are unused to volunteerism and have been amazed with what they have seen in Australia as this concept is not common in Singapore. The country's GDP has increased but not its ability to socialise people so they are keen to look at this. U3A began 12-15mths ago and there are now 250 U3A members. They have 5 foci – Finances & Health/Personal Growth/Relationships/Hobbies (few have them) and Intellectual Pursuits.
- Nepal – Kathmandu's main message is to promote cross-generational learning and to encourage all to attend the next Conference in August 2014 in Kathmandu to learn more!
- New Zealand – Founded in 1989 in Auckland, 64 groups mostly centred around Auckland, Wellington & Christchurch. The group Sylvia (their rep) attends in Auckland meets monthly with a guest lecturer, then their sub-groups which are of approx 15 meet the other weeks in someone's home and each member contributes to the topic they have decided on. E.g. Sylvia is in a Geography focused group and currently their topic is islands of the Pacific so sections are divided between members and each is encouraged to research and contribute with 3 a week on matters such as cities/transport/natural features etc.
- France – a mix of groups attached to Universities and those not so and whose operation would be similar to in Australia. They also do summer holiday programs in popular resort areas and currently are in partnership with Belgium presenting to aged prisoners.

Australian States

Attention was drawn to the last Alliance newsletter available to everyone interested at and which includes a report from the last Australian Alliance Meeting in Toowoomba in April.

Most state reps said they were expanding on the reports available in this newsletter. <http://www.u3aaa.org/>

- QLD is growing steadily with a 30% increase in membership over the past 12mths.
- Victoria seems to be the largest with 100 U3A groups and representatives from across the state who gathered to prepare for this conference. They are celebrating their 25th anniversary this year.
- SA is struggling a little but has 18 out of 20 groups included in their Alliance. They are looking at ways to market their groups and attract more members.
- NSW is steadily growing and they had their state conference this year in Armidale. They are working to encourage the formation of groups in many regional centres.
- ACT is keen to recruit new committee members as those serving currently have been for some time. They are meeting with the University of Canberra to see how the 2 can work together.
- Western Australia is flourishing in several regional areas and obtained a grant from the Lotteries Commission to stage a film making course in Perth. Currently Peter Flanagan from WA is the Editor of the Australian Alliance Newsletter.

I gave a report from Tasmania, the only state currently without an Alliance, which was received with much interest. Thanks to those who assisted me with material I was able to indicate that membership as a % of population is actually good and whilst in the south groups meet under a U3A banner, in the north there are similar groups e.g. School for Seniors Launceston who provide some similar options under a different banner. I explained the similarities of our program organisation and offerings but also tried to indicate how each of our groups aimed to reflect membership needs and interest giving an example from each:

- Hobart – strong academic program running across 4 days.
- Glenorchy – hosting a library of books, DVDs, jigsaws
- Cygnet – running a spectacular garden visit program
- Tasman – small but keen, interested in Online U3A
- Kingborough – Shared Sunday lunch & Coffee groups
- Clarence – utilised some of *The Great Courses* to provide Art options

As many U3As operate a similar program structure to here it was our little snippets of difference that apparently caught interest and several questions to me later.