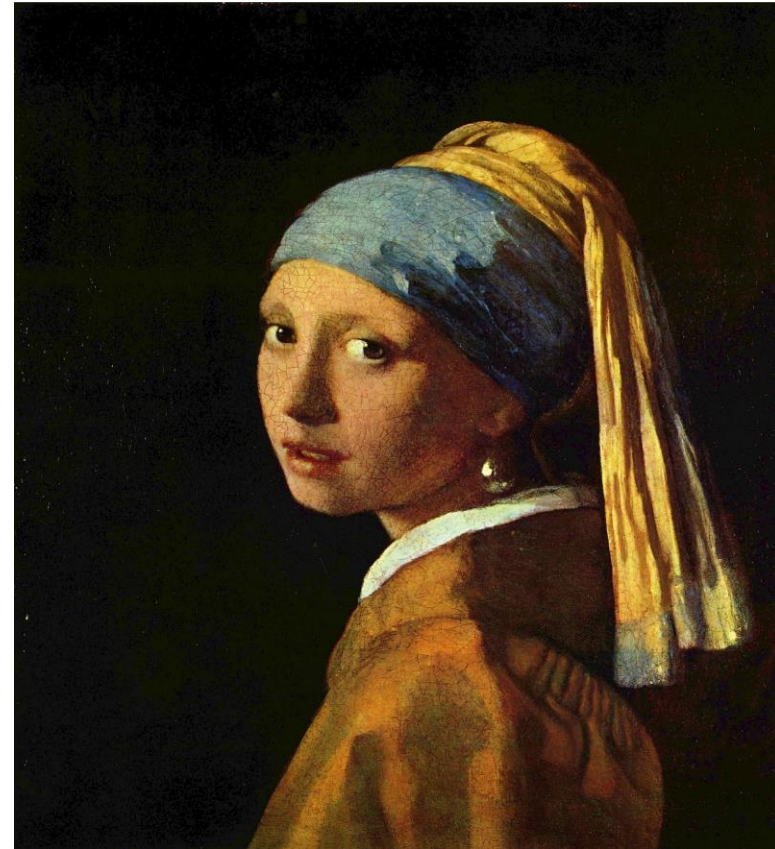


# Visually Connect – Older Adults’ Reflections around a Programme of Visual Art Dialogues

*The Girl with the Pearl Earring (ca. 1665)*  
*Jan Vermeer van Delft*



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# Research

To investigate older adult participation in a learning programme and the effect reproductions of visual art had on the **kind of learning** experienced:

- learning in terms of personal gains and identity capital
- learning in terms of the social/peer interactions
- learning in terms of the exposure to the projected images of the medium of visual arts shown.

Addressed a lacuna in **fourth age learning, outside of formal settings** and within a **residential home**.

*Consistent demographic increase in ageing, calls for radically “**new social and educational responses**”, as well as “**engaged and active ageing for all**” (Istance, 2015, p. 225).*



# Learning in Fourth Age and Geragogy

EC - *Adult Learning: It is Never Too Late to Learn* (Commission of the European Communities, 2006).

Soulsby's Fourth Age Report Summary (2000) - group remained an often neglected area up to the last years. An area that in the main has not yet established clear guidelines of training and delivery (Formosa, 2012c) and that fourth age learning opportunities locally remain currently limited (Formosa, 2000).

Fourth age learning opportunities are usually described in terms of a major feature: **participation and socialization.**

**Geragogy** is now a recognized term associated with teaching and learning specifically in later life (Findsen & Formosa, 2011) although there is no uniform definition of the term (Bubolz-Lutz et al., 2010). This field of study tries to **research the best methodologies and best practices** used in teaching older adults (Formosa, 2012a, 2012b).

Bubolz-Lutz et al. (2010) elaborated that in speaking about the establishment of these learning processes, two viewpoints have to be borne in mind:

- the perspective of the older adults themselves (education *for* the older adults)
- perspective of anyone working with them (training for working *with* older adults).



*Mona Lisa (c. 1503-1506)*  
*Leonardo da Vinci*



*The Stonebreakers (1849)*  
*Gustav Courbet*



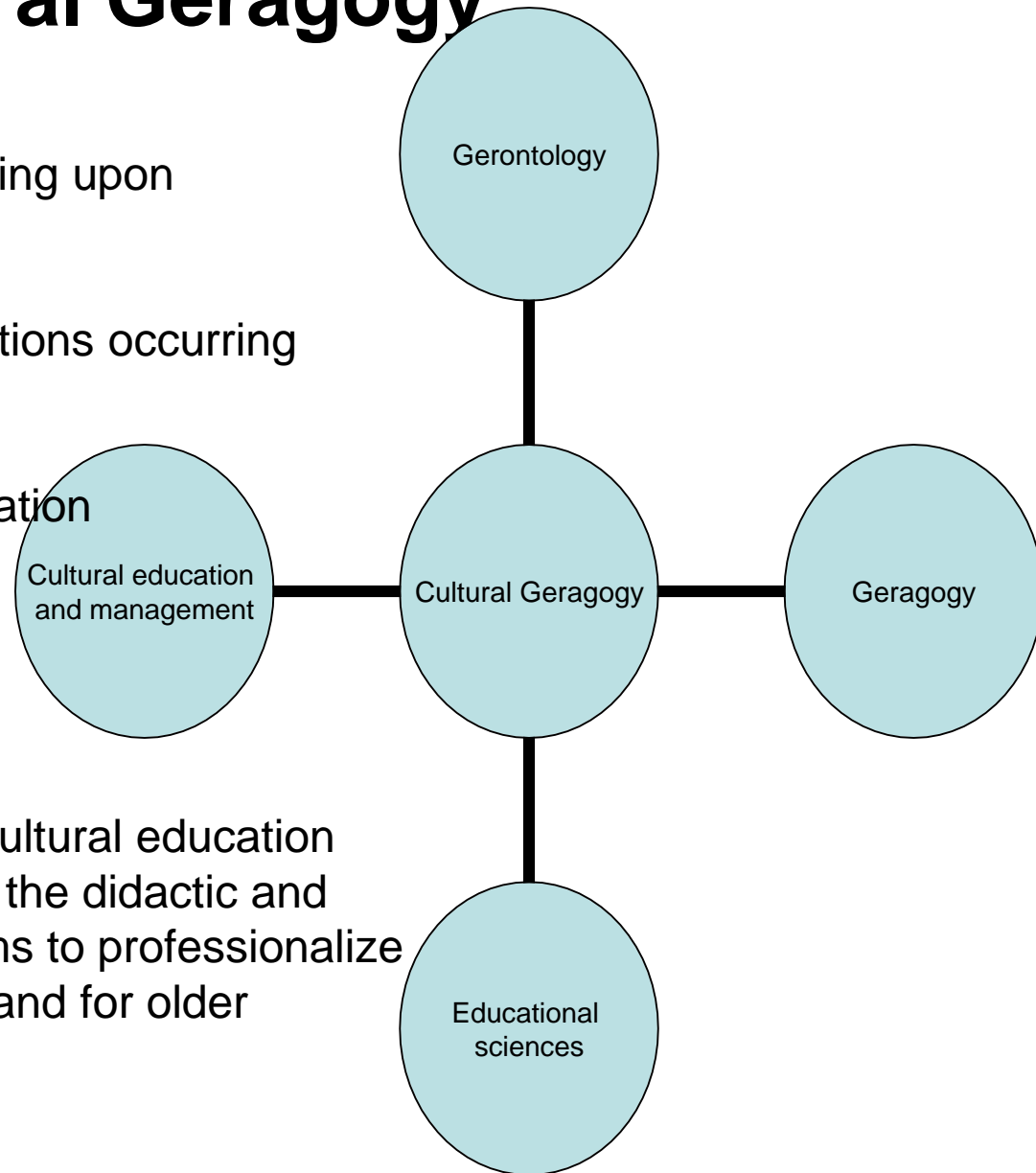
# Cultural Geragogy

Relatively new discipline building upon other disciplines...

Expanding field with collaborations occurring across European countries.

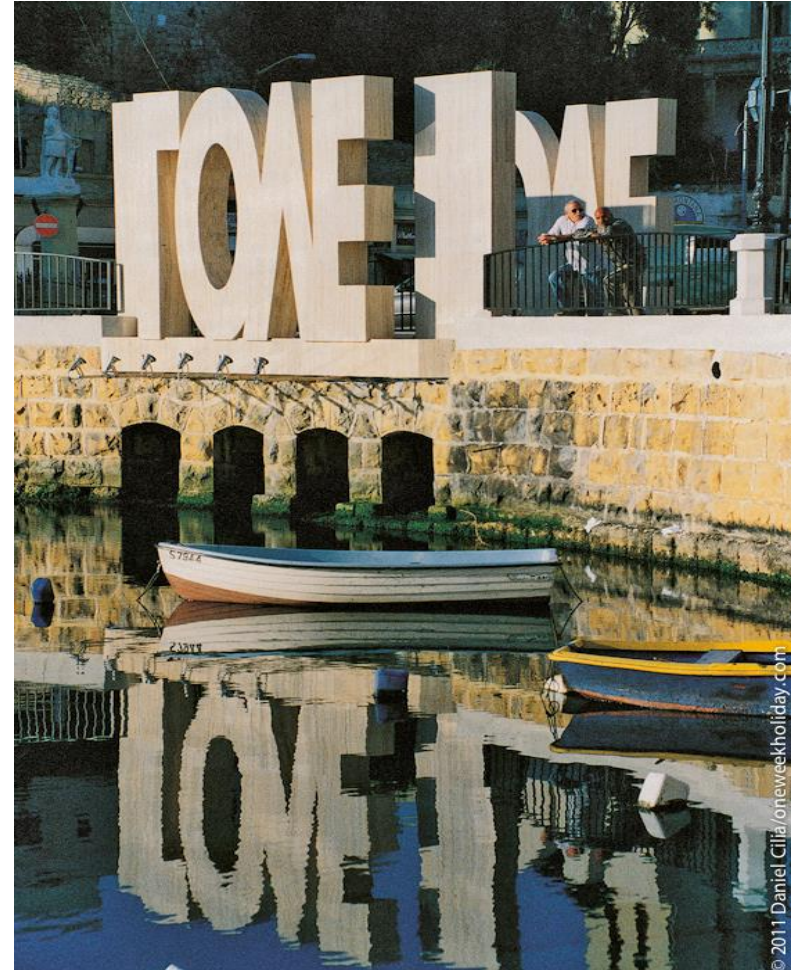
Cultural education via participation in arts and culture in later life is a key element to social inclusion, quality of life and wellbeing of older adults.

Seeks to address matters of cultural education in older adults and to address the didactic and methodological questions. Aims to professionalize artistic and cultural work with and for older adults.





*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose (1886)*  
*John Singer Sargent*



*Love Statue (2002)*  
*Richard England*



# Benefits of the Arts

Benefits...now cover a much wider range..., including cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral, and health benefits at the individual level, and social and economic benefits at the community level (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004, p. 29).

Systematic review of the research literature commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation Edinburgh on the impact of arts participation on older individuals, the communities in which they live and on societal perceptions of older people and ageing showed that the beneficial impact of participatory arts in terms of mental and physical wellbeing is evident at the individual, community and societal levels (McLean, Woodhouse, Goldie, Chylarova, & Williamson, T., 2011).

## Visual Art Benefits

- Environmental enrichment stimulated conversations and social interaction (Wikström, Westerlund and Erkkilä (2012)
- Apart from contributing to emotional wellbeing, visual stimulation could possibly help to prevent ill health too (Wikström, Theorell & Sandström, 1993)
- Engagement with contemporary visual art, created meanings and facilitated identity processes which contributed to participants' wellbeing and self-esteem (Newman, Goulding & Whitehead, 2014, 2012).
- Link between the programme and an increased amount of social interaction (Wikström, 2002)
- Dialogues became more experiential and knowledge-based (Wikström, 2000).





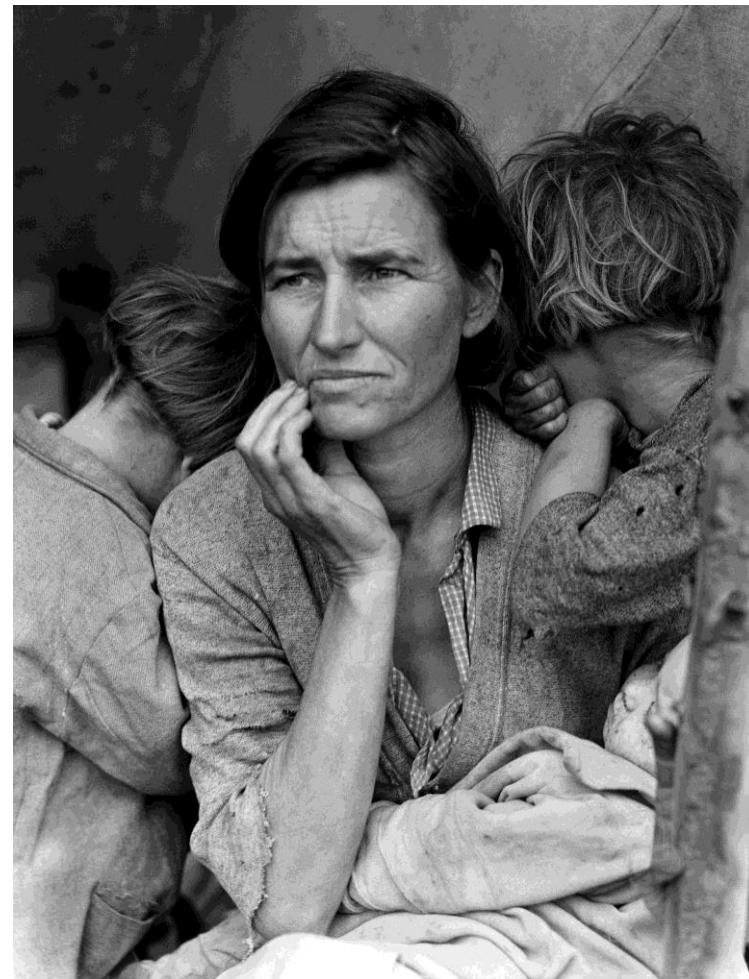
# Methodology

- Qualitative study using Action Research
- Method:
  - Non-probability sampling used for participant selection
  - Eligibility criteria
  - 7 week programme covering a number of topics (ex. childhood, love, spirituality)

Various methods for data collection and analysis:

- initial individual exploratory meetings
- observations
- reflective journal entries
- final focus group

Coding (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010) used.



*Migrant Woman (1932)*  
*Dorothea Lange*



# Demographic data

Pseudonym	Age	Educational Level	Previous Occupation	Previous attendance at art courses	Previous attendance at cultural activities
Leo	85	Secondary	Sergeant	No	No
Gina	92	Secondary not completed	Clerk (protection office) + HW	No	Yes
Pat	85	No schooling	Au pair + HW	No	No
Joel	70	Primary	Waiter	No	No
Mona	71	Secondary	Hairdresser	No	No
John	77	Primary	Electrician + Plumber	No	Yes
Cynthia	75	Secondary	Domestic + HW	No	No
Johann	81	Primary	Shop attendant	No	No
Omar	84	Tertiary	Architect + legal procurator	No	Yes
Martha	87	Primary	HW	No	Yes



# Six Emergent Themes

Learning in terms of the main goal occurred via the themes which emerged. Overlap between learning in themes occurred.

Theme 1	Reminiscence
Theme 2	Intergenerational and 'intra'-generational learning
Theme 3	Visual art dialogues as springboard for more contemporary issues
Theme 4	Visual art dialogues encourage appreciation of art
Theme 5	Visual art as a channel to dialogue and socialization
Theme 6	Stimulation of cognitive abilities



# Significance of study

- Contributes to geragogical research and is pertinent at European level (Long Live Arts Manifesto, 2016).
- Advances understanding of exposure of older adults with limited cultural capital to reproductions of VA and their feelings of learning involved.
- Provides a 'widening participation' agenda (Formosa 2011a)
- In line with the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing (2014-2020) which also targeted older adult participation in society, a subheading of which was older adult learning.

## Recommendations

- Practice issues
- Older adult learners
- Policy

*Birth of Venus (ca. 1482)  
Sandro Botticelli*





# Present and Future Challenges...

- What challenges might an increasing number of fourth agers pose?
- What is the challenge of increasing awareness of healthy aging, AA and well-being and increasing awareness of QOL?
- How can we challenge ourselves to view older adults differently?
- How can we challenge ourselves to stir away from a purely medical model of care?
- Can we challenge ourselves to really conceive of older adults as having the potential of being creative?
- Do we truly believe older adults as capable of learning? Can we challenge ourselves to provide such learning opportunities across the settings we work in?
- Can we challenge ourselves to incorporate arts into gerontological and geriatric care provision?

Should we really be focusing here on **cultural geragogy** as well?

*'The arts can help meet major **challenges** facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health. (All Parliamentary Group on Arts Health and Wellbeing UK, 2017).*



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