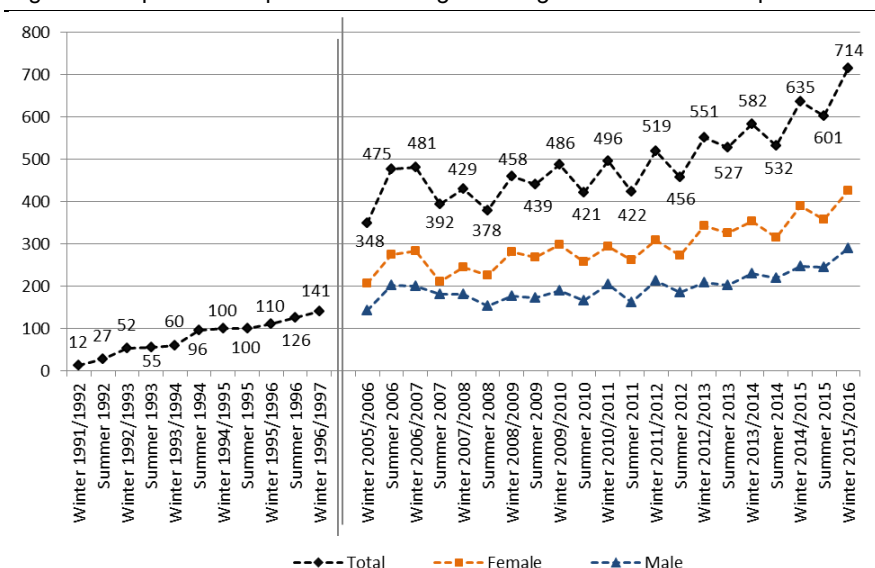


7. SENIOR STUDENTS SURVEY

7.1. Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg

Lifelong Learning 50+ has been offered at the Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg for over 20 years and is focused at senior adults who would like to be engaged with science.

Fig. 1 Participant development of *Lifelong Learning 50+* – absolute frequencies



Source: *Lifelong Learning 50+* at the Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg

The concept of *Lifelong Learning 50+* has been integrated at the Education and Media Research Department, with focus on Continuous Education at the Institute of Science Education, Faculty of Human Sciences. The program is open to all 50+ adults interested in continuous education and lifelong learning. Secondary school diploma is not required. *Lifelong Learning 50+* can be enrolled with a visitor status, which allows participation in public lectures offered by all faculties. Since 2004 project-based work has been employed and become a strong focus of the program. The objective was to bring together students of various ages and engaged them in collaborative research. In this way the organizers bring to life the motto of Senior Studies "Young and elderly

study together" and this is still our requirement today. Since the beginning of *Lifelong Learning 50+* the number of participants has steadily been increasing (see Fig. 1). At the very beginning, during the Winter Semester 1991/92, there were 12 people enrolled. 25 years later, the provisional peak has been reached during the Winter Semester 2015/16, with a participation quota of 718 people. In order to supply tailored, group-oriented offers and intensify collaborative work according among program participants, based on a variety of interests, several studies have been carried out. In the following contribution a survey on senior students from the Summer Semester 2014 will be presented.

Detailed findings are accessible in: Freymark, Olaf (ed.): *Continuous Science Education for Adults. Past - Present - Future, Dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Lifelong Learning 50+*, Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg, p. 17-43.

a) Rationale and Methodological Aspects

The following issues and topic areas which provide data about the current situation of senior education at the Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg as well as specific indicators for an in-depth development of *Lifelong Learning 50+* are crucial to the study:

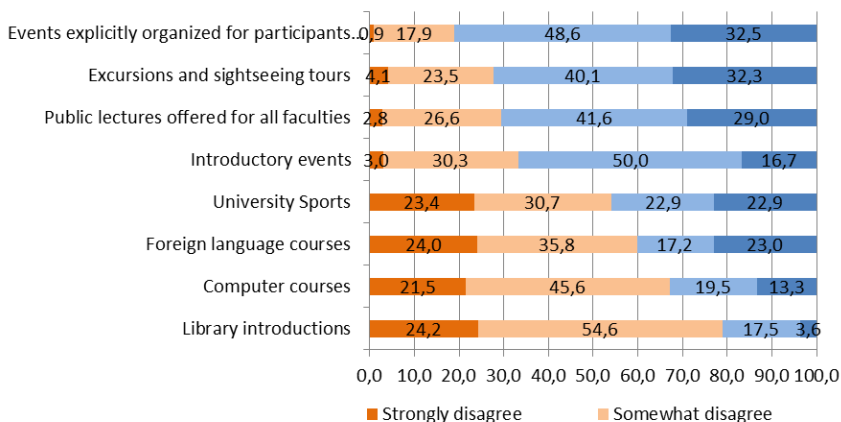
- How program participants rate the educational offer for senior students?
- What reasons motivate them to attend the program and what is their particular interest?
- What kind of program aspects make them feel satisfied and which improvements do they wish?

The quantitative survey has been designed using partially standardized questionnaires. Each questionnaire comprises four pages and can be answered in ca. 10 minutes. In the learning program, all *Lifelong Learning 50+* participants from the Summer Semester 2014 were targeted to be involved. The survey had been announced at Semester inauguration. Questionnaires were issued by the *Lifelong Learning 50+* office and distributed during the enrollment procedure, particularly at well attended events; the questionnaires could be returned personally or dropped in the mailbox. In addition to that, a round mail was sent via mailing lists of senior students to all participants. 247 from 532 enrolled senior students actively participated in the survey, which corresponds to ca. 46%.

b) Selected Results

The respondents were mostly interested in special events, trips and visits and open lectures at all faculties. More than half of all respondents clearly expressed their interests (see fig. 2). The introductory events which mark the beginning of Summer and Winter Semesters usually are accompanied by thematic lectures, match with the interests of well two-thirds of the respondents. Traditional academic forms, e.g. lectures and seminars, foreign language courses, computer courses and library introductions were estimated as less interesting by the interviewed, compared to other program forms. Nonetheless, a large group of respondents also expressed their interest in these offers.

Fig. 2 Interest in various courses and events of *Lifelong Learning 50+* (N 247) – numbers in per cent

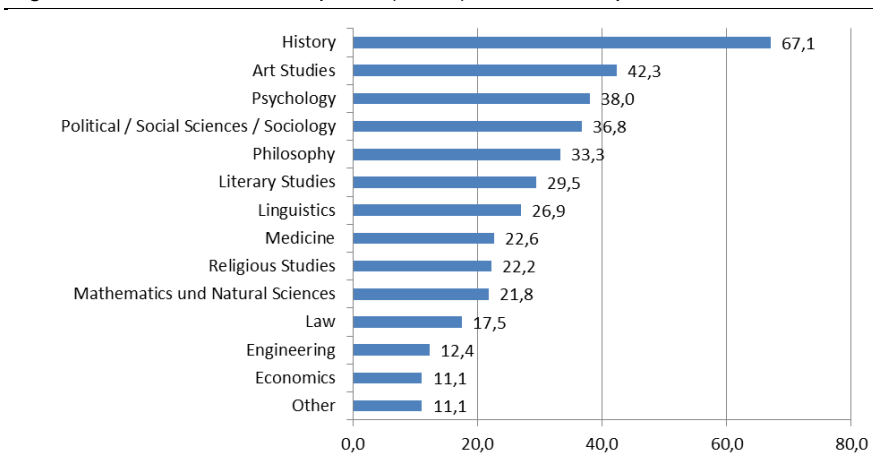


Question: To what extent are you interested in the following event type? Response form as indicated.

Source: Survey of the participants from *Lifelong Learning 50+*, Summer Semester 2014

Definitely, history is the topic area participants are mostly interested in. More than two-thirds of all respondents indicate this discipline (see Figure 3). Considering the expressed interests, History is followed by Art Studies. Psychology comes third, followed by the topic group Political / Social Sciences / Sociology and Philosophy. Nearly one third of all interviewed are passionately interested in the last topic.

Fig. 3 Interest in various disciplines (N 247) - numbers in per cent



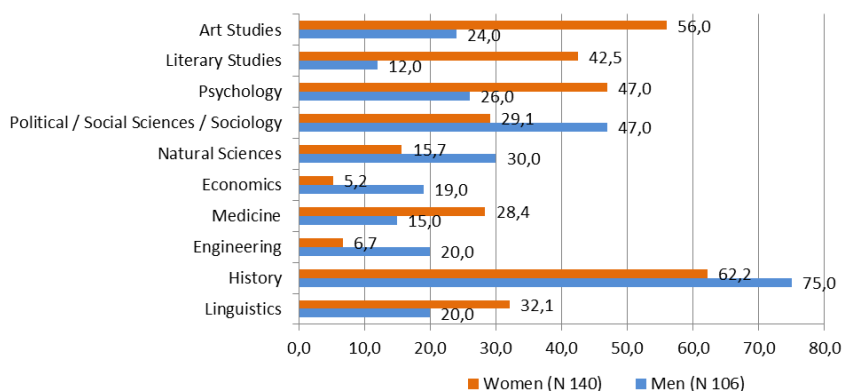
Question: Which disciplines are you mostly interested in? (Multiple Choice set)

Source: Survey of participants from *Lifelong Learning 50+*, Summer Semester 2014

According to the survey, a strong focus has been highlighted on certain topic areas, such as Literary Studies, Linguistics, Medicine, Religious Studies as well as Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Between 20% and 30% of all respondents have expressed interest in these disciplines. Other topic areas did not receive sufficient coverage. Various disciplines are mentioned under 'Miscellaneous'. These comprise, for example, Sports and Sport Studies, Education Studies, Media Studies or Musicology.

What deserves attention is the fact that in all those cases the topic preferences appeared to be gender-related. There is a significant difference between men's and women's preferences in the survey results, as evidenced in ten out of thirteen topic areas (see Figure 4). Men are often more interested in Political / Social Sciences / Sociology, Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Economics, Engineering, and History. Women, on the other hand, are significantly more interested in Art, Literature, Psychology, Medicine and Linguistics. Particularly strong gender differences are visible in the field of Arts and Humanities. Gender-related differences appear to be less relevant in the area of Language Studies, although they are still significant.

Fig. 4 Interest in disciplines by gender (N 247) – numbers in per cent



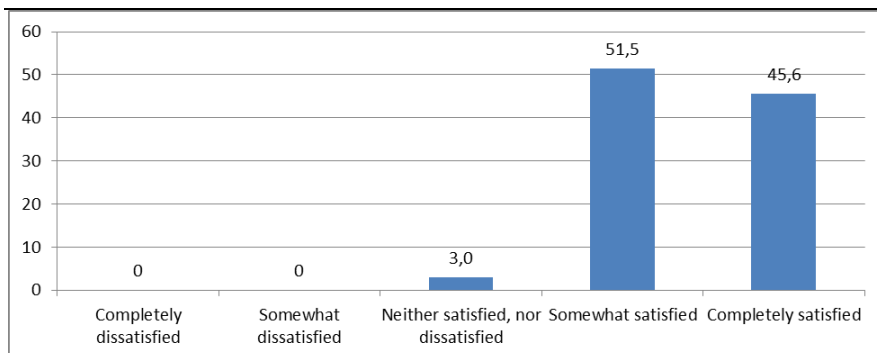
Question: Which disciplines are you mostly interested in? A Multiple Choice set with 14 response options (13 topic areas and others). Presented are only disciplines with gender-related significant differences (Chi²-Tests, *p ≤ .05). Ranking starts with the largest difference between subgroups.

Source: Survey of participants from *Lifelong Learning 50+*, Summer Semester 2014

A high level of satisfaction prevails generally among participants from the offered *Lifelong Learning 50+* program. Every second respondent states that they are mostly satisfied, while further 46% express unconditional satisfaction (see Fig. 5). Only three per cent of the participants say that they are neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied.

In two open questions at the end of the questionnaire, the participants had the opportunity to highlight particularly good aspects and to point out possibilities for improvement. The interviewed took the opportunity to genuinely express their personal desires. As a whole, 184 of 247 people (= 74.5%) commented what they really liked about *Lifelong Learning 50+*.

Fig. 5 Overall satisfaction with *Lifelong Learning 50+* (N 247) - numbers in per cent



Question: Overall, how satisfied are you with *Lifelong Learning 50+*? Response form as indicated.

Source: Survey of participants from *Lifelong Learning 50+*, Summer Semester 2014

Above all, respondents emphasize the diversity and wide range of offers from which they can choose according to their own interests, as well as the new knowledge and insights, but also the establishment of new social contacts. For example, participants point out the "wide range of diversity, challenging events and a high level of offered courses" (case 44), "many excursions and a variety of topics" (55). Participants also state that they "learn new things, deepen their knowledge, as well as get enriched with new social contacts" (case 182) and acquire "new knowledge and insights" (case 183); they "have a goal in mind [...] [and] stimulate the gray cells running" (case 131). However, the opportunity to participate in the regular study program and thus get in touch with younger ones is particularly attractive for the participants in *Lifelong Learning 50+*, as proved by the following quotations: "elderly and young together" (case 139), "age mixture of students" (case 215), "participation in lectures with quite usual, young students" (case 68), "connecting students from *Lifelong Learning 50+* to regular studies" (case 190). In addition, attention is focused on the good services provided by the *Lifelong Learning 50+* team, which delivers "precise information" (case 230) and ensures a "good organization" (case 115). A total of 111 from 247 respondents (44.9 per cent) offer ideas for further improvements of the *Lifelong Learning 50+* program. The interviewed are particularly concerned about the future of the Human Sciences Faculty resp. future course offers, which is still open as the following quotations indicate: "The Arts and Humanities' Faculties should not be closed!" (case 244) "If there are no

human sciences, *Lifelong Learning 50+* will belong to the past. This would be a disaster!" (case 219), "It is crucial to preserve the course offers in philosophy (human rights) and history" (case 216). Moreover, respondents expressed specific proposals concerning organizational and content changes. In addition to the improvement of technical equipment ("more microphones", case 138), they insisted on boosting of public relation activities (e.g. in the press) as well as on increasing the attractiveness of Internet presence of the *Lifelong Learning 50+* program ("with current changes, indications - to be easier accessible, case 126). The allocation of places for excursions needs to be addressed more frequently. Respondents wish that "a longer list of places would be available for regional and interregional visits (Case 59); excursion participation should be available for new and former participants" (case 26). The number of participants should not be fixed in advance, if possible." (case 116). They also propose to develop further the "work in project groups" (case 92) or to activate more fields of "discussion between regular and senior students" (case 220). Overall, a high level of satisfaction among program participants has been also evidenced concerning the above-mentioned question. Many respondents say that they have no suggestions for further improvements and that they are completely satisfied: "everything is optimal" (case 201), "It is desirable that these studying opportunities are preserved for a long time" (case 156).

c) Summary

To sum up, the participants express a high level of satisfaction with the *Lifelong Learning 50+* program. They are particularly interested in events such as excursions and sightseeing tours, organized especially for guests. The offers deriving from regular courses at the faculties are the third point. The focus of thematic interest lies clearly on History, along with other topic areas. Art Studies and Psychology follow suit within the ranking of topic areas. The interests of participants are also mirrored in the actual assignments. Courses in History, Art History and with regional topics proved to be among the most popular. Gender-related comparison indicates that men are somewhat more interested in Political and Social Sciences, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Economics and Engineering. Women, on the other hand, are more often interested in Art, Literature, Psychology, Medicine, and Linguistics.

As motives for participation in the *Lifelong Learning 50+* program, respondents clearly identify the maintenance of mental fitness, the expansion of general education and satisfaction of their own educational pursuit. The opportunity to continue their education in the former professions and improve professional qualification for post-employment or voluntary activity, are significant only for a small group. The motive of "making a youth dream come true" which has often been discussed within the context of "continuous education" for senior students and which has long been considered as a particularly relevant drive for educational participation, is obviously of secondary significance, compared to other motivation. If results from earlier surveys at the university are also used to be compared with the current ones, a great consistency of participation reasons is to be highlighted.

Collaborative learning of senior and regular students is considered unproblematic by both target groups. There is hardly any evidence concerning conflict points. However, social contacts and interaction usually remain on the surface or are sporadically experienced. Respondents expressed the desire for more exchange opportunities and collaborative projects. Previously existing initiatives could be expanded even further. Other suggestions for improvement, which have been brought by participants of the *Lifelong Learning 50+*, are mostly related to organizational aspects, for example, how the organization of enrollment week should be managed, as well as concerns about a sufficient Internet program presence and the development public relation activities. There are also specific indications to optimize the *Lifelong Learning 50+* program.