

SIMBIOZA

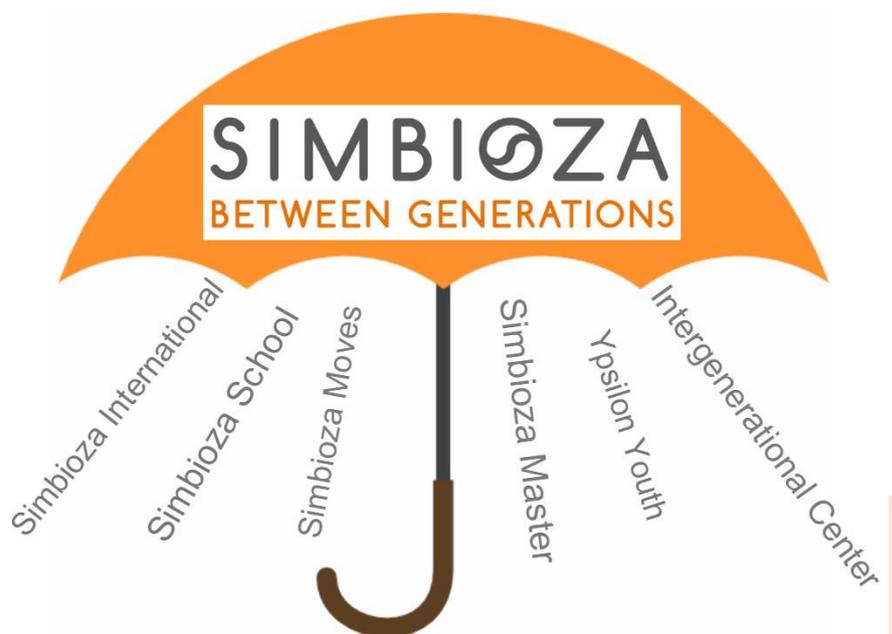
BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Let's connect Slovenia, were the first words of Žiga Vavpotič, Symbioza initiator and founder, after his grandmother asked him **what is www**. And who would though that this sentence started a **digital revolution** in Slovenia ever since. Weeklong computer workshops across whole Slovenia, where young volunteers teach the elderly the basics of computer and sounds simple. But in 2010 many people thought this idea was too crazy and idealistic. But Žiga found a team just crazy enough to an ear for intergenerational project on raising e-literacy volunteers. This project any characteristic that can the right to access the Internet technologies to all citizens, and with that we strengthen tolerance, respect, trust, solidarity and encourage cultural and lingual diversity.



It started off with an alarming fact: **2009, 94 % of people over the aged of 65 have never touched a computer**. This was the initial problem Symbioza addressed, as population in the world is ageing rapidly, but on the other hand people live longer. We found locations with existing infrastructure, invited almost every stakeholder in Slovenia to participate as a volunteer and trigger a nationwide euphoria with participants. After 2011, Symbioza happened again in 2012 and 2013, with a changed slogan as we started to develop **additional initiatives** which origin from Symbioza In three years of e-literacy and one year of sports we connected around **40 thousands people**, but most of all, we made a sustainable story of e-literacy for all. After four years we got the confirmation of our efforts: the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia has published data showing that shares of daily computer and Internet users among older people are three and seven times higher than five years ago (in 2009). This was our reward and motivation to continue.

Symbioza became a **Social Entrepreneurship** and it produced several socially innovative "**side effects**" that keep us busy since early 2014. In one year we manage to develop **Symbioza School** model (transferring the e-literacy model in local environments where schools organize Symbioza workshops twice per year with our modules), **Symbioza Moves** action (weeklong nationwide action in 2014 by doing sports in intergenerational focus), **Symbioza Master**, **Ypsilon Youth** initiative (for empowering youth between 20 and 30 years old in the field of ICT skills for higher youth employability) and strengthen activities with **Symbioza International** and **Intergenerational Center** (daily activities for all age groups) in Ljubljana, Slovenia. In 2014 as well as 2015 we have two main focuses which we want to pursue in detail: **Symbioza International** and **Symbioza Master**. Besides existing actions we are also planning to



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launch **Simbioza for Roma group**, where we would prepare workshops for them as they need some language adjustments.

With the first initiative we wish to implement classic Simbioza weeklong workshops across the world together with local actors, partners and stakeholders. Our international initiative coincides with the promotion of voluntarism, empowerment for higher employability and easier mobility for young people. Having in mind the coherent and indispensable know-how, the structure and a wide pallet of experiences, we want to connect with likeminded people abroad and address their similar social issues. We developed a special **social impact model**, where we will include young unemployed and high skilled individuals from Slovenia that will cooperate with our partner in destination country. The main **challenge** is funding, as we would like to send young proactive Slovenes abroad in order to prepare the foreign partner for Simbioza weeklong action. We would like to share our know-how and spread the Slovenian innovation that we developed through last years. So far we implemented pilot workshop in **Shanghai, China and Zagreb, Croatia** (20 participants and 6 volunteers in both locations). With this we proved that regardless of cultural, social, political and economic differences the social challenges remain the same and Simbioza offers an innovative approach to address it. Our long term goal is to make it a sustainable story in every country.

We developed Simbioza Master Initiative in early 2014, and launched it together with other partners. We set up 4 modules of 280-hour training: Project Management, learning e-skills, work with elder population and the practical part of this training. This initiative was made for underprivileged youth (who had no opportunity to finish school, origin from difficult social backgrounds or that lack perspective in job seeking orientation). We invited our National Employment Agency to cooperate and send us candidates that lack perspective in job orientation. This training is free of charge for the youth and is recognized as an additional official competence for unemployed person. So far we had two generations, each time **15 participants**. **Three** of them got their first job soon after the training and we still **keep track** with others and **follow** their **progress**. Our goal is to spread this initiative across Slovenia in 2015, especially in the remote regions where youth lacks opportunities and inspiration. In 2015 we would like to empower **60 new Simbioza Masters** in three additional regions.

Our social impact. With Simbioza as a sustainable story we produce quite some social impacts: social interaction with the elder, informal education, practical approach to the problem of increased ageing, intercultural and interethnic experiences (as the project includes all social groups), expansion of voluntarism among youth, e-literacy for easier access to the labor market (for the youth and the elder that still have to work), building social values and implementing intergenerational dialogue. Indirect impacts: building youth in responsible and proactive individuals, offering a higher quality of life for the elder, including the elder in active social life and recognizing the values of intergenerational cooperation. What we recognized as a side benefit is that different stakeholders started to connect and came to us with initiatives and proposals for further cooperation. On the other hand we also have remarkable stories during the workshops like two former classmates that didn't see each other for 50 years, or a grandfather



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that saw his grandchildren via Skype for the first time with our help, or elder people connecting with their childhood friends after many year on Facebook, etc.

Voluntary and non-profit. Simbioza has been and remains voluntary based project. In 2014 the total budget was 81.520€, but majority went for material costs as the team works on minimal funds. As we set a big vision for 2015 in the light of exporting our idea abroad and expanding existing activities to remote areas in Slovenia, we recognize the need for further funding. Current organizing team consists of 7 people with the same goal in mind and heart: bring intergeneration cooperation into every home.

Key aspects:

- To promote active ageing and solidarity between generations.

- To connect generations through learning in reverse roles: the young teach

and the elder learn.

- To show the elder that the youth cares.

- To develop responsible proactive young individuals.

- Special focus is on educating socially vulnerable groups on

the meaning of ICT knowledge and career prospects in this area as well as for women.

- We include all stakeholders: government, local communities, NGOs,

civil society, private sector, sponsors and business partners.

- The main goal is to show that Simbioza works in all environments with similar

social issues

- We focus on quality rather than on quantity and through different approaches.

- Use of the project for the target groups can be visible on a daily basis and serve as inspiration to be more

active – people live better and happier.

- We encourage activism and social responsibility that should be practiced on a daily basis.

Awards and honours:

- European Citizen Award by the European Parliament in 2012
- “Volunteer of the Year” Award in 2012 by the National Youth Council of Slovenia (under the patronage of Dr. Danilo Türk, former President of the Republic of Slovenia)
- Award for Innovations in 2011 in Central Slovenian region (silver award) by the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce in 2012
- State youth sector award in 2013
- European award for socially responsible entrepreneurship practices for partnership, innovations, and change by CSR Europe and Business in the Community (BITC) in 2013
- Award for social inclusion, conferred by Erste Foundation in 2013.
- Best of Best Award 2014 by American Chamber of Commerce in Slovenia
- Nomination for the United Nations Population Award 2014

Simbioza between generations – let's connect the world.

Youtube: Simbioza [Master](#) (the participants made the video), Simbioza [Slovenia](#) (English video presentation)

More on: <http://www.simbioza.eu/sl/2013/>

