

Multigenerational Centres as a Tool for Social Cohesion: Strengthening Communities and Creating Social Impact

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Abstract

Multigenerational centres (MGCs) are recognized in Slovenia as an important mechanism for strengthening social cohesion, intergenerational cooperation, and local resilience. They operate within a national social welfare framework that emphasizes preventive approaches, the inclusion of vulnerable groups, the development of competencies, and the strengthening of local support networks. The activities of 16 second-generation MGCs are currently funded on a project basis, primarily through the European Social Fund and the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. This highlights the need to consider sustainable national funding sources to ensure program stability and their long-term integration into the broader system of community care. The article examines MGCs as a development tool of contemporary social policy and presents the operations of “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” as an example of good practice. Particular emphasis is placed on strategic approaches, work methodologies, impacts on individuals and the community, and key challenges and opportunities for future development. The findings provide qualitative evidence that MGCs contribute to social cohesion and generate positive social impacts.

Keywords: social cohesion, intergenerational cooperation, multigenerational centres, social impacts, social inclusion

1 Introduction

Contemporary European societies are facing significant demographic, social, and economic changes. An aging population, the individualization of life paths, loneliness, the digital divide, and the fragmentation of traditional support networks are affecting quality of life and the sense of belonging. In this context, social cohesion is becoming one of the key development goals of local communities.

Multigenerational centres (MGCs) are the response to these challenges. They represent open, accessible, and inclusive spaces where different generations meet, where new skills are developed, social bonds are strengthened, and support networks are created. “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” is one such center whose activities significantly contribute to the development of intergenerational relationships and the strengthening of the local community.

The purpose of this article is to present MGCs as a tool for social cohesion and to analyze the operations of “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” within the framework of the national strategy.

This article aims to test the hypothesis that MGCs contribute to social cohesion and social impact.

2 Purpose, Objectives, and Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to present MGCs as an important tool of contemporary social policy and to analyze the operations of the “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” MGC as an example of good practice for strengthening social cohesion, empowering individuals, and creating social impacts in the local community.

Based on this, the following research objectives were formulated:

- analyze the role of MGCs in strengthening social cohesion and social inclusion
- present the organizational and program model of an MGC’s operations
- identify the key social impacts of MGCs on individuals, the community and the social support system
- examine the role of community programs in sustainable local development and socially responsible organizational practices
- In-line with these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:
- How do MGCs strengthen social cohesion in local communities?
- Which MGC activities and approaches have the greatest impact on individual empowerment and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups?
- What are the key social impacts of MGCs on individuals, the community, and social support systems?
- What is the role of MGCs in the development of sustainable and socially responsible community programs?

The research objectives and questions are directly connected to the proposed hypothesis, as they examine whether multigenerational centres contribute to social cohesion, empowerment, inclusion, and positive social impacts through preventive, participatory, and community-based approaches. The research framework therefore enables an assessment of the relationship between implemented activities and their broader social impacts on individuals, communities, and local support systems.

Research Hypothesis

Based on theoretical foundations and practical experience, we propose the following research hypothesis: Multigenerational centres make an important contribution to strengthening social cohesion, social inclusion, and generating positive social impacts in local communities.

3 Research Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative research approach and employs the case study method. According to methodological classification, this is an applied study of descriptive-analytical nature, focused on the operations of the “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” multigenerational center (MGC) as an example of good practice in strengthening social cohesion and generating social impacts in the local community.

The aim of the study is to understand the functioning of MGCs as a tool of contemporary social policy and to analyze their impacts on individuals, the community, and the social support system. The study is a professional analysis that integrates theoretical foundations of social cohesion, community work, and organizational social impact with practical experience from implementing programs in an MGC.

The data were collected using the following methods:

- analysis of relevant strategic documents, legislation and development policies in the field of social care
- analysis of project documentation and annual reports of the “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” MGC
- analysis of the center's implemented activities and programs
- professional reflection and interpretation of practical experiences from implemented community programs

Data analysis employed descriptive and interpretative methods, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of an MGC and its social impacts on individuals, the community, and the social support system. The analysis process included several stages. First, relevant documents, reports, and descriptions of implemented activities were systematically reviewed and categorized according to thematic areas related to social cohesion, inclusion, participation, and community resilience. In the second stage, the identified content was interpreted using a thematic analytical approach focused on recurring patterns, perceived social impacts, and organizational practices. The interpretation was additionally supported through comparative reflection between theoretical concepts and practical experiences from program implementation.

The analysis is based on the conceptual framework of social cohesion, community work, and organizational social responsibility, taking into account the principles of participatory approaches, individual empowerment, and cross-sector collaboration.

The analysis additionally considers selected well-being dimensions frequently used in contemporary social impact assessment frameworks, particularly social connectedness, empowerment, participation, and psychosocial well-being (OECD, 2020; WHO, 2021). These dimensions were used as interpretative categories for understanding the broader social impacts of community-based activities.

The main limitation of the study is that the analysis is based on a single case of good practice; therefore, the findings cannot be directly generalized to all MGCs and must be interpreted within the context of the specific local environment.

4 Systemic Framework

Over the past decade, Slovenian social policy has focused on strengthening community-based support, deinstitutionalization, and developing preventive programs aimed at reducing the risk of social exclusion. In this context, MGCs have emerged as an important part of community infrastructure, complementing the public network of social welfare services and contributing to greater accessibility of support in the local environment.

The Active Aging Strategy (2017) defines intergenerational solidarity as one of the key pillars of development and highlights the need to create spaces where generations can meet, learn from one another, and provide mutual support. The Slovenian Resolution on the National Social Protection Programme 2022–2030 (ReNPSV30) further positions MGCs as an important instrument of social inclusion, prevention, and community work, emphasizing accessibility, participation, and stakeholder engagement. The Strategy for the Development of Non-Governmental Organizations and Volunteering 2021–2027 also provides an important framework, recognizing intergenerational volunteering as a key component of active citizenship and the development of local communities. Together, these documents provide a solid foundation for the development of multigenerational centres as infrastructural hubs of social cohesion.

In line with the EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness (2026), MGCs can be seen as one of the most important operational mechanisms for achieving the EU's strategic goals, as their preventive, inclusive, and community-oriented programs directly contribute to reducing intergenerational disparities, strengthening social cohesion, and developing age-friendly and resilient local environments. This strategy emphasizes that local programs facilitating interaction, cooperation, and mutual support between generations are key to building fair and cohesive societies.

National and European strategic documents, demographic trends, and shifts in social policy provide a comprehensive framework in which MGCs are established as key local infrastructure for strengthening intergenerational justice, social cohesion, and community resilience.

4.1 Social Cohesion as a Development Concept

Social cohesion refers to the level of connectedness, inclusion, and solidarity within a society. The OECD and the European Commission define it as a combination of:

- a sense of belonging
- mutual trust
- equal opportunities
- active participation in the community

A high level of social cohesion reduces the risk of social exclusion, strengthens community resilience, and promotes sustainable development.

4.2 Intergenerational Cooperation

Intergenerational relationships are fundamental to the transfer of knowledge, values, and social capital. In contemporary societies, generations often become spatially and socially distant, which reduces opportunities for natural intergenerational learning. Multigenerational centres (MGCs) bridge this gap by creating safe, open, and welcoming spaces for people to come together.

4.3 Multigenerational Centres as an Infrastructure Solution

MGCs are a systemic response to the needs of local communities. They combine elements of:

- prevention
- non-formal education
- social support
- volunteering
- cultural engagement
- active inclusion

Their advantage lies in their flexibility and ability to adapt to local needs.

5 Multigenerational Centres as a Strategic Community Framework

Multigenerational centres operate as community-based spaces located across multiple local environments and are intended to support the inclusion and participation of people of different generations through diverse daily activities. Unlike institutional forms of care, multigenerational centres do not provide accommodation, medical treatment, or organized food services, although many locations include community kitchens and opportunities for shared food preparation and social interaction.

Activities are implemented both within the centres and in the broader local environment, including schools, associations, municipalities, and other community settings. Programs typically include lifelong non-formal education, intergenerational discussions, learning support for children, physical exercises, creative workshops, leisure-time activities, volunteering, and informal social gatherings such as excursions, community events, and intergenerational social activities. These activities and implementation approaches are documented in the annual operational reports of the “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” project (VGC+ Srce Štajerske, 2024; VGC+ Srce Štajerske, 2025).

Particular emphasis is placed on the inclusion of vulnerable and socially excluded groups, including older adults, persons with disabilities, migrants, Roma communities, victims of violence, and persons with special needs. Through preventive, participatory, and community-oriented approaches, multigenerational centres contribute to strengthening social inclusion, intergenerational solidarity, and local community resilience.

The “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” project represents an example of a partnership-based multigenerational center model implemented through cooperation between the Maribor Home Care Center, the TOTI DCA Maribor Association, Andragoški zavod Maribor – Ljudska univerza, Ozara Slovenia, municipalities, volunteers, and other local stakeholders. The project combines preventive social programs, informal education, volunteering, empowerment

activities, and community-based support services aimed at strengthening social cohesion and improving quality of life within the local environment

The field of operation of MGCs is indirectly regulated through several strategic documents addressing intergenerational cooperation, social inclusion, preventive and complementary programs, community work, age-friendly communities, and the development of non-governmental organizations and volunteering. MGCs are thus part of a broader strategic framework, rather than a standalone policy.

In Slovenia, they emerged as an innovation project funded by the European Social Fund rather than as a systemic service. Since MGC programs (with 16 second-generation MGCs currently active) are tied to a five-year European Social Fund funding cycle, questions about their future are again emerging as this cycle comes to an end. The funding source is not stable, as multigenerational centres are not integrated into a systematically financed public network but depend on competitive tender mechanisms that may change or not be renewed. There is also no guarantee that the ESF will support such initiatives in the next programming period, creating uncertainty for both implementing organizations and the local communities that have developed on this foundation.

In the absence of stable funding and clear systemic integration, MGCs face structural risks that may threaten their continuity and development potential. Over the past decade, MGCs have become an important part of local community infrastructure, complementing the public social welfare system, strengthening prevention, reducing social exclusion, and connecting different generations. Their impacts are demonstrably long-term, but the project-based funding model creates short-term cycles that are incompatible with the nature of community work, which requires stability, gradual development, and a sustained presence in the local environment.

A systemic solution would enable sustainable funding to ensure program and staff stability, a clear institutional framework recognizing MGCs as part of broader community support, the development of quality standards to strengthen professionalism and comparability, the possibility of long-term planning essential for partnerships, volunteering, and local networks, and greater regional equity, as project calls often create geographical disparities in program accessibility.

Since MGCs address key challenges of contemporary society (an aging population, loneliness, social exclusion, limited intergenerational contact, and the need for preventive programs), their systemic integration is a logical step toward a modern, inclusive, and community-oriented social policy.

5.1 Strategic Objectives

The national strategy for MGCs must be based on:

- strengthening social inclusion
- reducing loneliness
- developing support networks
- promoting intergenerational cooperation
- empowering individuals

5.2 Strategic Principles

The strategy must be based on:

- Accessibility and openness – programs and activities are designed to be accessible to all users without discrimination and to ensure the inclusion of diverse population groups.
- Participation – users, local stakeholders, and the community actively participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs, strengthening co-creation and shared responsibility.
- Local relevance – operations are adapted to the needs, characteristics, and specifics of the local environment, enabling more effective and context-sensitive solutions.
- Sustainability – activities are developed with a focus on long-term stability, financial sustainability, and continuous support for users and the community.
- Cross-sectoral collaboration – the strategy promotes cooperation among public institutions, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders, as holistic approaches yield better results.

5.3 Organizational model

MGCs operate in partnership with municipalities, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, social welfare services, and other stakeholders. The model enables flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the local community.

In community work, the quality of relationships is a fundamental prerequisite for effective support. Institutional settings, such as centres for social work, find it more difficult to provide a truly neutral space, due to their dual role in both support and oversight. MGCs, as informal, open, and non-hierarchical spaces, enable relationships based on voluntariness, equality, and trust, which is crucial for preventive and early support.

6 VGC+ Srce Štajerske: Example of Good Practice

The “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” project is a comprehensive community program offering a wide range of preventive activities and services designed for diverse population groups. Special attention is given to:

- families with low socioeconomic status
- children, youth, and adults at risk of social exclusion
- older adults from socially vulnerable environments
- people with disabilities and special needs
- migrants, refugees, and their families, particularly children, youth, and women
- Roma families, particularly women, children, and adolescents
- parents
- single-parent families

The project creates an informal, accessible, and inclusive environment that promotes social interaction, mutual learning, and information sharing. The program includes lectures, training sessions, practical workshops, and discussion meetings aimed at strengthening social, health, cultural, financial, and other life skills.

Special emphasis is placed on activities that promote:

- integration into the social environment and maintenance of social networks
- the development of responsible citizenship, democracy, and gender equality
- empowerment for entering the labor market
- understanding of basic health information and mental health care
- language literacy and intercultural understanding
- financial literacy
- lifelong learning
- intergenerational cooperation and networking
- strengthening parenting skills and work–life balance
- leisure activities for children, youth, and adults
- counseling for individuals and families
- facilitating the integration of migrants, refugees, Roma, and other vulnerable groups

The project also provides free after-school care for primary school children and triage counselling, enabling the early identification of needs and referral of individuals to appropriate forms of support. Experience from practice shows that many individuals and families face complex, interrelated problems that require collaboration among a broader team of professionals. The project offers individual counselling, during which the counsellor works with the individual to develop a plan for addressing their challenges and, if necessary, involves other professionals or institutions. This approach also reduces the burden on other public institutions (e.g. Centres for Social Work, the Employment Service of Slovenia, Administrative Units), as participants receive support in understanding, defining, and addressing their problems, preventing individual services from being overburdened or assigned inappropriate responsibilities

Accessibility is a key element of the project. Activities are implemented in both urban centres and rural areas, including communities where such services are often less accessible. The project ensures equal access to services for all residents, contributes to the preservation of physical and mental health, promotes equality regardless of gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or age, and helps prevent various forms of violence and intolerance.

6.1 Organizational Framework

“VGC+ Srce Štajerske” serves as a regional hub for intergenerational programs. It is run by a consortium of four organizations: the Maribor Home Care Center (Center za pomoč na domu Maribor) as the main applicant, and its partners—the TOTI DCA Maribor Association (a social enterprise), the Maribor Adult Education Center (Andragoški zavod Maribor) – Ljudska univerza, and Ozara Slovenia – Maribor. “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” cooperates with municipalities, schools, nursing homes, social welfare and healthcare institutions, non-governmental organizations, and volunteers. Its main strength lies in strong local embeddedness and a wide partner network. Together with its partners and through its activities, it operates in municipalities of the Eastern Cohesion Region (Podravje A), namely: the City Municipality of Maribor, Municipality of Starše, Municipality of Kungota, Municipality of Hoče-Slivnica,

Municipality of Cerkljenjak, and Municipality of Pesnica. Activities are carried out by six employees, numerous volunteers, and external associates.

6.2 Work Methodology for Creating Social Impact

VGC+ Srce Štajerske uses the following in its work:

- participatory approach (participants as co-creators)
- empowerment of participants (development of competencies, increased independence, and strengthened self-confidence)
- preventive programs aimed at preventing social exclusion, loneliness, and deteriorating health
- non-formal learning methods (workshops and training sessions enabling knowledge exchange and learning through practice)
- individualized approach (counselling and assistance in specific life situations, including social, administrative, or personal counselling, and referral to relevant support services)
- group work (discussion and support groups aimed at reducing loneliness and strengthening social networks)
- inclusion of vulnerable groups that might otherwise be excluded from various social activities
- exchange of knowledge and experience, reducing intergenerational differences, and fostering connection and mutual respect among youth, adults, and older adults
- community work (connecting local stakeholders, involving volunteers, and activating the community)

VGC+ Srce Štajerske uses a combination of methods from social work, adult education, community work, and preventive programs. These methods are fairly standardized in practice for MGCs and are directly linked to the goals of social cohesion, the empowerment of both service users and participating stakeholders, and the prevention of social exclusion, particularly among vulnerable groups.

The operational logic of the program can also be understood through a simplified Theory of Change model: Activities → participation and interaction → strengthened competencies and social networks → increased inclusion and empowerment → stronger social cohesion and community resilience (Weiss, 1995).

To better understand and evaluate the long-term social impacts of multigenerational centres, the activities of “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” can also be interpreted through a well-being framework. Contemporary approaches to social impact assessment increasingly emphasize quality of life, subjective well-being, social connectedness, and empowerment as important dimensions of sustainable community development (OECD, 2020; WHO, 2021).

Within this framework, selected well-being indicators may include:

- reduced loneliness and social isolation,
- strengthened sense of belonging and social participation,
- improved psychosocial well-being,
- increased self-confidence and empowerment,

- strengthened intergenerational relationships and social networks,
- increased participation in community life and volunteering.

These indicators are closely connected to the objectives of multigenerational centres and may serve as a basis for the future development of more systematic social impact measurement models in community-based programs.

7 Social Impacts of Multigenerational Centres

The observed social impacts of multigenerational centres can also be understood through the concept of well-being outcomes. Contemporary social impact frameworks increasingly emphasize indicators related to quality of life, social connectedness, empowerment, participation, and subjective well-being (OECD, 2020; WHO, 2021). In the context of community-based programs such as “VGC+ Srce Štajerske”, these dimensions represent important indicators of sustainable social development and social cohesion.

Social impacts are the effects that organizations and individuals have on society and the environment. The aim is to ensure that these impacts are positive. This is referred to as positive social impact. Social impacts also encompass environmental impacts. In environmental organizations, these impacts are often treated separately; however, social and environmental impacts should be managed in an integrated and holistic manner. In the context of organizational management, the integrated and holistic management of social and environmental impacts can be understood as social responsibility or responsibility toward society (Ambrožič et al., 2024).

In our work at VGC+ Srce Štajerske, we observe various impacts of our activities, which can be categorized into three or four groups.

7.1 Impacts on the Individual

- Reduced loneliness – individuals establish more social connections, reducing feelings of isolation.
- Strengthened sense of belonging – participation in the community increases feelings of acceptance and security.
- Development of new knowledge and skills – participants acquire practical, social, and cognitive skills that enhance daily functioning.
- Increased self-confidence and empowerment – individuals gain confidence and a sense of agency over their own lives.
- Improved psychosocial and physical well-being – regular participation in programs positively affects mental health, mood, and physical vitality.

These impacts were linked to specific activities implemented within the project. Discussion groups, intergenerational workshops, and community activities contributed to reducing loneliness and strengthening social connections. Financial literacy workshops and employment-support activities improved participants’ self-confidence and independence, while parenting workshops and counselling activities contributed to stronger family relationships and psychosocial wellbeing.

7.2 Impacts on the Community

- Greater intergenerational cohesion – activities promote understanding, cooperation, and the exchange of experiences among different age groups, reducing stereotypes.
- Development of local support networks – networks of mutual support are strengthened, increasing security and solidarity within the community.
- Greater inclusion of vulnerable groups – programs enable equal participation for individuals often excluded from social life.
- Strengthening volunteerism – the community benefits from more active individuals contributing their time, knowledge, and energy.
- Enhanced community resilience – the community becomes more connected, adaptable, and better prepared for challenges, strengthening its long-term stability.

7.3 Environmental Impacts

In addition to social impacts, multigenerational centres also contribute to environmental awareness and the development of sustainable community practices. Environmental activities implemented within the “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” project included workshops on reuse and repair, sustainable consumption, food preservation, gardening, clothing exchange initiatives, waste reduction activities, and environmental awareness workshops.

These activities not only promoted environmentally responsible behaviour but also strengthened intergenerational cooperation, mutual learning, and community participation. Environmental workshops and practical activities enabled participants to exchange experiences, develop sustainable habits, and better understand the relationship between environmental responsibility, quality of life, and community wellbeing.

Environmental impacts can be observed at several levels:

- direct environmental impacts – reduced waste generation, reuse practices, sustainable event organization, and responsible resource management;
- indirect impacts – changes in participants’ habits, increased environmental awareness, and the transfer of sustainable practices into everyday life;
- community impacts – strengthening local cooperation, community gardening initiatives, clothing exchange activities, and environmental volunteering;
- policy impacts – awareness-raising and cooperation with local institutions and decision-makers regarding sustainable community development.

The findings suggest that social and environmental dimensions of sustainability should be understood in an integrated and holistic manner, as environmental activities can simultaneously strengthen social inclusion, participation, cooperation, and community resilience.

Environmental activities also enable the development of measurable sustainability indicators within community-based programs.

This allows for monitoring indicators such as reduced waste per workshop or event, the number of participants arriving by public transport, bicycle, or on foot, participation rates in environmental workshops, and the number of participants reporting changes in habits.

7.4. Social Impacts of VGC+ Srce Štajerske Activities

Social impacts should result from planned and measurable activities, in line with the Theory of Change approach. Such approaches are increasingly integrated into contemporary social impact measurement models, including the Model for Measuring the Social Impacts of Social Enterprises developed in 2023 by the Institute for Economic Research (IER, 2023) following a public call issued by the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport. The model incorporates approaches such as the Theory of Change, IRIS indicators, and the Impact Value Chain. In practice, organizations often use the SROI (Social Return on Investment) methodology, which expresses social value in monetary terms (e.g., an SROI ratio of 3:1 indicates that every €1 invested generates €3 of social value). Larger organizations subject to the European Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (2022) report according to complex sustainability reporting standards and indicators.

The “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” project demonstrates the importance of partnership-based cooperation in generating social impacts. The lead partner, the Maribor Home Care Center, demonstrates its commitment to social responsibility through the “Socially Responsible Employer” certification, the implementation of ISO 9001 quality standards, and several national and international recognitions in the fields of social welfare, occupational safety, and active ageing.

Project partners also demonstrate long-term commitments to social responsibility and community development. Andragoški zavod Maribor – Ljudska univerza holds the Family-Friendly Company certificate and has received international recognition in the field of suicide prevention. The TOTI DCA Association actively reports social impacts to the Municipality of Maribor and is among the first organizations in Slovenia to voluntarily estimate the social value of volunteer work and broader community impacts. Ozara Slovenia, the national association for quality of life, has also received recognition for its activities in mental health and suicide prevention.

All consortium partners within the “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” project operate in the public interest and contribute to social inclusion, intergenerational cooperation, community resilience, and the empowerment of vulnerable groups. Although methodologies for measuring social impacts within the consortium are still being further developed and refined, the project demonstrates significant potential for generating measurable long-term social value.

The activities and impacts of the “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” project are also closely connected to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), as the project promotes social inclusion, lifelong learning, community resilience, and partnership-based local development (United Nations, 2015).

Summary of Key Findings

The findings indicate that multigenerational centres can play an important role in strengthening social cohesion, inclusion, intergenerational cooperation, and community resilience through preventive, participatory, and community-based approaches. The case of “VGC+ Srce Štajerske” additionally demonstrates the importance of partnership-based

cooperation, socially responsible organizational practices, and the gradual development of social impact measurement approaches for achieving sustainable long-term community impacts.

8 Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Multigenerational centres (MGCs) represent an important part of modern community infrastructure, as they help reduce social inequalities, strengthen intergenerational solidarity, and promote participatory forms of community engagement. Their role extends beyond traditional social welfare programs. They function as spaces for social innovation, informal learning, and stakeholder networking. In this context, they face numerous structural and operational challenges, while also presenting significant development opportunities that can enhance their long-term sustainability.

Among the key challenges, securing stable and predictable funding is particularly important, as it is essential for the continuous implementation of programs and staff professionalization. Reaching the most vulnerable groups, who are often exposed to multiple forms of exclusion, also remains a significant challenge. They face limited staffing capacities, which affect the scope and quality of programs, as well as increasing demands for the systematic measurement of social impacts, which is crucial for legitimizing their operations in a broader context. In addition, a significant digital divide persists, affecting equitable access to digital services and information, particularly among older adults and socially vulnerable groups.

Despite these challenges, MGCs offer numerous development opportunities. Among the most important is the development of digital intergenerational programs that address digital exclusion while promoting intergenerational learning. There is growing potential to strengthen partnerships with the business sector, enhance links with health and social care services, and develop community-based innovations that respond to specific local needs. MGCs also play an important role in the development of volunteering, which serves both as a source of additional human resources and as a mechanism for strengthening social capital. Systematic reporting on social impacts can contribute to greater visibility and the strategic integration of MGCs into local and national development policies. Collaboration with academic institutions enhances expertise, supports quality development, and strengthens sustainability through the integration of research, pedagogical processes, and practical community work.

MGCs are thus becoming an important element of sustainable social infrastructure, contributing to community resilience, reducing inequality, and promoting inclusive and intergenerational development. Their future will largely depend on their ability to transform challenges into development opportunities and establish themselves as key actors in social, health, and education policy systems.

Including MGCs in Slovenia's national strategy would represent a crucial systemic shift. This would, for the first time, ensure a stable, predictable, and long-term funding model, which is essential for the sustainable operation of these programs. After the current project cycles expire, MGCs will largely depend on decisions by individual municipalities, creating significant disparities among local communities and regions and leading to unequal access to programs intended for the broader population.

A national strategic framework would enable the harmonization of standards, funding, and development priorities, eliminating the current systemic inequality in which MGCs remain in a precarious position after project funding ends, often without secured resources for continued operation. This would also strengthen program sustainability, enabling the planning of development activities, staffing capacities, and long-term impacts without dependence on short-term calls for proposals or discretionary local budget decisions.

A national strategy would contribute to greater cohesion among municipalities, reduce regional disparities, and ensure equal access to MGC programs for all residents. It would also facilitate better integration of MGCs into broader social, health, and education policies, strengthening their role as sustainable social infrastructure that supports the long-term resilience and development of communities.

9 Conclusion

Multigenerational centres (MGCs) are an important building block of modern, connected, and resilient communities. They provide a space where generations come together, where new skills are developed, and where a sense of belonging is strengthened.

In addition to a wide range of preventive programs, MGCs serve an important function that goes beyond their specific activities: they create an inclusive and safe environment where individuals feel accepted, heard, and valued. The sense of belonging fostered by MGCs is a key factor in healthy psychosocial development, as it promotes security, reduces loneliness, and strengthens individuals' ability to actively participate in the community.

Unlike institutional settings, where formal, administrative, and supervisory roles are intertwined, MGCs function as neutral, open, and informal spaces where relationships are built on voluntariness, equality, and mutual respect. This informality enables the development of trust, which is the foundation for effective preventive work and early support-seeking. In such an environment, participants find it easier to open up, express their needs, and seek help, as they do not feel monitored or fear the consequences associated with formal procedures.

MGCs are becoming community hubs of belonging, where intergenerational relationships, intercultural dialogue, volunteering, and mutual support intersect. In doing so, they contribute significantly to the development of social capital, the strengthening of community resilience, and the creation of conditions in which individuals of all ages and backgrounds can realize their potential. The inclusive environment provided by MGCs is not merely an added value but a key developmental outcome: a space where people feel at home, connected, and supported.

"VGC+ Srce Štajerske" is an example of how a local community can implement the principles of community work in practice and contribute to long-term social cohesion through innovative approaches, partnerships, and participatory engagement.

For the future, it will be crucial to ensure stable support, further program development, and the strengthening of cross-sectoral cooperation. MGCs are not just a program: they are infrastructure for the future, connecting people and strengthening communities. Their activities generate positive social impact.

Implications for Practice and Policy Development

The findings indicate that MGCs represent important infrastructure for strengthening social cohesion and community resilience. Based on these findings, it is advisable to consider long-term systemic funding for MGCs, the development of quality standards, and the further integration of social, educational, and health programs at the local level.

These implications are also aligned with broader national and European policy frameworks, particularly the Slovenian Resolution on the National Social Protection Programme 2022–2030, the Strategy for Active Ageing, and the EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness (2026), all of which emphasize preventive approaches, community resilience, participation, and intergenerational solidarity.

9.1 Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence was used as a support tool in the preparation of this article for language editing, content structuring, and improving clarity of expression. The authors are fully responsible for the content of the article, the interpretation of data, and the final conclusions.

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