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Designing a research ecosystem for Active & Healthy Ageing: The case of the Free Age University (Florence)

Dr Davide Bonaiuti – PhD Student – davide.bonaiuti@unifi.it
Supervisor: Prof. Vanna Boffo - Co-supervisor: Prof. Fabio Togni

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The research investigates the University of the Free Age (Florence) as a pedagogical device for later life, analysing how lifelong learning processes and life competences contribute to the care of ageing within a public, implicit and multidimensional educational context. It examines the meanings, practices and forms of participation that emerge within this setting, focusing on how educational experiences shape later-life trajectories. Through an exploratory mixed-methods design, the study aims to reconstruct the configuration, impacts and generative potential of this institutional experience, highlighting its role as a relational environment that supports identity negotiation, participation and everyday forms of care in later life.

RESEARCH DESIGN: ORIENTATION AND SCOPE

To operationalise this inquiry, the study adopts a **pragmatic–constructivist perspective** and is guided by the following research question:

How does the educational experience at the University of the Free Age, both in its institutional configuration and in participants' lived meanings, take shape as a practice of caring for one's ageing process?

This orientation supports a design structured around three core components presented below:

- (1) the **Theoretical framework**, which situates the study within international policies on lifelong learning, life competences and active ageing;
- (2) the **Analytical matrix**, which structures the phenomenon into dimensions, areas and indicators (not reported for brevity) and guides instrument design and analysis;
- (3) the **Methodological flow**, which articulates the sequential exploratory strategy, guiding data collection and model-building.

(2) ANALYTICAL MATRIX FOR THE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE AGE	
DIMENSIONS	AREAS
A – STRUCTURE, RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE OF THE SERVICE	A1. Organisational model and governance
	A2. Management of economic and structural resources
	A3. Institutional partnerships and territorial networks
	A4. Regulatory framework and normative instruments
B – EDUCATIONAL OFFER AND DIDACTIC FRAMEWORK	B1. Structure and articulation of the educational offer
	B2. Teaching models and practices
	B3. Pedagogical rationale
	B4. Evaluation and self-evaluation of the educational experience
C – USER PROFILING	C1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants
	C2. Motivational drivers
	C3. Access barriers
	C4. Learning needs and expectations
D – IMPACT AND RESULTS	D1. Life competences
	D2. Active ageing
	D3. Lifelong learning
	D4. Educational outcomes
E – RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TERRITORY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL	E1. Social representations and institutional visibility
	E2. Civic participation and relational capital
	E3. Role of territorial stakeholders
	E4. Intergenerational practices
F – INNOVATION, ACCESSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MODEL	F1. Functional accessibility and process simplification
	F2. Inclusive capacity of the service
	F3. Support for the digital divide
	F4. Systemic sustainability and design innovation

Key References

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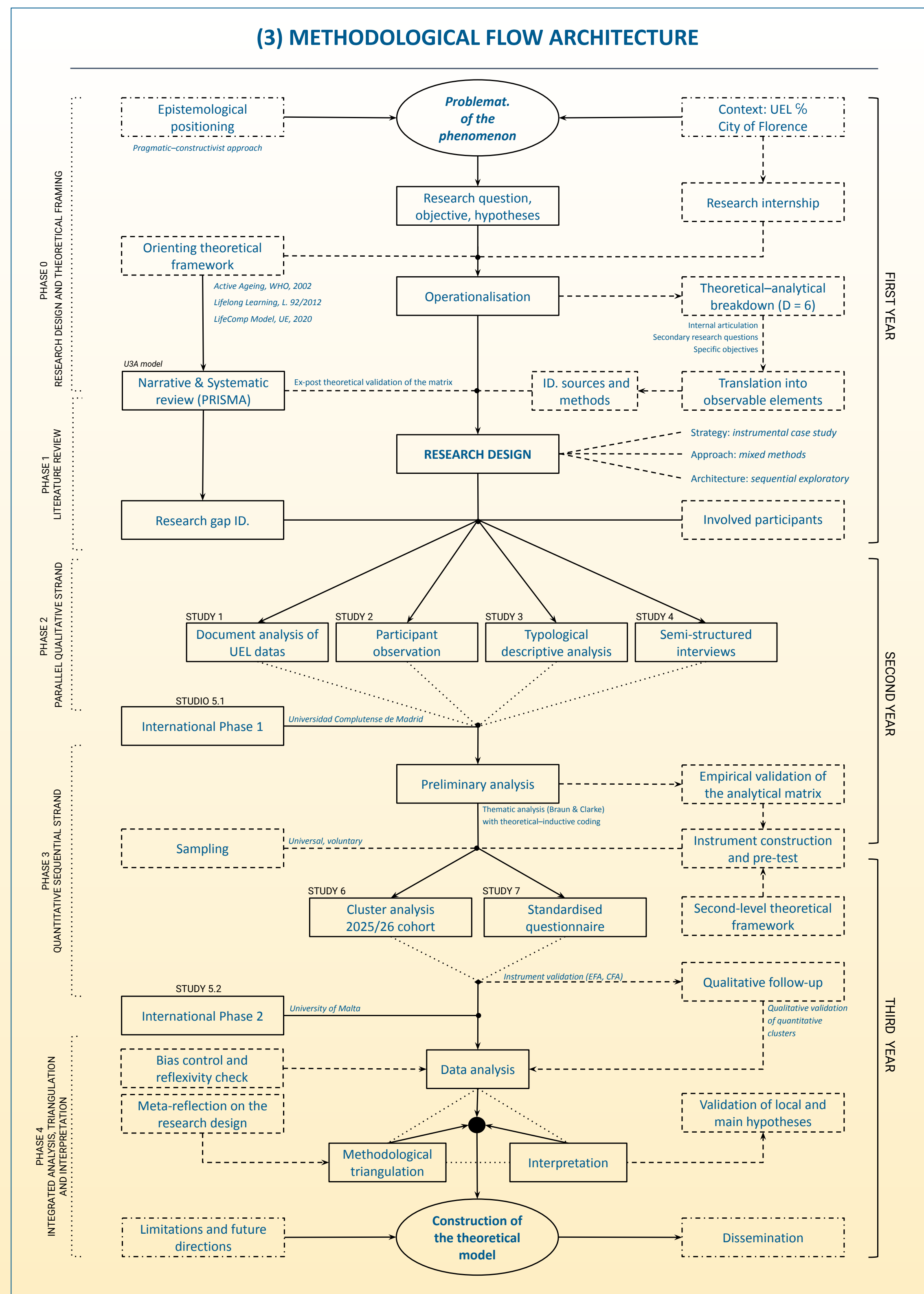
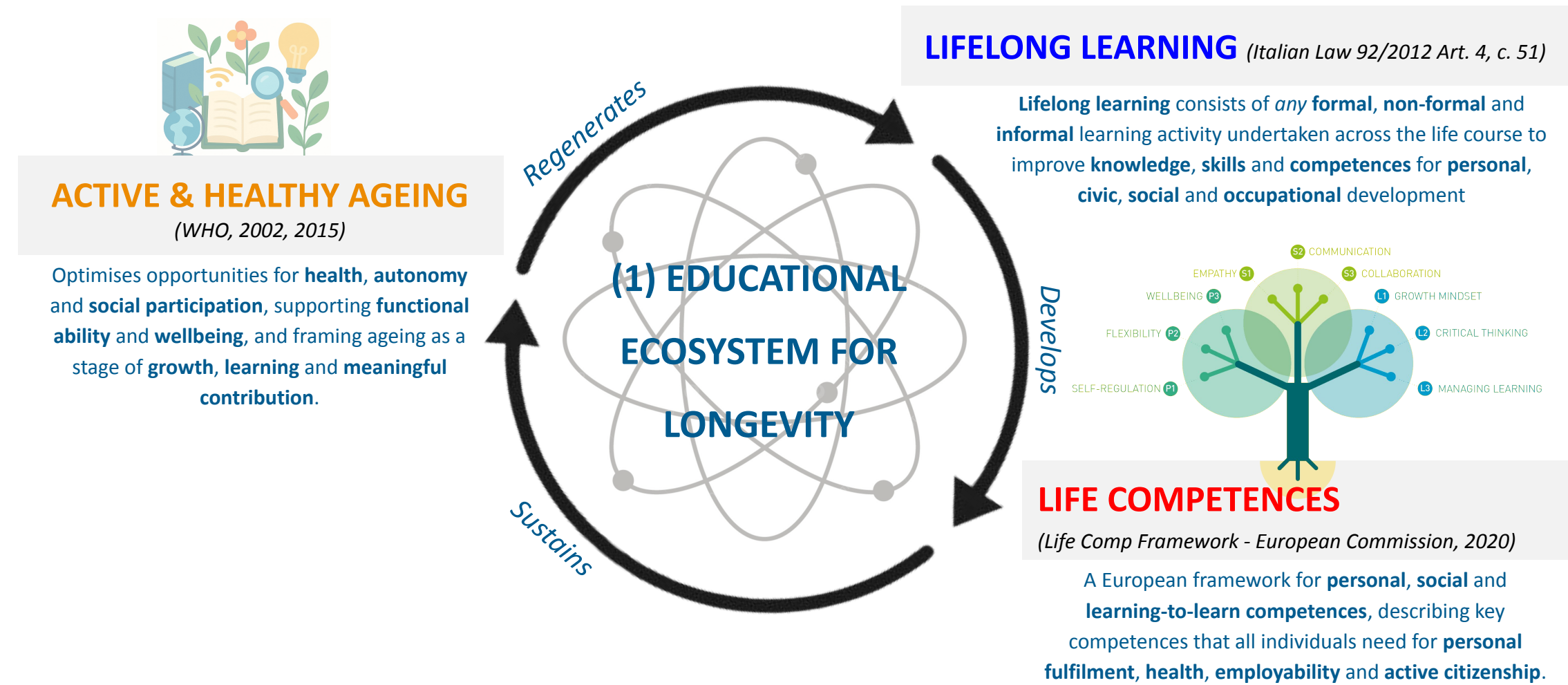
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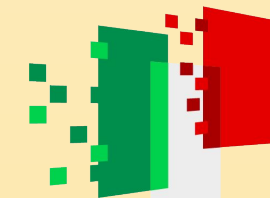
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